

**Disnarration, Unnarration and Circumnarration:
A Neonarrative Study of Jane Austen's Novels**

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Statement of Originality

This thesis is being submitted to Macquarie University and Beijing Language and Culture University in accordance with the Cotutelle agreement dated 20/10/2016.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) __Sha FAN_____

Date: __07/08/2019_____

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Abstract:

This project maintains that Jane Austen demonstrates modern spirit through those seemingly traditional works because her way of writing challenges the conventional concept of narration and incorporates fresh techniques that can be termed neonarrative strategy. As a developing branch of postclassical narratology first proposed by Gerald Prince and then expanded by Robyn Warhol and Brian Richardson, neonarrative theory includes such enlightening concepts as disnarration (narrative that refers to events that do not happen), unnarration (narrative that omits certain information out of narrative incapability or narrative choice) and circumnarration (narrative that indirectly narrates what happens).

Austen's narrative practice of imagination, misconception and deception comprise the narrative domain of disnarration. Her characters are always defined and redefined by how they are positioned in relation to narration and disnarration, and at the same time the truth is constructed from a gradual development of false or hypothetical narrative. It is fair to say that her novels are narratives about the dangers of narratives, since truth is never what appears to be and narrative can be illusory, misleading and deceptive. Austen's application of unnarratable silence or narrative refusal breaks from the tradition that only focuses on what is narrated. No matter if it is narrative incapability or narrative choice, the strategy of unnarration leads her to the narrative domain of possibility and infinity, and a consistent articulation of the relationship between what is narrated/voice and what is not narrated/silence strengthens the collaboration between the narrator/author and her narratee/reader. Austen manages the issues of passion and sexuality through circumnarration. She assimilates the erotic implications into the public activities of courtship and flirtation or the social issues of elopement and adultery, which highlights the passionate interactions between men and

women without violating social conventions and destroys the fallacy that her novels are unpolluted in terms of corporeal reality. It is fair to say that Austen's narrative world is constructed in narration, and deconstructed and reconstructed in disnarration, unnarration, and circumnarration. The significance of what is revealed by looking at her novels through the neonarrative lens consists in her modern spirit of fluidity, possibility and infinity, which will be a new addition to the Austen study in the days of booming Janeite culture.

Key Words: Jane Austen; neonarrative; disnarration; unnarration; circumnarration

Abbreviations

JA	Jane Austen
<i>E</i>	<i>Emma</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Mansfield Park</i>
<i>NA</i>	<i>Northanger Abbey</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>Persuasion</i>
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
<i>S&S</i>	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Jane Austen's Letters</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Works of Jane Austen VI Minor Works</i> . Ed R. W. Chapman. Rev. B. C. Southam. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

<i>Memoir</i>	<i>A Memoir of Jane Austen</i> by James Edward Austen-Leigh. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
<i>Record</i>	<i>Jane Austen: A Family Record</i> by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen Leigh. London: The British Library, 1989.
<i>History</i>	<i>The History of England Jane Austen and Charles Dickens</i> introduced by David Starkey. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2006.

Quotations from Jane Austen's six novels are taken from the edition of Penguin Books published in 2006.

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Introduction

As one of the most popular novelists, Jane Austen (1775-1817) is known for her works about the family life of the gentry, especially women characters' love and marriage, through her sensitive observation and humorous language. Since the publication of her first novel in 1811, readers have never tired of exploring her art of storytelling, and it is still worth doing so because she occupies a unique place in English literature two hundred years after her death. We can observe vicissitudes in the study of Austen and her novels from obscurity to popularity, from the theme of love and marriage to religion and morality, from the theories of feminism and narratology to post-colonialism and dialogism, and from the West to China. With the development of multimedia technology, interest in Austen has transcended the domain of literature to a broader context of cultural study. This project remains focused on literature, to be specific, Austen's narrative art, but proposes a new reading of her classics that depends on a postclassical view of narratology, neonarrative theory.¹

Literature Review

The previous research of Austen can be roughly divided into four phases, and here are the key words of each phase: obscurity, popularity, productivity (in literature) and diversity (in theoretical and sociocultural context) respectively. The first phase started from 1811 when her first novel *Sense and Sensibility* was published to 1869 when her first biography *A Memoir of Jane Austen* was published by her nephew. During this time, Austen was an obscure author who published novels as "a Lady" or "The Author of *Sense and Sensibility*." Her contemporary writer Sir Walter Scott contributed to the early criticism of her work. He pointed out her great talent in portraying "ordinary life",

¹ This is a term first introduced by Robyn Warhol, intending to mark the new sphere of narrative study in contemporary era. It is different from what we used to describe the diversity of postclassical narrative study, "New Narratives." I will explain it in detail in Chapter I.

which has become a consensus among later Austen scholars, and admitted that he could not achieve Austen's success in "render[ing] ordinary common-place things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment."¹

James Edward Austen-Leigh's biographical work ushered in the second phase because it brought to the public a flesh-and-blood image of Austen and subsequently promoted her to a wider public with increasing popularity.² As a result, the mysterious "Lady" turned into the prolific Jane Austen who started writing as a teenage girl and finished altogether six novels in her short life. In 1894, George Saintsbury first coined the term "Janeite" in an introduction to Austen's novels.³ This term has been widely accepted as a label of Austen's readers or disciples since the appearance of Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Janeites" (1926). And this neonarrative project of Austen's novels could be taken as the product from a Chinese Janeite.

The third phase was introduced by R.W. Chapman, who edited and annotated all Austen's six novels (1923), letters (1932), juvenilia (1932) and unfinished works (1951) in succession.⁴ His standard edition of Austen's works paved the way for her entrenchment within the English literary academy. The representative scholars in this phase includes Mary Madge Lascelles, Marvin Mudrick, Andrew H. Wright and Howard S. Babb. Lascelles's *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939) is regarded as the first critical treatise of Austen's works. She gives a brief account of her life and the scope and outcome of her reading, and then mainly discusses her narrative art based on the narrator's role in handling the subject matter and in communicating with the readers. Wright's *Jane Austen's Novels A Study in Structure* (1962) is on the same track of classical narratology as Lascelles', in which he approaches her narrative management

¹ Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 114.

² B. C. Southam, "Introduction," *Jane Austen: 1870-1940 Volume 2: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 1-2.

³ Deidre Lynch, "Introduction: Sharing with Our Neighbors," *Janeites: Austen's disciples and devotees* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 24.

⁴ Ian Watt, *Jane Austen A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 10.

from “point of view” (for example: in/direct comment and interior disclosures) and characterization (including heroes, heroines, and villains). The subsequent narrative studies of Austen are all indebted to them.

Mudrick explores Austen’s unique style of irony in *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952), which is still the fundamental work of commentary on Austen’s works. He is a forerunner in discovering the subversive nature of her literature and destroys “the nostalgic latter-day enshrinements of [her] as the gentle-hearted chronicler of Regency Order.”¹ Similarly, Babb is interested in the underlying information within Austen’s text, but he focuses on the richness of dialogue in terms of range and intensity in *Jane Austen’s Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (1962). This project will reiterate her unconventional style and the topic of meaningful implication will be readdressed in Chapter IV on circumnarration. The above in-depth research laid the foundation for Austen’s significant role in western literature. Virginia Woolf is one of the leading figures who acknowledged Austen and her literary intelligence, “of all great writers she is the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness.”² Both F. R. Leavis and Ian Watt agree that Austen surpasses Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson by her integration of “interiority and irony, realism and satire.”³

The study of Austen had come into its fourth phase by the end of the 20th century when Austen was put on the list of writers central to the western canon along with twenty-five other literary masters (including Shakespeare, Dante, Tolstoy, Proust amongst others) by Harold Bloom. The present phase features diversity in regard to the application of critical theories and the connection to social, historical and cultural and psychological background, which results in a variety of outcomes.

Claudia L. Johnson’s *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1990) is a

¹ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. vii.

² Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Vol. IV* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), p.155.

³ Kathryn Sutherland, “Chronology of composition and publication,” *Jane Austen in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 20.

feminist examination of Austen's novels. I appreciate her reassessment of Austen from a political view by referring to such issues as female authority and the independence of women in her day, which overcomes the stereotype of taking her as a conservative author. Edward Said discovers the ideological and historical dimension of *Mansfield Park* and proposes an inspiring reading in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). According to him, Austen claims "the importance of an empire to the situation at home" through the character of Sir Thomas, whose domestic authority is synchronized with his control over his colonies in Antigua.¹ Barbara K. Seeber exposes the dialogic nature of Austen in *General Consent in Jane Austen: A Study of Dialogism* (2000). With the help of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, she destabilizes conventional readings of Austen by investigating "the other heroine" who competes with the female protagonist and the buried narratives that contradict with the progressive major plot. This project will also touch upon Austen's polyphonic aspects in Chapter II about disnarration. In his book *The Hidden Jane Austen* (2014), John Wiltshire draws attention to the psychological dimension of Austen's works by searching for the motives of her characters, which intensifies the interpretation of her narrative art.

The majority of the studies in the fourth phase contribute to the reconstruction of the realistic picture of Austen's lifetime, including society, ethics, religion, marriage and so on, which is consistent with the development of literary criticism over the same period that switched emphasis from form and structure to history and culture. In *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (1994), Roger Sales reviews Austen against the background of Regency England and pays attention to the social issues like the Regency Crisis of 1810-12, watering places and health-care, thus successfully reconstructing the historical scope of her work. In *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues* (2005), Sarah Emsley inquires into Austen's works in her philosophical context and redefines virtue on the basis of classical and theological ethics. Michael Giffin thinks that Austen stands between the pillars of British Empiricism and Georgian

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 89.

Anglicanism and he unravels the clue of classical theology that runs through her novels in *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England* (2002). Maria Grace conducts a comprehensive work concerning the customs of courtship and marriage in Austen's lifetime supported by the details of her novels in *Courtship and Marriage in Jane Austen's World* (2016), which includes the rules of dancing or making an offer as well as the issue of women's dowry and marriage licenses.

There are some innovative perspectives in these studies of cultural context. In *Jane Austen and the Body: "The Picture of Health"* (1992), John Wiltshire breaks with the prejudice against Austen that physicality is totally excluded from her works by addressing the cultural significance of the body in consideration of illness and health. Chapter IV of this project will allude to Wiltshire in terms of the circumnarration of corporeal reality. Susannah Fullerton makes an unexpected combination of Austen and the topic of crime in *Jane Austen and Crime* (2004). She examines such illegal elements as thieves, elopement, adultery, murder, hangings, to name just a few, and brings to us the criminal landscape of Austen's age. In *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (2005), Jillian Heydt-Stevenson deals with Austen's manipulation of sexuality by means of erotic humor, objects or the human body, and uncovers her sexual subtext against the sexual repression of women writers. The discussion of circumnarration benefits a lot from Fullerton's work on elopement and adultery and Heydt-Stevenson's ideas on visual pleasure and the love token of hair. If each of the above scholars is attempting to retrieve one particular aspect of the panoramic view of Regency England, Janine Barchas goes further in *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* (2012). She is the first one to make the connection between Austen's novels and those real celebrities and locations in her life. In Barchas' eyes, Austen obtains a balance in the tension between fiction and invention in her realist creation. This project will discuss the concept of fictionality of Austen's narrative art in Chapter II.

The development of multimedia technology heralds an unparalleled climax of the

Austen cultural industry in the fourth phase. Since the first film version of *Pride and Prejudice* was produced in 1940, all of Austen's six novels have been adapted into films or TV series thanks to her great manipulation of dialogue, which makes it quite easy to develop a script. The adaptations of her novels in popular culture secure her position among common readers and common audience. And "Janeite", which used to be a defamatory term referring to the cult of Jane Austen, has turned into an honorable title for all Austen enthusiasts.¹ Austen's disciples from different countries and regions establish their own Jane Austen Society² and organize conferences, reading clubs and dancing parties regularly. All kinds of souvenirs related to Austen are also produced to satisfy their needs, such as a scarf with Austen's silhouette, a mug with Darcy's confession letters, or the Regency style bracelet. It is fair to say that the Janeites are not merely a community of readers but the promoters of the cultural industry of Jane Austen.

In contrast to the booming sociocultural phenomenon of Austen all over the world, the relevant narrative studies are decreasing, which is partially caused by the intellectual turn from classical narratology (focused on text and structure) to postclassical narratology (interdisciplinary studies).³ Here are some classical works that develop what Lascelles and Wright have done, including Tara Ghoshal Wallace's discussion of narrative authority (1995), Erika Wright's analysis of narrative prevention in *Mansfield Park* (2011), and Caroline Austin-Bolt's examination the narrator's performance in mediating happiness (2013).

Robyn Warhol and Kelly A. Marsh offer some new readings of Austen's novels by employing the neonarrative perspective, a branch of postclassical narratology. In 2007, Robyn Warhol published "Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn't Happen in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of*

¹ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 211.

² The most famous and active societies include The Jane Austen Society of the United Kingdom (founded in 1940), The Jane Austen Society of North America (founded in 1979) and The Jane Austen Society of Australia (founded in 1989). I participated in the Weekend Conference on *Persuasion* held by the JASA from July 6th to 8th, 2018 and it was a wonderful event.

³ Chapter I will start from this intellectual movement and expatiate the development of neonarrative theory.

Poynton.” She addresses the opening part of *Northanger Abbey* in light of “disnarration”¹ and points out Austen’s humorous rendering of the unconventional female protagonist Catherine. Then she scrutinizes the ambiguous ending of this novel from the perspective of “narrative refusal”² and identifies the author’s technique in restructuring generic expectations. This project will present a more comprehensive discussion of narrative refusal, especially about the denouement part, in the third section of Chapter III. Two years later, Kelly A Marsh made a quite original interpretation of *Persuasion* in “The Mother’s Unnarratable Pleasure and the Submerged Plot of *Persuasion*”. By means of the concept of progression and plot, Marsh shows that all the three sisters from the Elliot family are retrieving their mother’s “unnarratable”³ pleasure on their way pursuing happiness. The concept of “the unnarratable” will be clarified in the second section of Chapter III, but what Marsh calls “submerged plot” will be shown in the investigation of circumnarration in Chapter IV. These studies display that it is possible and fruitful to address Austen’s novels by making use of neonarrative strategies, and this project aims at continuing what Warhol and Marsh have begun but have not completed.

The translation and introduction of Austen’s novels in China dated back to the 1920s. Up to now, all of her six completed novels have been translated into Chinese, among which the versions of Wang Keyi and Sun Zhili are of higher quality and therefore more popular. Generally speaking, the study of Austen underwent marginalization from 1949 to 1976 for ideological reasons; there was a reappearance of interest between 1977 and 1989, and an expanding development from 1990 till now. In 1982, Yang Jiang, published an article reviewing her personal understanding of Austen’s vivid miniatures of common people and their positive attitude towards life,

¹ This is a term first proposed by Gerald Prince, which means narrating something that actually does not happen. I will explain it in detail in section 1.1.1, Chapter I.

² This is an important concept in neonarrative theory, which refers to a deliberate refusal in narration. I will explain it in detail in section 1.1.2, Chapter I.

³ This is a term first addressed by Gerald Prince and later on expanded by Robyn Warhol, which indicates that something is beyond the narrator’s capability to tell. I will explain it in detail in section 1.1.2, Chapter I.

which made her one of the representative figures who paved the way for the revival of Austen's works in China.

The study of Austen in China is greatly influenced by western scholars, with reference to both subjects and methodologies, and this also means that Chinese scholars are facing an awkward situation in that their work seems lacking in innovation.¹ It is worth mentioning that some scholars prefer to localize Austen study within the context of Chinese literature and this broad view of comparative literature produces some interesting readings. Gu Yinghua chooses to compare the major characters from *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Cao Xueqin and mainly looks into their attitudes about love and marriage against the background of a decaying aristocracy. Liu Xuanyu carries out a comparative study between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Love in a Fallen City* by Eileen Chang regarding theme, characterization and rhetorical devices in order to investigate the tradition of female writing. In 2014, Bu Yayun accomplished a comprehensive treatise upon Austen's classical narrative strategies, covering the analysis of characterization, focalization as well as narrative voice. Up to now, there is no neonarrative study of Austen in China, and here is the gap that this project intends to fill.

The Plan of This Project

In brief, this project aims at finding out what are the aesthetic values of Austen's narrative art from the perspective of neonarrative theory in relation to disnarration, unnarration, and circumnarration respectively. Chapter I opens by investigating the diachronic development of neonarrative theory that incorporates a series of thought-provoking concepts: the disnarrated and disnarration; the unnarrated, the unnarratable, and unnarration; and circumnarration and denarration. By the end of this chapter, a

¹ There are some representative works: Lin Wenchen addresses the technique of irony in *Sense and Sensibility*; Tong Wei deals with the marriage view in *Pride and Prejudice*; Mo Cuihua conducts a research of *Pride and Prejudice* from the perspective of narrative focalization; The most popular approach consists in the combination of feminism and narratology, in which we can find the works of Liu Huiliang, Chen Yanhua, Luo Qianni and Fan Jinglan.

systematic diagram of the above terms will be put forward to carry out the analysis of Austen's works.

Chapter II offers an analysis of disnarration, including the imagination of a multilayered Gothic world, misconception as a form of productive creation of both others and oneself, and a range of liars and their constructive lies taking the form of narrative deception. Chapter III turns to unnarration, which underscores Austen's use of unnarration in her early work and then explores two different types of unnarration in her novels: that which results from narrative incapability (the unnarratable) and that which belongs to narrative choice (narrative refusal). Chapter IV considers the concept of circumnarration, which focuses on her implicit rendering of passion in sexually charged courtship and the indirect manipulation of sexuality through the theme of fallen women in terms of the erotic love token, elopement, and adultery.

This project interprets Austen's novels from the perspective of neonarrative theory with the purpose of proving her modern spirit in deconstructing binary oppositions, including the true and the false, the voice and silence, and presence and absence. With the help of neonarrative methodology, this research could bring about more inspiring interpretations of Austen by reconstructing the concept of narratability in these seemingly traditional texts. In addition, this experimental research could provide a more comprehensive case study for neonarrative theory and hopefully could promote the development of this postclassical narrative trend. The next chapter is devoted to the new development in narratological approaches to literature, where this study fits in.

Before reviewing the neonarrative theory, it is necessary to clarify the precondition or stand of this project. The well-known French literary critic Roland Barthes used to articulate his understanding of narratives as such:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a

prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives ... Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.¹

The above famous statement showcases a wide range of narratives across a variety of forms in the course of human civilization without the limit of time and space, which implies a pan-narrative view in general and has foreseen the narrative turn of contemporary intellectual fields. This project inherits the tradition of pan-narrative view by applying a broader narrative scheme in which narrating is regarded as a universal activity. Traditionally, a narrator refers to the one who narrates, while a character only narrates when he/she/it is produced as a first-person narrator. Throughout this project, the distinction between narrators and characters is destroyed by endowing the characters with the identity of narrators and treating each equally as autonomous narrators. That is to say, characters such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are treated as if they were narrators in spite of fact that there has already been a traditional narrator in the text, which results in the multiple roles of characters, multiple layers of narration, and multiple interpretations of Jane Austen.

¹ Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), pp. 251-2.

Chapter I. Neonarrative Theory

As a self-contained branch of structuralism, narratology fell into a recession due to the appearance of deconstructionism in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, the 1990s witnessed

a renaissance of narratology, which migrated away from the confinement of structuralist studies and turned into a more inclusive and diversified academic field by incorporating social and cultural context. That is to say, narrative study has undergone a fundamental transformation from what is within the text to what is outside the text. The earlier trend that focuses on structure and system is called classical narratology while the recent innovative movement is labeled as postclassical narratology. Neonarrative theory is a new approach beyond classical narratology and a unique product in the context of postclassical narratology because it is neither a restoration of the study of structure nor an intersection of different disciplines

1.1 The Development of Neonarrative Theory

Neonarrative theory involves a series of disputable concepts: disnarration (narrative that refers to events that do not happen), unnarration (narrative that omits certain information out of narrative incapability or narrative choice) and circumnarration (narrative that indirectly narrates what happens). Compared with those interdisciplinary studies of postclassical narratology like feminist narrative (that combines feminism with narrative theory) or cognitive narrative (that connects cognitive psychology with narrative theory), what neonarrative pursues is internally oriented. Instead of resorting to another strand of academic study to rekindle its vitality, neonarrative chooses to preserve the niche of classical narratology and rediscover something that has been covered over or neglected before.

In a traditional sense, the concept of narrative signifies “assurance”, “knowledge” and “certainty”, and “dies from [...] ignorance and indecision.”¹ That means a narrative is supposed to provide the definite information of what happens and it is not necessarily to give a narrative if there is something uncertain or unreliable about the

¹ Gerald Prince, “The Disnarrated,” *Style* 22.1 (1988): p. 4.

content. The concept of neonarrative is trying to prove that narrative is not merely a series of counting, accounting, and recounting, but also the force field of discounting, un-counting, circum-counting.¹ To put it another way, if the classical narratology intends to figure out what is narrated, who is narrating, how it is narrated, and so on, neonarrative theory attempts to answer questions like: what does not happen but is narrated (like dreams, imaginations, and so forth.), what is left unsaid (could it be a deliberate plan or the result of incapability?), and what is narrated but in an indirect way (what is the point of such an evasive narration and how is it achieved?). Gerald Prince's comment on disnarration could be borrowed to sum up the modern spirit of neonarrative theory:

It insists upon the ability to conceive and manipulate hypothetical worlds or states of affairs and the freedom to reject various models of intelligibility, of coherence and significance, various norms, conventions or codes for world- and fiction-making. It institutes an antimodel in terms of which the text defines itself and indicates the aesthetics it develops and espouses, the audience it represents and aspires to, the matters, topics, and configurations this audience takes to be tellable.²

In other words, neonarrative theory challenges the past focus on norms and conventions and brings to narratology an anti-model spirit that reveals the hypothetical or possible worlds. This intellectual renovation opens another door of the old small niche of text-oriented narratology and expands the hermeneutic dimension of narrative discourse. This theory is not brought up by only a single scholar at one particular moment, and it

¹Gerald Prince, "The Disnarrated," *Style* 22.1 (1988): p. 6. Prince refers to his understanding of the essence of disnarration, but here I expand it to the idea of neonarrative theory in general.

² *Ibid.*

is still developing.

1.1.1 The disnarrated and disnarration

In 1988, the prominent narratologist Gerald Prince put forward the concept of “the disnarrated” in his thesis with the same title. Prince coins this term to “cover all the events that do not happen but [...] are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text”, at the level of story (pertaining to the character/s and his/her action), as well as at the level of discourse (pertaining to the narrator and his/her narration).¹ After the definition, he provides a list of examples ranging from “purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts, crushed hopes, suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies.”² And we could sum up these descriptions as imagination, misconception and deception in terms of their different motivations.

Robyn Warhol further extends the discussion of Prince’s new term. First of all, she generates the affixed verb form and noun form, and correspondingly the narrative strategy of “the disnarrated” is called “disnarration”, and the narrative act could be described as to “disnarrate”.³ According to Prince, we can cope with the issue of disnarration based on its “nature and content”, “the level at which it functions”, its “relative frequency”, and “the relative amount of space it occupies.”⁴ All these examinations can be used to distinguish “narrative manners, schools, movements, and even entire periods.”⁵ Generally speaking, disnarration is applied on the level of story in realist texts while on the level of discourse in meta-fictional works.

It is not that the narrative practice of disnarration did not exist before the

¹ Gerald Prince, “The Disnarrated,” *Style* 22.1 (1988): p. 3.

² *Ibid.*

³ Robyn R. Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 221.

⁴ Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*

appearance of such a term; the point is that we are indebted to Prince for theorizing the concept of what does not happen but is narrated in the domain of narrative study for the first time. I agree with Hilary P. Dannenberg who acknowledges Prince's contribution as this: he "directs our attention to the issue of how vital the hypothetical in fact is in its dynamic and contrastive interaction with events which are deemed to 'really happen' in a narrative world," and he helps us realize that "such questions are not only ontologically complex but rhetorically significant."¹ The narrative strategy of disnarration lays stress on the concept of tellability (what makes a story worth telling) and draws our attention to what is negative or what is hypothetical. This concept foregrounds what is both alethically (of or relating to truth) and ontologically (of or relating to existence) "inferior" to what really happened and is narrated, and underscores its rhetorical functions in narrative discourse by "emphasiz[ing] the realities of representation as opposed to the representation of realities."² According to this notion, we are invited to take a look into possible worlds, and to follow the road not taken.

1.1.2 The unnarrated, the unnarratable and unnarration

In his insightful essay about disnarration, Prince briefly mentions two other affiliated new terms concerning what is unsaid and what is unable to be said, namely "the unnarrated/nonnarrated" and "the unnarratable/nonnarratable". On the basis of the word-formation presented by Warhol, I'll keep the prefix of un- and go with the unnarrated and the unnarratable in this project.³ Warhol also coins the verb form and noun form, to "unnarrate" and "unnarration".

¹ Hilary P. Dannenberg, "Gerald Prince and the Fascination of What Doesn't Happen," *Narrative* 22. 3 (2014): p. 307.

² Gerald Prince, "The Disnarrated," *Style* 22.1 (1988): p. 5.

³ Robyn R. Warhol, "Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film." *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 221.

According to Prince, “the unnarrated” refers to the narrative omission that is “explicitly underlined by the narrator” or “inferrable from a significant lacuna in the chronology or through a retrospective filling-in.”¹ The former part of this definition equates to Warhol’s account of “narrative refusal”, which emphasizes the narrator’s practice of refusing to give an account of the event and calls for our attention to his/her narrative act and what lies behind it: “those passages that explicitly do not tell what is supposed to have happened, foregrounding the narrator’s refusal to narrate.”² The latter part of the definition is not new for narrative scholars, since the great French narratologist Gérard Genette has already given a term “ellipsis” in the second chapter “Duration” of his prominent work *Narrative Discourse*. On the authority of Genette, “ellipsis” is about “the story time elided” in terms of time span.³ In this way, “ellipsis” belongs to the subcategory of “the unnarrated”, and this temporal term side by side with “narrative refusal” could be taken as two hyponyms of “the unnarrated”.

Genette also mentions another seemingly similar term, “paralipsis”, which refers to “a false omission, otherwise called pretension.”⁴ Different from the author/narrator’s deliberate exclusion or a time-related hiatus, which results in an information blank in the text, “paralipsis” is a way of emphasizing something by pretending to pass over it, which thus presents everything in the text. This rhetorical device of irony is not our concern in the field of “the unnarrated” because the latter stresses that nothing is narrated in the text.

In addition, it is very easy to associate “the unnarrated” with another concept, the “gap”, which is a specific term composed in the field of reader-oriented theory. In the opinion of Wolfgang Iser, no story could be told to its fullest, “whenever the flow is

¹ Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

² Robyn R. Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 221.

³ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 106-109. I’m sorry to hear that Professor Genette passed away on May 11, 2018. We will always remember his brilliant theory about narrative discourse and his insightful criticism about À la recherche du temps perdu. R.I.P.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in gaps left by the text itself.”¹ These two concepts share the same opinion in the infinite dimension left by the text. Their difference lies in that “the unnarrated” focuses on the author/narrator’s decision to unnarrate while the concept of “gap” draws attention to the effect upon the readers. Consequently, it is appropriate to leave “the unnarrated” in the precinct of narrative criticism and maintain the term “gap” within reader-response criticism. In spite of that, it would be beneficial to allude to the collaboration between the author and readers when addressing what is unnarrated in the text.

“The unnarratable” is related to the concept of narratability and accounts for the other half of unnarration. In Prince’s view, “the unnarratable” refers to what “cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating either because it transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, formal) or because it defies the powers of a particular narrator [...] or because it falls below the so called threshold of narratability (it is not sufficiently unusual or problematic).”² It is apparent that Warhol has noticed the richness of this category and therefore elaborates this idea in her brilliant essay on “neonarrative” published in 2005.³ In this article, Warhol invents four paronyms which are seemingly confusing but actually make the concept of the unnarratable clearer, including “the subnarratable”, “the supranarratable”, “the antinarratable”, and “the paranarratable”.

“The subnarratable” corresponds with Prince’s notion of what is not worth narrating because it is below the “threshold of narratability”. It refers to what is “taken for granted” and is “not worthy of narration”, like what is “too insignificant or banal to warrant representation.”⁴ For example, when making a phone call to their parents and

¹ Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach,” *New Literary History* Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972), p. 285.

² Gerald Prince, “The Disnarrated,” *Style* 22.1 (1988): p. 1.

³ Robyn R. Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 220-22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

recounting their recent life, people probably would mention the delicious food they ate or the terrible date they had, but they are not likely to tell their parents that they breathe in and out 24 hours a day, which is absolutely below the standard of narration in this context.

“The supranarratable” accords with Prince’s illustration of the narrator/character’s powerlessness and what cannot be described in words, “compris[ing] those events that defy narrative, foregrounding the inadequacy of language or of visual image to achieve full representation.”¹ It is very common that people may lose the ability to speak in highly emotional situations. And this life experience is honestly retained in the narrative text. Based on Warhol’s observation, the supranarratable is always textually marked by an “explicit disclaimer.”² For instance: I was so astonished that I couldn’t utter a word at that moment.

As for “the unnarratable” caused by law transgressions, Warhol comes up with two different terms. “The antinarratable” refers to what is against the social convention to narrate. And Warhol gives an example that the subject of sex is a taboo in realist Victorian novels, and therefore remains unspoken.³ “The paranarratable” conforms with what is contrary to formal conventions of narrative. The principle of this subcategory may vary in terms of time, genre or nationality. For example, while reading a comedy, most people are expecting a happy ending rather than other options.

After proposing these new terms, Warhol observes that “disnarration” and “unnarration” are two different narrative strategies for rendering “the unnarratable”.⁴ In other words, “the unnarratable” is a larger category to incorporate the concept of “disnarration” and “unnarration” (as shown in Figure 1.1). Then she gives a definition

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

² Robyn R. Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 223-24.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

of “unnarration” that sounds a little bit contradictory with the previous statement: “asserting that what did happen cannot be retold in words, or explicitly indicating that what happened will not be narrated because narrating it would be impossible.”¹ This definition shows that “unnarration” is the hypernym that covers narrative incapability or “the unnarratable”. Therefore, I would like to make an alteration of her classification (as shown in Figure 1.2): “disnarration” and “unnarration” are two mutually exclusive concepts since the former refers to what is invented in the text while the latter emphasizes what does not appear in the text ; “unnarration” is the superordinate while “the unnarrated” and “the unnarratable” its subordinate, because “narrative refusal”, “ellipsis”, as well as various forms of narrative incapacity could all bring about the result of “unnarration”.

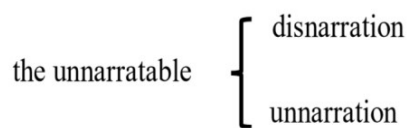


Figure 1.1

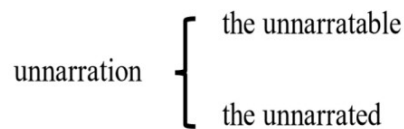


Figure 1.2

The most significant contribution made by Warhol is that she steers Prince’s theoretical study towards a pragmatic perspective, “viewing disnarration and unnarration as narrative acts,” which is the future of narratology as identified by Prince.² It is on this account that she comes up with the original taxonomy of neonarrative:

The “disnarrated” along with “the unnarrated” are instances of narrators’ making explicit the boundaries of the narratable; sometimes disnarration and

¹ *Ibid.*

² Robyn R. Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 221.

unnarration also become strategies for moving the boundaries outward, and changing the genre itself. When disnarration and unnarration lead to genre change, they are participating in what I will call “neonarrative,” or narratorial strategies for making narrative genres new.¹

The application of disnarration and unnarration shatters the traditional notion of what is narratable and gives importance to what used to be inferior (compared with what is real, certain and explicitly told) in the context of narrative study, including what is fake, uncertain and implicitly passed over.

1.1.3 Denarration and circumnarration

The emergence of “denarration” and “circumnarration” greatly enriches this newly founded neonarrative theory. Through his essay “Denarration in Fiction: Erasing the Story in Beckett and Others” (2001), Brian Richardson introduces a new concept called “denarration” to supplement what cannot be covered by disnarration and unnarration. Based on Richardson’s analysis of Samuel Beckett, William Makepeace Thackeray, William Faulkner and some other writers, “denarration” designates “a kind of narrative negation in which a narrator denies significant aspects of [his or] her narrative that had earlier been presented as given.”² By canceling what has been narrated and reconstructing another narrative, the effect of denarration could be quite arresting. Following Warhol’s principle of derivation, the relevant terms are to “denarrate” and “the denarrated”. In consideration of Austen’s novels, this concept will not be addressed in the following analyses, but it is addressed here for its uniqueness in neonarrative theory.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Brian Richardson, “Denarration in Fiction: Erasing the Story in Beckett and Others,” *Narrative* 9. 2 (2001): p. 168.

Helen H. Davis conceives another fresh expression “circumnarration” in her essay “‘I seemed to hold two lives’: Disclosing Circumnarration in *Villette* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” (2013). According to Davis, as a parallel idea of disnarration and unnarration, “circumnarration” refers to the narrative strategy that “talks around a subject or event rather than indirectly reports it,” or to be specific, “either evades the report of what actually happened/is happening through various means [...] only obliquely or indirectly reports it.”¹ In short, “circumnarration” indicates that the narrator is beating around the bush in light of “substituted narratives, metalepses, misdirections.”² The corresponding forms include to “circumnarrate” and “the circumnarrated”.

To some extent, this indirect narrative practice is something between narration and unnarration. I come to this perception because sometimes it is difficult to distinguish whether what happened is fully excluded or presented in a convoluted way. Or could unnarration be regarded as the extreme case of “circumnarration”? Finally, I decided to preserve “unnarration” and “circumnarration” as two categories, since they give rise to different reflections in narrative study: the former about the concept of presence/absence, the latter about the periphrastic delicacy of narrative style. As far as I am concerned, “circumnarration” makes up the ambiguous space between what is narrated and what is not narrated and is worth exploring as an indispensable strategy of storytelling.

1.1.4 The Methodology of Neonarrative Theory

Up to now, it is reasonable to recognize the establishment of neonarrative theory as an independent and inclusive branch of postclassical narratology. As shown in Figure 1.3

¹ Helen H. Davis, “‘I seemed to hold two lives’: Disclosing Circumnarration in *Villette* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” *Narrative* 21.2 (2013): p. 199.

² *Ibid.*

below, if we compare “narration” as a straight line from point A to point B, “disnarration” or the false narrative could be presented as a dotted line from point A to point B; “unnarration” or the omission of narrative means that there is no line in between; “circumnarration” or the indirect narrative could be demonstrated as a curved line from point A to point B; “denarration” could be displayed as a dotted line which represents a narrative that is erased and a full line which stands for the other one that is reconstructed.

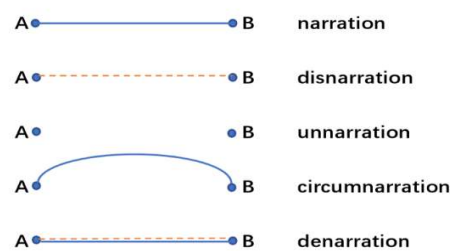


Figure 1.3

Let’s put it simply: if the conventional idea of “narration” is one side of a coin, the unconventional ideas of disnarration, unnarration, denarration and circumnarration comprise the other side of this narrative coin. In other words, neonarrative theory forms the exclusive parallel world of classical narrative study by drawing attention to what the foreground narrative seems to exclude. Here is a working diagram to exhibit the complicated genealogy of neonarrative theory (as shown in Figure 1.4). The overarching demarcation is based on what is narrated, what is not narrated and what is narrated indirectly, and therefore circumnarration and denarration are put in the same category.

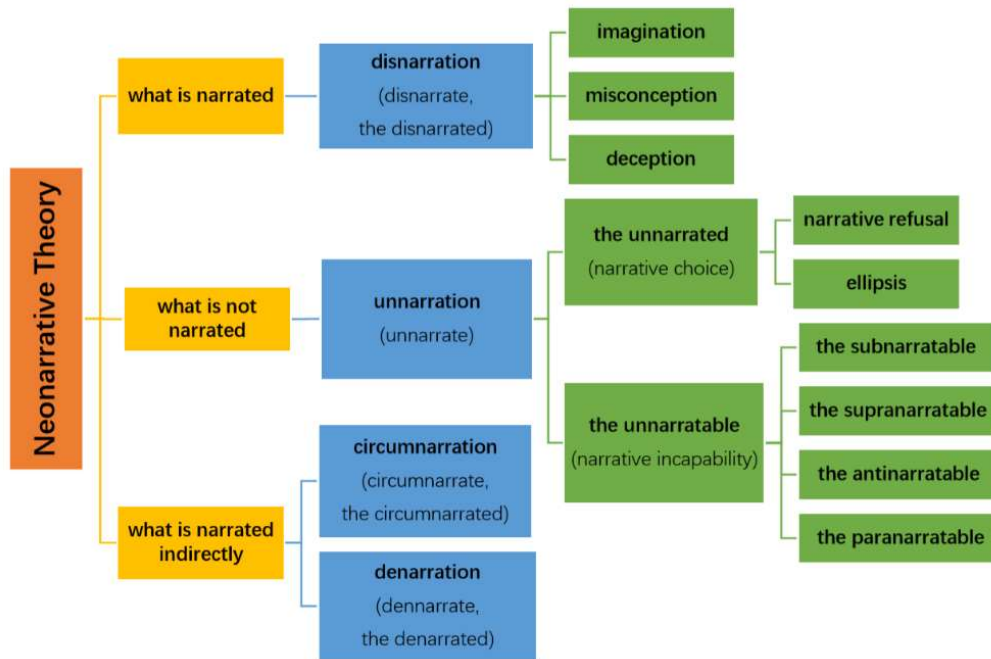


Figure 1.4

The idea of disnarration destroys the binary opposition between the true and the false. The concept of unnarration brings together the presence/voice and the absence/silence and ameliorates the latter that has always been neglected in narrative study. Circumnarration is a useful way to shed light on the author's implications. In brief, neonarrative theory enriches the dimension of narrative study by addressing what is not real but recorded, what happens but is not narrated and what is implicitly presented.

1.2 The Literary Practice of Neonarrative Theory

The contribution of Prince, Warhol, Richardson and Davis have stimulated more works in this field. The earliest practice might be the essay created by Mark E. Workman in 1992. He probes into the fictionality of autobiographical works and talks about the inability to present a life story accurately, or in his own word "the problematic of

expression.”¹ This is similar to the category of the narrator’s incapability yet different in its emphasis on language itself.

Harold F. Mosher examines the narrative strategies of unnarration and disnarration in Joyce’s *Dubliners*. In this essay, Mosher analyzes the examples of delaying or paralipsis and hypothesis, like “nonnaming or delayed naming of characters and objects,” “the omitted, incomplete and delayed narrating of actions, reporting of words and ideas, and descriptions of states,” and also “those cases in which one does not do what one intends [...] that one loses what one has [...] that one does not obtain what one expects [...] and that one is not what one seems to be or could be.”² Comparatively speaking, Elizabeth Scala’s project is more related with the type of illegal unnarration, that is to say, narrative taboos. Scala carries out a study about the incest and other forms of the unnarratable within Geoffrey Chaucer’s texts.

Based on the classical binary opposition between metaphor and metonymy, Warhol brings forward a new discovery in Victorian Novels. As stated by Warhol, Victorian male novelists prefer to employ “descriptive metonymies to move away from the material persons being described and toward abstract principles they come to represent” while their female counterparts prefer to apply a “metonymic sequence to resist abstraction and to point back to the characters’ bodies.”³ Further on, she arrives at this conclusion that “[b]y employing metonymy to extend the boundaries of the ‘unnarratable’ in Victorian fiction, women writers redefined ‘femininity’ for themselves.”⁴ Comparatively speaking, metonymy is more relevant with circumnarration instead of unnarration. Be that as it may, this interdisciplinary study is in tune with the spirit of postclassical narratology.

¹ Mark E. Workman, “Narratable and Unnarratable Lives,” *Western Folklore* 51.1 (1992): p. 97.

² Harold F. Mosher Jr., “The narrated and its negatives: The nonnarrated and the disnarrated in Joyce’s *Dubliners*,” *Style* 27.3 (1993): p. 408, 409, 418.

³ Robyn R. Warhol, “Narrating the Unnarratable: Gender and Metonymy in the Victorian Novel,” *Style* 28.1 (1994): p. 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

In the new millennium, more works have been produced in the arena of neonarrative study. Laura Karttunen makes use of disnarration together with dialogism and explores the pragmatic functions of negatives in non-literary texts as well as literary works. It is very enlightening to take Bakhtin's polyphony into consideration, because what disnarration does is to foreground what has not been actualized from the range of background possibilities in a limited text. As mentioned in Introduction, Kelly A. Marsh writes an essay dealing with the submerged plot of unnarratable pleasure in *Persuasion*.

The year 2012 witnessed the publication of Ken Eckert's essay about the unnarrated representation within *A Pale View of Hills* by Japanese British writer Kazuo Ishiguro, Birgit Dawes's study of unnarration and terror in post-9/11 narrative in literary works as well as motion pictures, and Samuel Frederick's research about the narrative proliferation engendered by disnarration and the subnarratable by reviewing three Austrian writers' works. In 2012 and 2014 respectively, Dirk Van Hulle published two theses about Samuel Beckett examining the genetic dimension and cognitive dimension of Richardson's denarration.

In 2014, Cecilia Vindrola-Padros and Ginger A. Johnson brought about a collaborative study focusing on those narratives in health services based on the concept of the narrated, the nonnarrated and the disnarrated, which embarked on practical research in this field. Kate Marantz dwelt upon the unnarrated ambiguity of *The Stone Diaries* by Canadian writer Carol Shields in the same year. In her thesis "Gerald Prince and the Fascination of What Doesn't Happen", Hilary P. Dannenberg, who could be regarded as a successor of Prince, sorts out the development of the concept of disnarration in Prince's theory and stresses that it is important to scrutinize what is "beyond the realm of the 'real'".¹ One year later, Dominik Wallerius chose "The Boarding House" by James Joyce as an example to explore the method of unnarration. He argues that Joyce has demonstrated the restriction of shotgun marriage and poverty

¹ Hilary P. Dannenberg, "Gerald Prince and the Fascination of What Doesn't Happen," *Narrative* 22. 3 (2014): p. 310.

through the method of unnarration, which always defies simple interpretation.

Warhol has shown her consistent interest in neonarrative study during the past years. It is mentioned that she published an essay about the disnarration and unnarration within *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen and *The Spoils of Poynton* by Henry James two years after her coinage of the term “neonarrative”.¹ In 2010, she dissected the cases of narrative refusal in the works of Charles Dickens.² Three years later, she investigated the works of George Eliot by means of her own classification of the subnarratable and the supranarratable.³ Nobody could deny her great experimental contribution to this branch of postclassical narrative theory.

What is worth mentioning is that, a national conference entitled “Disnarration: ‘The Road not Taken’: Explorations in Narrative Refusals, Disnarration, and Counterfactual Histories” was held at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai, from March 1st to 2nd in 2013. In 2016, the conference volume *Disnarration The Unsaid Matters*, which collected 12 papers on this topic, was published. Just as the editor Sudha Shastri declares in the Introduction to this volume, “despite the notion of ‘the disnarrated’ having exciting theoretical implications for narrative studies, not much attention has been devoted to it in the intervening years.”⁴ This is a diverse volume embracing case studies of disnarration within vastly different works, the projects of disnarration in the discourse of gender, history, ideology and postmodernism, and interdisciplinary researches of disnarration together with film and other subjects. Without exaggeration, the appearance of this collection marks a great accomplishment that has been achieved in the field of neonarrative study. The latest treatise is Marina Lambrou’s *Disnarration and the Unmentioned in Fact and Fiction* (2019), which

¹ Robyn R. Warhol, “Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn’t Happen in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of Poynton*,” *The Henry James Review* 28.3. (2007): pp. 259–68.

² Warhol, “‘What Might Have Been Is not What Is’: Dickens’s Narrative Refusals,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 41 (2010): pp. 45–59.

³ Warhol, “‘It Is of Little Use for Me to Tell You’: George Eliot’s Narrative Refusals,” *A Companion to George Eliot* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), pp. 46–61.

⁴ Sudha Shastri, *Disnarration The Unsaid Matters* (Telangana: Orient Blackswan, 2016), p. 1.

demonstrates the extensive uses of disnarration in various storytelling genres, such as personal stories produced by children, news reports, novels, or contemporary films. His systematic study greatly expands the scope of this unconventional narrative technique and invites people to go beyond the boundaries of fiction in the study of narratives.

The research about neonarrative theory in China is still in its infancy. A coup of translation works are worth noting. Warhol's thesis in 2005 has been translated by Professor Ning Yizhong, whose precise translation especially that of baffling terms, lays a solid foundation for the spread of neonarrative theory in China. Besides, Tang Weisheng translated Marsh's thesis about *Persuasion* in 2012. In 2014, Zhou Zhigao made a comparative study between unreliable narrative and the unnarratable.

As a developing branch of postclassical narrative study, neonarrative theory calls for attention and application. Prince talks about the narrative functions of "disnarration", and I would like to expand his explanation to all the above neonarrative methods so that they could be applied to reveal the rhythm of narration, to construct characters, to define a narrator, his/her narratee and their relationship, to develop themes, and to lay bare the narrative logic.¹ These enlightening concepts cope with the opposite side of narration and work together to redefine the narrative dimension that is marked by possibility, multiplicity, uncertainty and infinity. Therefore, Shastri's observation of disnarration could be borrowed to clarify the prosperous future of neonarrative study: it "offers a fertile ground for new readings, and perhaps more significantly, new ways of reading or even re-reading existing narratives, pointing to huge additions in scholarship."² This re-reading proves stimulating in those classics of Austen. Though limited, the preliminary researches accomplished by Warhol and Marsh have showed that Austen's novels provide an eligible laboratory for neonarrative experiments.

This project maintains that Austen demonstrates modern spirit through those

¹ Gerald Prince, "The Disnarrated," *Style* 22.1 (1988): pp. 4-5.

² Sudha Shastri, *Disnarration The Unsaid Matters* (Telangana: Orient Blackswan, 2016), p. 2.

seemingly traditional works because her way of writing challenges the conventional concept of narration by incorporating such neonarrative strategies as disnarration, unnarration and circumnarration. The following discussion of Austen's works is situated within the discourse of neonarrative theory, which means the themes of fantasies and misunderstandings or silence and secrets in Austen are translated into neonarrative terms such as disnarration or unnarration.

Chapter II. Imagination, Misconception, Deception:

Neonarrative Disnarration in Austen's Novels

Neonarrative disnarration refers to the narrative that records what does not take place, including those events that are hypothetical and negative. This means that the content of the narrative is fake or not real. Based on Gerald Prince's definition, we could deal with disnarration in the following subcategories: imagination, or purely imagined worlds and fancy; misconception, or unwarranted supposition and misinterpretation; deception, or false calculation and lies.¹ Their difference consists in that imagination is more like unconscious creation, deception is a sort of conscious fabrication, while misconception is something in between. Besides, imagination and misconception belong to the hypothetical domain and deception falls into the negative domain. This chapter intends to analyze the above three narrative strategies of disnarration in Austen's fictional works and manifest the dynamic relationships between the author, the text and the reader.

Disnarration dismantles the fence between story and discourse and unsettles the traditional roles of author/character/reader. The characters who ought to be passive agents in the story have the right to play the role of active readers and are granted the privilege of authors to create their own texts in the form of fancies, misunderstandings

¹ Referring to 1.2.1, Chapter I.

or lies. *Northanger Abbey* is a multilayered Gothic fancy in which Catherine Morland is not merely a naïve heroine obsessed with Gothic novels or a blind reader of Henry Tilney's made-up horror stories but a contributing writer who accomplishes her own Gothic work of imagination. *Pride and Prejudice* is a polyphonic romance of misconception in which author Elizabeth constructs an unfavorable hero Mr. Darcy while author Mr. Darcy misunderstands the playful archness of his heroine Elizabeth. *Emma* consists of several match-making scenarios created by diligent playwright Emma based on her farfetched assumptions about others and herself. The lair characters such as Willoughby and Wickham take advantage of other people through attractive appearance and pretentious kindness, but their deceptive tricks usually foreground the heroes and attach the heroines to their rivals in reverse. Austen also exposes the paradoxical chain from liar to victim in which the one who invents lies might turn into a victim in deception, such as General Tilney or Henry Crawford. The narrative methods of disnarration give rise to the interchangeability and interaction of the different roles of author/character/reader, which greatly expands the possible dimension of Austen's narrative discourse.

2.1 Imagination: Multilayered Gothic Fancy

Though published with her final work *Persuasion* after her death, *Northanger Abbey* was created when Austen was only 23 years old. That's why a lot of people hold the same opinion that "the light-hearted tone about politics and work in *Northanger Abbey* suggests the young Steventon woman rather than the Chawton professional."¹ I agree that Austen did undergo a change of tone (from cheerfulness to a little bit melancholy) paralleling her life experience, but her early work is not as simple as the public once believed. One piece of evidence is the long gestation of this novel (the longest of all her

¹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 37.

completed six novels) that guarantees a “professional” edition of her “young” creation: drafted in 1798; revised in 1803, finally published in 1818.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen vividly pictures the naïve girl Catherine Morland and her obsession with the world of Gothic literature by means of imagination, a hypothetical method of disnarration. Nevertheless, the imagined world of our protagonist does not come out of the blue. Generally speaking, Catherine’s Gothic creation is the result of three factors: her indulgent reading of Gothic novels, Henry Tilney’s unintentional guidance in creating a Gothic abbey, and her imagination that is starved of Gothic adventures. Among these factors, her reading is the origin, Henry is an influential stimulus and her wild imagination is the major cause.

Through the perspective of disnarration, what a writer does could be regarded as a form of imagination, and so could the product of a writer. Therefore, *Northanger Abbey* can be taken as the imagination of imagination. First, this novel is Austen’s imaginative work, a Gothic imagination which conforms to the literary fashion of her time. She makes fun of the viral sensation of Gothic stories through this story, which comes out of those imaginative Gothic works created by her contemporary writers. On that account, this parody acts as the counterpoint to traditional Gothic works but at the same time belongs to the overall context of Gothic literature or Gothic imagination. Second, this work is Austen’s Gothic imagination of Catherine’s terrifying fancy that is triggered by Henry’s spooky story. We could reconstruct the multiple narrative layers of the Gothic world in this work as shown in the diagram below.

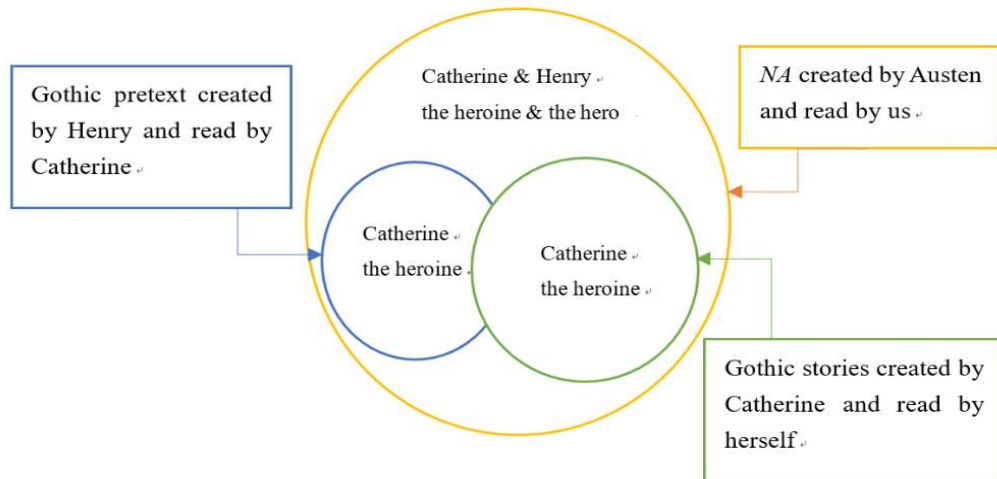


Figure 2.1

The outer yellow circle represents the imaginative novel *Northanger Abbey* written by Jane Austen. Inside this big circle are two small ones. The smaller blue circle represents the Gothic story made up by Henry Tilney on his way to Northanger Abbey. The bigger green circle represents Catherine's Gothic fancy while living in the abbey. Henry's narrative circle is smaller than that of Catherine's because the former is only a lead-in or pretext for the latter, and the latter is the major part of Austen's work. The overlapping part of the inner circles refers to the reproduction of Henry's Gothic creation in Catherine's own imagination. In regard to the outer narrative circle, Austen is the author who creates the parody of Gothic novels in which Catherine and Henry are the major characters while we are the readers who are supposed to appreciate Austen's imagination and her art of humor. As for the smaller inner circle, Henry is the author who drives Catherine into his Gothic story while Catherine is both his chosen heroine and the blind reader who takes in his invention excitedly. When it comes to the larger inner circle, Catherine is the author, the heroine as well as the reader, and she delights in her various roles in the Gothic world. From the perspective of productive disnarration, these passive characters in the traditional sense are endowed with the autonomy and authority to read and write, and this authorial delegation brings the author,

the reader and the characters into the same scope and develops the dimension of narrative discourse accordingly.

2.1.1 Breeding ground for Gothic fancy: Catherine's absorptive reading

Austen provides a reasonable breeding ground for Catherine's unreasonable imagination about Northanger Abbey, including the popularity of Gothic literature, Catherine's absorptive reading and an unfinished adventure of the mysterious castle. In the first place, there is a solid background for her fascination with the Gothic world. *Northanger Abbey* was first written around 1798 when literate people were steeped in such blood-chilling works as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Mysterious Warnings*, and *Necromancer of the Black Forest*. It is fair to say that "[a]ll over Europe readers trembled in delight over the crime of evil men and sighed with relief when their wrongdoings were aptly punished and brought to an end."¹ In addition to our protagonist Catherine, her beloved Henry as well as her new acquaintance in Bath Isabella Thorpe are all fans of thrillers. Isabella even lists more than ten Gothic novels for Catherine to read. There are a couple of basic components for the creation of Gothic stories that can be found in this recipe for "a mixture of shudders and fright":

An **old castle**, half of it crumbling down,

A **long corridor**, with numerous doors many of which must be hidden,

Three **corpses** still weltering in their blood,

Three **skeletons** carefully wrapped up,

An **old woman** hanged, stabbed several times in her throat,

¹ Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 157.

Robbers and ruffians galore,

A sufficient dose of **whispers**, stifled and **moans** and **frightful din**.¹

Catherine collects the above Gothic components in her mind little by little before making them into a feast as the story of a Gothic abbey. At the beginning of Chapter 6 in Volume I, Isabella mentions the very source of Catherine's fancy for horror and the pre-text of *Northanger Abbey*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (published in 1794) by Ann Radcliffe, "the great enchantress of that generation."² Actually, Radcliffe's Gothic works, which always involve the basic elements of corpses, dim passages, dangerous villains and imprisoned heroines, were taken as "required reading" for cultivated men and women during the Georgian age.³ By then, Isabella has finished reading it, while Catherine is still on the way.

Catherine has already demonstrated a tendency to make up her own Gothic fancy while being a devoted reader. When Isabella tries to arouse her interest in the development of the story, her reply is quite interesting. At first, she's dying to know what happened instinctively, yet she refuses the inclination immediately, "Oh! Yes, quite; what can it be? But do not tell me--I would not be told upon any account."⁴ She would like to read it or experience the Gothic story all by herself. Then she makes a wild guess regarding the plot development, which is similar to a rehearsal of what she's going to do over and over again inside the great abbey, "it must be a skeleton, I am sure it is Laurentina's skeleton."⁵ After that is an exclamation which confirms her obsession with reading *Udolpho* and an exaggeration of her enthusiasm for it, "Oh! I am delighted

¹ A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 60. Original repetition of conjunction "and". Emphasis added.

² Anne Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. viii.

³ Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 163.

⁴ *NA*, p. 36.

⁵ *NA*, p. 36.

with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it.”¹ When reading *Udolpho*, she’s totally oblivious to the world around her, “lost from all worldly concerns of dressing and dinner.”²

During this period of time, the Gothic imagination of a mysterious abbey has been deeply entrenched in Catherine’s mind. Absorbed in the Gothic world day and night, Catherine is passionate about ancient buildings where uncanny things would take place like in the stories. Although she’s more passionate for Henry Tilney, “castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill.”³ It’s no wonder that Catherine is thrilled just by the name of Henry’s home, “Northanger Abbey! These were thrilling words, and wound up Catherine’s feelings to the highest point of ecstasy.”⁴ Here is an exclamation again. Only that this time, Austen employs free indirect discourse⁵ to combine the voice of the narrator and that of Catherine at the same time, and this is one of her frequently used methods in bringing about multiple implications. That is to say, the above exclamatory sentence could be the utterance of excited Catherine, or the narrator who imitates Catherine’s naïve tone to highlight her state of rapture.

Some suggest that people’s desire for darkness could be gratified by appreciating literary and artistic works or by visiting “sublime landscapes as featured in Gothic novels.”⁶ Catherine is very lucky that she could binge on reading spine-chillers and could also spend some days in a place full of Gothic atmosphere. In fact, before receiving the invitation to visit Northanger Abbey, she has an abortive chance to take a look at Blaise Castle, “an edifice like *Udolpho*”⁷ with all the horrifying stuff she reads

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55. Original spelling “abbeies”.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵ Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (Birmingham: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 32.

⁶ Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 156.

⁷ *NA*, p. 92.

and craves. And that unsuccessful visit together with her extensive reading of horror stories promote Catherine's curiosity of mysterious Northanger Abbey and expectation of Gothic adventures to a higher level, which lays the foundation of her later imaginative creations.

Catherine is very grateful to General Tilney for the Gothic invitation and looks forward to delicious terror in that ancient and mysterious abbey, "Her grateful and gratified heart could hardly restrain its expressions within the language of tolerable calmness."¹ Then comes two more exclamations in the form of free indirect discourse to emphasize Catherine's exaltation, which unites the voice of the narrator and that of the heroine, "To receive so flattering an invitation! To have her company so warmly solicited!"² This high-spirited condition is the after-effect of Catherine's indulgent reading of *Udolpho* and other Gothic pieces, "Everything honourable and soothing, every present enjoyment, and every future hope was contained in it."³ We can see that Catherine is full of emotions: "grateful," "gratified," "flattering," "honourable," "soothing," "enjoyment," "hope"; all but "calmness." All these emotions are hoarding in her heart for the impending Gothic journey.

No one could stop Catherine from getting involved in her dreamland abbey, "her acceptance, with only the saving clause of Papa and Mamma's approbation, was eagerly given, "I will write home directly [...] and if they do not object, as I dare say they will not—."⁴ Seemingly she will wait for her parents' approval to make a decision, but in fact she has already decided all by herself that they won't disagree. Here Austen keeps Catherine's sentence in direct discourse, and the addition of her impatient response instead of her parents' reply "as I dare say they will not—" is a humorous way to capture her great expectations of Northanger Abbey.

¹ *NA*, p. 153.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Since the very first moment of learning the name of Northanger Abbey, Catherine has set free her starved imagination, gaining great enjoyment from it, “To see and explore either the ramparts and keep of the one, or the cloisters of the other, had been for many weeks a darling wish.”¹ Along with those impressive visualizations of “damp passages” or “ruined chapel,” Catherine longs for some “legends” too, a projection of Gothic stories inside the archaic edifice. It is possible that reading is a major pathway for Catherine to get rid of daily boredom. Readers might be involved in the plot of literary works sometimes, but not every reader would go to extremes like Catherine who takes *Udolpho* as a model to carry out her adventure at Northanger Abbey. At this moment, Catherine is equipped with frightening source materials and great passion to create her own work. Her role of author is triggered by the host of that ancient abbey, Henry Tilney.

2.1.2 Stimulus of Gothic fancy: Henry’s influential guidance

It is certain that Henry has no intention to lead Catherine into absurd fantasy, but his made-up Gothic story about Northanger Abbey exerts an indispensable influence on this inexperienced girl. On their way to the ancient abbey, Henry plays the role of author and Catherine is his heroine and reader. This reader is blindly devoted and subjectively productive in creating her own fancy. Mature Henry is directing his narration and it is never a problem for him to distinguish reality/truth from representation/falsehood, but poor Catherine cannot capture the essence and truth.

Henry is conferred with lots of favorable qualities to be a writer, such as reliability, authority, influence, imagination, eloquence and persuasion. Since the early period of their relationship, knowledgeable Henry has already played the role of reliable mentor in Catherine’s life, giving her instructions in light of tropes and genres, painting and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

history. The girl in love delights in idolizing the one she loves, while the man is pleased with the sense of superiority and authority. Just as Oliver MacDonagh observes, “his dazzling attraction blinded her to any fault, and she and he fell into a type of pupil-master interchange. She was a pupil who longed to please as well as learn.”¹ Hence when their dialogue topic changes from “journal” or “novel” to uncanny tales of Northanger Abbey, Catherine is still prone to his authority and hegemony.

When they first met at the ball, Henry’s articulation about women’s habit of keeping journals sufficiently demonstrates that he is not only a conversationalist but also someone with an active imagination, a fact overlooked by people because of Catherine’s more evident and whimsical fantasies. He first imagines his own image as it might appear in Catherine’s journal by mimicking her focalization and voice, “I danced with a very agreeable young man [...] had a great deal of conversation with him--seems a most extraordinary genius--hope I may know more of him. That, madam, is what I wish you to say.”² This is a very smart and humorous way to make a positive impression on the young girl. After Catherine’s denial of keeping a journal, Henry gives a long speech. He expresses his doubt about her answer in the first place and then poses three rhetorical questions in which he implies the loss of not doing so.

How are your absent cousins to understand the tenor of your life in Bath without one? How are the civilities and compliments of every day to be related as they ought to be, unless noted down every evening in a journal? How are your various dresses to be remembered, and the particular state of your complexion, and curl of your hair to be described in all their diversities, without having constant recourse to a journal?³

¹ Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 84.

² *NA*, p. 20.

³ *Ibid.*

Henry's opinion is presented with a series of details and therefore sounds very persuasive. After that, he compliments women's writing ability achieved by writing diaries, a very thoughtful consideration with a sense of humor, "it is this delightful habit of journaling which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated."¹ This example shows clearly that Henry is a skilled and eloquent conversationalist. When comparing the lengths of dialogue between Henry and Catherine, it is obvious that the former is the dominating speaker while the latter a willing listener by and large. In other words, Henry is always the one who takes control of their conversation, or rather, relationship. To some degree, Henry is manipulating Catherine when he encourages her to be a writer and even what kind of writer to be. There is a kind of gender power play here that he is using the female taste for fiction as a way of exerting power over her.

Henry's influence is more remarkable in their dialogue concerning Gothic Northanger Abbey where he is the author and Catherine his heroine and listener/reader, which is the stimulus of Catherine's Gothic fancy at the abbey. This representative dialogue episode could be found in the latter part of Chapter 5 Volume II, ² when Catherine is in the carriage heading to Northanger Abbey with Henry and his sister Eleanor Tilney. At the beginning, Catherine reveals her special interest in Northanger Abbey inadvertently, which draws the attention of Henry, "You have formed a very favorable idea of the abbey."³ Then Catherine raises a question, "Is not it a fine old place, just like what one reads about?"⁴ This seemingly casual question exposes the wellspring of her "favorable idea". Therefore, Henry is tempted to amuse this innocent girl by feeding her starved imagination with Gothic stuff, "And are you prepared to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

² *NA.*, pp. 173-77.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴ *Ibid.*

encounter all the horrors that a building such as ‘what one reads about’ may produce? Have you a stout heart? Nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?”¹ These three questions in succession effectively create a spooky atmosphere for his later fabrications. Apparently, Catherine doesn’t perceive the flirtatious nature of this dialogue. She still takes Henry as the author-like guide and fails to jump out of the role of credulous heroine or reader in the face of his imaginative inventions. She falls into his Gothic “snare”, as well as his “snare” of charm.

As the chosen heroine and only reader of this Gothic story, Catherine does not yield to the stereotype of passive agent but actively gets involved in Henry’s creation. After replying that she’s prepared for a creepy drama, Catherine assures Henry that she’s brave enough since she will not be alone in the abbey. Here the presupposition of Catherine’s reaction lies in her total acceptance of his guiding story. On that account, Henry is encouraged to flesh out more scintillating details of her impending adventure in four long paragraphs. In the first paragraph, Henry takes away the comfort that Catherine counts on, “you must be aware that when a young lady is [...] introduced into a dwelling of this kind, she is always lodged apart from the rest of the family.”² Here Henry does not refer to Catherine directly as the female protagonist of his made-up story; instead he chooses a rather neutral third person pronoun. Before that he addresses Catherine firstly, which could easily bring her into the role of this “young lady”.

After “smashing” her psychological support, Henry introduces a figure “Dorothy”, a servant character in *Udolpho*, to lead Catherine into a terrifying room, “along many gloomy passages, into an apartment never used since some cousin or kin died in it about twenty years before.”³ This is followed by three rhetorical questions that aim at intensifying the scary effect, “Can you stand such a ceremony as this? Will not your mind misgive you when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber [...] Will

¹ *Ibid.*

² *NA*, p. 174.

³ *Ibid.*

not your heart sink within you?”¹ In the second question, there is a long parenthesis added to zoom in the uncanny interior of the room, “too lofty and extensive [...] with only the feeble rays of a single lamp [...] its walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life [...] presenting even a funereal appearance.”²

In the next paragraph, Henry carries on his lengthy spiel with various horror elements in a classic Gothic novel, “a ponderous chest which no efforts can open,” “the portrait of some handsome warrior [...] incomprehensibly strike[s] you,” a mysterious servant “drop[ping] a few unintelligible hints,” and “your door [...] has no lock.”³ Catherine’s feedback is a positive recognition of his Gothic writing and his role as a writer, “Oh! Mr. Tilney, how frightful! This is just like a book!”⁴ She herself as a reader gets involved in the thrilling clichés, with a sense of rationality or doubt perhaps, “it cannot really happen to me. I am sure your housekeeper is not really Dorothy.”⁵ Nevertheless, she cannot help reading more of his tale, immediately adding, “Well, what then?”⁶

Driven by her naïve innocence, Henry goes on creating a typical night with “violent storm” when curious Catherine “proceed[s] to examine this mystery” in the haunted abbey with a “lamp being nearly exhausted.”⁷ The climatic episode afterwards is quite amusing so that the discovery of “a roll of paper” in an “old-fashioned cabinet” will be reduplicated in Catherine’s real search of the abbey. Actually, most of Henry’s Gothic elements will be reproduced in Catherine’s own version in one way or another as shown in the following table. The left chart enumerates the major images or events that appear in Henry’s invention, and the right chart lists the

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 174, 175.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵ *NA*, p. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175, 176.

corresponding adaptation or modification in Catherine's imagination. The similarity and repetition demonstrate that Catherine is imitating her mentor Henry when she obtains the role of author.

Henry's version	Catherine's version
"a ponderous chest"	the chest in Catherine's bedroom
"the portrait of some handsome warrior"	the portrait of Mrs. Tilney
"Dorothy [...] drops a few unintelligible hints"	Catherine supposes that Miss Tilney has dropped a few hints about Mrs. Tilney
a night with "a violent storm"	a stormy night in the abbey
"proceed to examine this mystery"	Catherine's secret search of the abbey
"lamp being nearly exhausted"	Catherine's lamp suddenly exhausted
"a large, old-fashioned cabinet of ebony and gold, which, though narrowly examining the furniture before, you had passed unnoticed"	the old cabinet in Catherine's bedroom that draws her attention
"an inner compartment will open--a roll of paper appears"	a roll of paper that Catherine found inside the cabinet

Figure 2.2

Until now, Catherine has dropped her remaining doubts and keeps up with Henry's invention closely, "Oh! No, no--do not say so. Well, go on."¹ However, Henry cannot bear to make up stories to tease Catherine anymore, "Henry was too much amused by the interest he had raised to be able to carry it farther; he could no longer command solemnity either of subject or voice."² Henry indulges in Gothic fantasy but knows when to stop, whereas Catherine goes to extremes. She cannot wait to make use of her own imagination for her Gothic adventure at the mysterious abbey. Therefore, she takes

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

² *NA*, p. 177.

over the unfinished Gothic fancy invented by Henry together with his role of author.

Todd is insightful in saying that “*Northanger Abbey* is about the seduction of the reader, fictional and real.”¹ Austen has entrusted her privilege to Henry. He takes on narrative authority and imagines a horror story filled with various Gothic components. Catherine is his reader, the only one and a very loyal one, who takes the content presented too seriously and is ready to put all these into practice. Henry’s pre-text whets Catherine’s appetite for a Gothic adventure on their way to Northanger Abbey, and the girl’s expectations for the abbey accumulate to the highest level of intensity. We readers and our detached author Austen stand side by side appreciating the interactive communication between the substitute author Henry and his chosen heroine and reader Catherine. What happens between Henry and Catherine is a miniaturized reflection of the relationship between Austen and her readers. Austen projects the irrevocable influence of an author onto the character of Henry, and we are supposed to recognize the risk of credulity from Catherine.

Surrendering to Henry’s Gothic direction, Catherine obediently moves forward decisively, “She could no longer comprehend her own gullibility, and inability to distinguish the real and the imagined.”² I am of the same opinion with G. K. Wolfe that “The notion of impossibility in fantasy [...] must [...] be part of an implied compact between author and reader,”³ There must be an agreement between the author and the reader regarding impossible imagination. It gives the permission that the author could express his or her ideas freely while the reader could seize the key point without being diverted by the bizarre descriptions in the text. Obviously, here is an instance of failure due to the absence of an agreement between Henry who writes imaginatively and

¹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 36.

² Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 86

³ G. K. Wolfe, “The encounter with fantasy.” *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press/Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 3.

Catherine who reads blindly.

2.1.3 Actualization of Gothic fancy: Catherine's anticlimactic disillusion

Finally, Catherine seizes the chance to play the role of author and creates her own Gothic fancy. In her imagined world, she is the author, the heroine, and also her own reader. This author is persistent with her Gothic invention although she's been disillusioned every time. As an active heroine, she gets involved and is sensitive to every suspicious detail. Moreover, she is a very responsive reader who even sheds tears because of her own creation. According to Fullerton, Radcliffe chooses a rather "rational approach" compared with her peer writers like Horace Walpole, because those "inexplicable horrors" in her works usually turn out to be "remarkably prosaic," which bears resemblance to Catherine's search of the abbey.¹ Her obsession with Gothic novels is frustrated by her anticlimactic experience at Northanger Abbey, which could be summarized in four stages: first impression, the chest adventure, the cabinet adventure and General Tilney's crime. This process is accompanied by the shift or superposition of her different roles of author/character/reader.

It turns out that Northanger Abbey does not fit into Catherine's design of a Gothic story. The journey towards disillusionment starts from her first view of the building. Judging from the name of it, Catherine is expecting something antique and mysterious, but that's not how it looks, "so low did the building stand [...] without having discerned even an antique chimney."² She's not satisfied with this abbey from the inside out, "She knew not that she had any right to be surprised, but there was a something in this mode of approach which she certainly had not expected."³ Catherine's inner world is introduced with two exclamations in the form of free indirect discourse, "An abbey!

¹ Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 158.

² *NA*, p. 177.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Yes, it was delightful to be really in an abbey!”¹ Right after that comes her disillusionment in an adversative sentence, “But she doubted, as she looked round the room, whether anything within her observation would have given her the consciousness.”² All those she once pictured in her mind, including the fireplace, the windows, and the arch, fail to live up to her eager expectations. Thus, the pleasure of arriving at an abbey is broken down and turns to the opposite side because “the difference was very distressing.”³

Disappointed by the true features of Northanger Abbey, Catherine decides to produce the Gothic part by herself and begins to place her interest on “a large high chest, standing back in a deep recess on one side of the fireplace.”⁴ Without being affected by the modern taste of the building, she sets free her imagination, “This is strange indeed! I did not expect such a sight as this! An immense heavy chest! What can it hold? Why should it be placed here? Pushed back too, as if meant to be out of sight!”⁵ Once again, the form of free indirect discourse is applied to express Catherine’s thoughts: her representative exclamatory sentences and interrogative sentences. She regards herself as the one chosen to discover a secret in the abbey and is determined to uncover it at all costs. Her exploration of this mysterious chest is briefly interrupted by Miss Tilney’s maid, which only causes her fearful curiosity to grow greater. At last, Catherine fails to finish her Gothic draft of the chest since what is hidden inside is only a white cotton counterpane folded properly.

This failure makes Catherine feel ashamed for harboring absurd assumptions for a while. Nevertheless, horror stalks everywhere in this ancient building when it comes to a stormy night, a perfect time for something creepy to take place. Catherine cannot

¹ *NA*, p. 178.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁵ *Ibid.*

resist the temptation of being an active author and she resorts to her previous condition of farcical imagination little by little, “characteristic sounds [...] brought to her recollection a countless variety of dreadful situations and horrid scenes.”¹ At first, she “scorn[s] the causeless fears of an idle fancy”² and reminds herself that nothing weird will occur in this modern building since she’s not far from her friends. Yet when she happens to notice “a high, old-fashioned black cabinet, which [...] had never caught her notice before,”³ what Henry said in the carriage crosses her mind. In spite of the difference between the materials of the cabinet, Catherine feels amused by this discovery, “though there could be nothing really in it, there was something whimsical, it was certainly a very remarkable coincidence!”⁴ Then she’s propelled by the rebirth of her sense of strange fancy to open the cabinet, “not, however, with the smallest expectation of finding anything, but it was so very odd, after what Henry had said.”⁵ As mentioned before that Catherine follows the example of Henry when creating her own Gothic stories, especially in her early ones. She cannot help referring to his story from time to time. As Henry sows, so shall Catherine reap. We can see that Henry is responsible for the relapse of Catherine into absurd fancy in this case.

This Gothic invention of a mysterious cabinet is also a failure. Against the background of pouring rain and blowing wind, nervous Catherine succeeds in opening the cabinet after several attempts. Instead of discovering the secret directly, she finds a double range of small drawers in it, “and in the center, a small door, closed also with a lock and key, secured in all probability a cavity of importance.”⁶ The outside four drawers are all empty, but when it comes to the inner drawer, Catherine does find something seemingly significant, “a roll of paper pushed back into the further part of

¹ *NA*, p. 184.

² *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

the cavity, apparently for concealment.”¹ When she is ready to interpret the content of the precious manuscript, the dim lamp is snuffed all of a sudden with terrifying effect. The climax of cabinet is temporarily delayed, and Catherine could do nothing but keep on speculating about the secret information in the manuscript, “What could it contain? To whom could it relate? By what means could it have been so long concealed?”²

Just as she used to be the heroine in Henry’s made-up tale, Catherine takes it for granted that she’s the protagonist here and now in her own story, “how singularly strange that it should fall to her lot to discover it! Till she had made herself mistress of its contents, however, she could have neither repose nor comfort.”³ Confronting the washing-bill and farrier’s bill in her hand the next morning, Catherine feels humbled and humiliated because “[n]othing could now be clearer than the absurdity of her recent fancies.”⁴ Indeed, Catherine’s investigation of the drawers looks like peeling an onion, full of excitements, but with a hollow core. The only comfort for poor Catherine is that Henry, who is responsible for her curiosity about this strange cabinet, has no idea of her folly yet.

Catherine’s last Gothic fancy about General Tilney’s crime takes more time to act out since she spends quite a long period of time collecting or making out “evidence”. During her stay at Northanger Abbey, she finds it suspicious that General Tilney is unwilling to show her around the abbey, “his anxiety to delay what she so much wished for struck Catherine as very remarkable.”⁵ Additionally, he often takes an early walk alone in the morning. According to Catherine, his “lengthened absence, [and] these solitary rambles” expose his disturbed state of mind or pricks of conscience.⁶ For Catherine, a careful observer who is always ready to create a Gothic story, this is

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

² *NA*, p. 189.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

definitely a sign of some dark secret, “certainly very provoking.”¹ Later on, the fact that Mrs. Tilney has never been mentioned draws her attention, because a villain always calls for a counterpart victim in a Gothic story.

This time, Catherine saves the position of heroine to mysterious Mrs. Tilney, and she comes up with a series of questions to enrich the image of this character, “Was she a very charming woman? Was she handsome? Was there any picture of her in the abbey? And why had she been so partial to that grove? Was it from dejection of spirits?”² Holding fast to some dubious behavior and utterance of General Tilney, Catherine is totally obsessed with her imaginative creation of this woman, “Catherine’s interest in the deceased Mrs. Tilney augmented with every question, whether answered or not.”³ Depending on those suspicious evidence and perceptive conjectures, she is convinced that something horrible has happened to Mrs. Tilney: she did not have a happy marriage during her life time and General Tilney is responsible for her sudden death. Catherine makes a judgement about the villain figure General Tilney, “He must have been dreadfully cruel to her”⁴ based on the evidence that he does not value the portrait of his departed wife. In fact, the governing principle of her reasoning, if we could say so, is the generic convention she reads in books, “She had often read of such characters, characters which Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn; but here was proof positive of the contrary.”⁵

In a humorous tone, Austen remarks on our confident detective Catherine when she’s led by the General to have a look at the abbey, “with a grandeur of air, a dignified step, which caught the eye, but could not shake the doubts of the well-read Catherine.”⁶ Careful reader Catherine arrives at a conclusion that there is a secret chamber in this

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

² *NA*, p. 200.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

building where she could find the secret of poor Mrs. Tilney, “having seen, in a momentary glance beyond them, a narrower passage, more numerous openings, and symptoms of a winding staircase, believed herself at last within the reach of something worth her notice”¹ Catherine demonstrates resilience in front of obstacles, and the villain’s preventing them from visiting the secret chamber serves as an impetus, “Something was certainly to be concealed; her fancy, though it had trespassed lately once or twice, could not mislead her.”²

Small doubts keep nibbling at the edges of Catherine’s mind, and she deduces evidence from Miss Tilney’s hints. When Miss Tilney agrees to lead Catherine to her mother’s room, Catherine actively pictures the images of a cruel husband and his miserable wife, “the general should shrink from the sight of such objects as that room must contain [...] never entered by him since the dreadful scene had passed, which released his suffering wife, and left him to the stings of Conscience.”³ The fact that Mrs. Tilney died from a sudden illness while Miss Tilney was away from home reconfirms her assumption of the villain’s crime, “Could it be possible? Could Henry’s father--? And yet how many were the examples to justify even the blackest suspicions!”⁴ Here are two short questions and an exclamation, and free indirect speech is applied again to manifest Catherine’s uneasiness in front of such a supposition. The second question is interrupted, and the crucial piece of Catherine’s suspicion or the blackest part is omitted and replaced by a dash. And this rhetorical replacement vividly captures the disturbance, “Catherine’s blood ran cold with the horrid suggestions which naturally sprang from these words.”⁵

Adhering to Henry’s strategy of alluding to the characters in *Udolpho*, Catherine

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

² *Ibid.*

³ *NA*, p. 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

compares General Tilney to Montoni, the Gothic villain who is haughty, brooding and cruel, “It was the air and attitude of a Montoni! What could more plainly speak the gloomy workings of a mind not wholly dead to every sense of humanity, in its fearful review of past scenes of guilt?”¹ She even ventures to guess that Mrs. Tilney is still alive and General Tilney shuts her up in the secret cell by supplying her coarse food in the middle of the night. Sometimes Catherine does reflect upon her bold surmises in case she has gone to an extreme, but she’s too close to the “truth” to stop there, “they were supported by such appearances as made their dismissal impossible.”² She chooses to believe in her collected evidence and careful judgement.

A writer is always the first reader of his or her own work. Catherine is the first and only reader of her own Gothic fancy (except the last moment when she runs into Henry). Her role of reader used to encourage Henry in carrying on his horror story. It is true as well when it comes to her own writing. Catherine is definitely a dedicated reader when shedding tears in front of the elegant monument in memory of Mrs. Tilney, the pathetic heroine in her story. She is convinced by her own creation of this woman’s miseries and her husband’s cruelties. Depending upon her previous projection of the corpus delicti, Catherine is scared to death when she’s trying to enter Mrs. Tilney’s room with Eleanor Tilney but caught red-handed by General Tilney, “the dreaded figure of the general himself at the further end of the gallery, stood before her!”³ This exclamation reproduces her fear at the sight of General Tilney. For Catherine, he is also very frightening in terms of auditory sense, and his loudest tone to call Eleanor brings to her “terror upon terror.”⁴

Filled with thrilling sensations, Catherine manages to go through the “forbidden door” by herself and become the heroine of her own Gothic creation, “confident of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³ *NA*, p. 213.

⁴ *Ibid.*

somewhere drawing forth [...] Of the way to the apartment she was now perfectly mistress.”¹ Nevertheless, what is waiting for her is not the climax of a dark secret as expected. The view inside the secret chamber has nothing to do with prison or a prisoner but “a large, well-proportioned apartment, an handsome dimity bed, [...] a bright Bath stove, mahogany wardrobes, and neatly painted chairs.”² Catherine is stricken by “astonishment,” “doubt” at first and then “emotions of shame.”³ Although still refusing to acknowledge her false judgment of General Tilney, she tries to run away from the site in case she is discovered, “sick of exploring, and desired but to be safe in her own room, with her own heart only privy to its folly.”⁴

Having no idea that she could run into him on her way back, Catherine’s encounter with Henry on the stair seems like an episode of interrogation with Catherine as the interrogatee while Henry the interrogator. Catherine admits that she is looking for the room of his mother. She tries a few times to divert their conversation from this topic to other things, yet Henry turns back to the topic of his mother anyway, “As there is nothing in the room in itself to raise curiosity, this must have proceeded from a sentiment of respect for my mother’s character.”⁵ This time, she gets up courage and probes into the core of her curiosity cautiously, “what she did say was very interesting. Her dying so suddenly [...] and you--none of you being at home--and your father, I thought--perhaps had not been very fond of her.”⁶ Based on Catherine’s speculation that beats around the bush, Henry makes an explanation in a rather controlled way, “you infer perhaps the probability of some negligence — some— (involuntarily she shook her head) — or it may be — of something still less pardonable.”⁷ As it is too horrid for

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214

² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *NA*, p. 218.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Catherine to utter it directly, it is even harder for Henry to do so. Therefore, Henry resorts to euphemism while the author resorts to rhetorical dash again.

In the presence of the first-hand statement from Henry, Catherine is still suspicious about the relationship between General Tilney and Mrs. Tilney, “was he afflicted?”¹ Patient Henry has to provide more evidence to prove the innocence of his father, “You have erred in supposing him not attached to her. He loved her [...] though his temper injured her, his judgment never did. His value of her was sincere; and, if not permanently, he was truly afflicted by her death.”² It might be a relief for Catherine to know the truth, but it is also the worm of conscience. Henry points out her folly seriously, “Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from?”³ In fact, Catherine’s irrational imagination is comparatively reasonable in consideration of the fashion of Gothic literature, which is the eternal cause, and her blind reading together with excessive expectations, which is the internal cause.

This episode of interrogation sounds like a confrontation between a vulnerable writer and an aggressive reader, in which the former’s creation of a crime story is questioned or usurped by the latter who is equipped with mighty logic and irrefutable evidence. Having no opportunity to read the previous Gothic excerpts by Catherine, Henry is unaware that he is the one who kindles her enthusiasm as a Gothic heroine, leaves her alone to make up the absurd story and tears down her illusion at last. At first, Catherine is only a common reader obsessed with Gothic novels. Henry tells the Gothic story of *Northanger Abbey* to her and deliberately takes her as the female protagonist in order to arouse her interest in the following visit. Catherine is greatly satisfied with this shift of roles and goes further by playing the role of author/character/reader at the same time. The only difference is that Catherine goes to the extreme of making up the

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

story of General Tilney the villain and Mrs. Tilney the victim until Henry calls “cut”. All in all, the Gothic adventure of *Northanger Abbey* is the outcome of Catherine’s absorptive reading of horror books, Henry’s influential guidance in creating a spooky pretext of the abbey, and Catherine’s absurd fancy and corresponding disillusionment.

Fullerton attributes the appetite for Gothic novels shared by Catherine and her contemporaries to “the extreme rationalism which characterized the Age of Enlightenment.”¹ Yet it is dangerous to overemphasize this literary cult as Catherine did. All of her imagination has been “craving to be frightened” long before her visit to *Northanger Abbey*, “the infatuation had been created [...] long before her quitting Bath, and it seemed as if the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there indulged.”² It is fortunate that her unreasonable fantasies are only momentary lapses. After deserting the past delusion and fancy, Catherine could finally take the abbey as an ordinary building and return to her ordinary life. The role of Henry might be a little disputable that he is the one that ignites Catherine’s ambition to be a writer, especially a Gothic writer, and then undermines her illusion all at once. He acts as the counterpoint character of Catherine who makes up his own work of Gothic fancy but does not indulge in the Gothic world. He is the one in control of Catherine because he could distinguish what is fictional and what is real while Catherine goes to extremes.

The content of Henry’s creation is fake, but his intension to amuse Catherine is real. The content of Catherine’s imagination is fake, but it accidentally exposes the real temperament of General Tilney. Austen’s parody is based on making up stories, but we successfully get her real humor owing to the collaboration between the author and her readers. It is a paradox that Austen questions imagination in a work of imagination. Through the lens of disnarration, *Northanger Abbey* is an imaginative work originated from the literary trend of Gothic imagination with the purpose of warning us the risks

¹ Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*. (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 155.

² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

of involving in wild imagination.

2.2 Misconception: Productive Creation of Others and Self

Misconception is another subcategory of disnarration. According to Wayne Booth, misconception or misinterpretation is the privilege given to the omniscient narrator that takes effect “by explicitly controlling the reader’s expectations, insuring that he will not travel burdened with the false hopes and fears held by the characters.”¹ C. S. Lewis locates an interesting similarity shared by *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*: “Disillusionment”, or in other words “awakening.”² And he discovers that all the four heroines have undergone the process from misinterpretation to reinterpretation pertaining to the world as well as to themselves “with varying degrees of pain.”³ I agree with Lewis on the point of “awakening,” only that the comedy of Catherine is more related to her imagination and fantasy, the tragedy of Marianne is more connected with deception and lies, while the cases in between about Elizabeth and Emma are exactly what is generalized as “misconception”. It is mentioned that both imagination and misconception belong to the hypothetical side of disnarration while deception belongs to the negative side of disnarration. In light of hypothetical attribute, imagination focuses on the formation of ideas without foundation, while misconception centers on the interpretation of ideas based on false foundations.

This section will mainly focus on *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* in regard to misconception of self and others and lay bare the developing and dynamic progression from interpretation to misinterpretation, from misinterpretation to reinterpretation.

¹ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 173.

² C. S. Lewis, “A Note on Jane Austen,” *A Truth Universally Acknowledged: 33 Reasons Why We Can’t Stop Reading Jane Austen* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 106-107.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Misconception could be taken as a kind of productive creation or writing. The narrative process of the romance between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth is dominated by the force of misconception on both sides. The hero and the heroine resemble two biased writers being stuck in their erroneous creations of each other. Elizabeth takes Mr. Darcy's pride and introversion as alienating arrogance while the latter takes the former's arch humor as a sense of interest and appreciation. Emma is more like a self-centered playwright who enjoys writing match-making stories at will. She tries to bring Harriet and Mr. Elton together, invents a dark love affair for Jane Fairfax, and makes up a romance between Frank and herself. However, all of her efforts prove to be absurd in the end.

Austen is intelligent in preserving the complicated essence of the process of writing and reading, in which we interpret, misinterpret and reinterpret continuously. To some extent, interpretation is the pretext of misinterpretation while reinterpretation is the post text of misinterpretation. In other words, misinterpretation presupposes the existence of interpretation and reinterpretation, and interpretation, misinterpretation and reinterpretation could be taken as an organic unity in narrative discourse. The duet of misconception between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth is not static and tragic. They come to revise their previous prejudices and reproduce an authentic version of the other. The interactive play between interpretation and misinterpretation triggers reinterpretation and true love between them. After a series of unfulfilled match-making plays, Emma learns to discard her conceited misunderstandings of Harriet, Frank, Jane, Mr. Knightley and herself. The belated revelation and reinterpretation orient Emma to her perfect match of love. And the process moving from false impression to correct interpretation is similar to the dynamic course of imagination in *Northanger Abbey*,

2.2.1 Polyphony of misinterpretations: from prejudice to love

Based on the original title of "First Impressions", we can tell that this is where the whole story of *Pride and Prejudice* starts: first impressions or first interpretations, which entail

the subsequent appearance of misinterpretation and reinterpretation. The modified title “Pride and Prejudice” might be a follow-up of Austen’s first published work *Sense and Sensibility*, but it also points out clearly what is the obstacle that stops the characters from a smooth romance and what is the driving force of the plot. At the first glance, it is likely to label the hero Mr. Darcy as Mr. Pride while the heroine Elizabeth Miss Prejudice, but the truth is that both of them make mistakes due to pride and prejudice. More precisely, prejudice is their mutual weakness. And *Pride and Prejudice* is a polyphonic journey consisting of Elizabeth’s unfavorable creation of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Darcy’s creative underestimation of Elizabeth. After traveling along the path of interpretation and misinterpretation, Mr. Prejudice and Miss Prejudice turn to create a true text of each other and arrive at the destination of reinterpretation and love.

Most readers appreciate our vivacious heroine Elizabeth, but there is a flaw in her disposition that might destroy her positive image if taken to extreme: she is inclined to build up interpretations based upon insufficient or false evidence. Elizabeth makes a hasty evaluation of Mr. Darcy because of their first encounter at the assembly, which is definitely not a pleasant one. Mr. Darcy appears with his friend Mr. Bingley who just rented the house of Netherfield not far from Longbourn, the residence of the Bennets. Our hero “[draws] the attention [...] by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien” together with the big news of his large fortune, “ten thousand a year.”¹ Yet before the end of the ball, this handsome and wealthy young man has already frightened away all his admirers with his unfavorable manner, “he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased [...] a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance.”² This terrible image is more salient when being compared with his amiable and easygoing friend Mr. Bingley.

Losing all popularity, Mr. Darcy turns into a negative figure among the neighborhood from the very first night he shows up. Elizabeth couldn’t agree more with

¹ *P&P*, p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

this consensus because of his personal “insult” during the ball. Due to the scarcity of male partners, Elizabeth has to sit down and take a rest occasionally. In spite of everything, Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with these girls in town except Bingley’s sisters who came with him. When Bingley suggests introducing Elizabeth to him as a partner, he gives the “notorious” remark about our heroine, unfortunately overheard by the girl herself, “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me.”¹ Elizabeth shares the anecdote with her friends since she has a “a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.”² At the same time, the key word of this man’s image has been set in her text: “His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world.”³

What is worse, Elizabeth’s interpretation is misdirected to the wrong path by their new acquaintance Mr. Wickham. This seemingly nice and cordial gentleman provides a pretext regarding Mr. Darcy’s “black history”, including his violation of his father’s will and deprivation of Wickham’s career as a churchman out of jealousy. There is a reason that Elizabeth is willing to believe these accounts and they contribute to the negative image of him. All these evil deeds confirm and consolidate Elizabeth’s unfriendly preconception about that person. To some extent, she is one of the major authors who draft the unfavorable portrait of Mr. Darcy and disseminate it among her family members and friends. Luckily or unluckily, people buy it. As one of the readers of her own creation, Elizabeth believes it without a shadow of doubt.

While Elizabeth is busy gathering his “guilt”, Mr. Darcy has already stepped past the initial “tolerable” interpretation of her. He turns to reconstruct a desirable image of Elizabeth and falls in love with her unconditionally and irrevocably. At first, he’s just attracted by her pleasing playfulness in spite of imperfect appearance and form. After that, he is smitten with her loving eyes, “My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have

¹ *P&P*, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.”¹ Blinded by her prejudice, Elizabeth fails to detect a sense of affection from his attention but misinterprets it as disapprobation. Although Elizabeth dislikes this man for his awful pride and ill treatment towards Mr. Wickham, she still takes him as someone superior unconsciously and has no confidence of being the object of this “great” man’s adoration. After noting his gaze every now and then, she infers this attention as a way to express his negative view.

Elizabeth’s undesirable interpretation of Mr. Darcy accelerates with burning anger when she heard about his interference in breaking up the nascent romantic relationship between Mr. Bingley and her sister Jane. Dramatically, at this particular moment, Mr. Darcy proposes to her out of unquenchable admiration and gives his touching confession of love, “In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”² In addition to this passionate declaration, this suitor spends more time in enumerating how degrading this union would be, considering her social inferiority and the supposed vulgarity of her family members. Elizabeth is insulted by his so-called love that is against will, reason and character. On account of her deeply rooted misinterpretations and his impolite offence, this arrogant proposal is doomed to be a failure. Mr. Darcy has no doubt of a favorable answer because he misinterprets her ironic retort as a kind of flirtation and takes it for granted that this lady with little fortune and a vulgar background would accept his hand at once. Therefore, he feels shocked and angry in front of Elizabeth’s straightforward refusal and ruthless accusation.

Without hiding her dislike and rage, Elizabeth blames Mr. Darcy for the misfortunes of the loving couple, “you have been the principal, if not the only means of dividing them from each other [...] involving them both in misery of the acutest

¹ *P&P*, pp. 29-30.

² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

kind.”¹ She also exposes his unfair treatment towards poor Wickham, “You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life of that independence which was no less his due than his desert.”² After listing his “sins” one by one, Elizabeth declines his proposal without showing any compassion for this suitor.

[...] your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.³

This relentless accusation shows clearly that Elizabeth is an eloquent speaker and creator, but the major character of her creation as well as her reader Mr. Darcy has something more to say. Based upon the previous depiction we can tell that this man is a rather introverted person, and accordingly his reaction towards Elizabeth’s unfair judgment and prejudice is a confession letter as an alternative to a face-to-face conversation. Generally speaking, the whole story is mainly perceived from the focalization of Elizabeth. Mr. Darcy is always the passive object and character under her control, and readers can only acquire limited information from his dialogue with other people and Elizabeth’s tainted observations and interpretations. Here is the first and the only time we hear/read from this hero directly in a long statement. In this occasion, Mr. Darcy could finally speak on behalf of himself and plays the role of an

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

² *P&P*, p. 213.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.

author in control of Elizabeth, his only reader.

From this crucial letter, Elizabeth begins to revise her previous misinterpretations of Mr. Darcy. She learns the truth about Bingley and her sister Jane as well as the liar Wickham. Charlotte once reminded Elizabeth that Bingley might misunderstand Jane's attitude as normal civility due to her reticence. It turns out that gentleman Bingley fails to perceive Jane's preference indeed. Besides, Jane misinterprets Bingley's sudden departure as a lack of affection, which comprises the journey of misconception paralleling that of Elizabeth. Mr. Darcy urges his friend to leave Netherfield out of deep concern for Bingley's feelings (and also his own decision to cool down his passion for Elizabeth). According to his observation, Bingley is totally infatuated with Jane and is very serious about this relationship, but Jane is not on the same level: "she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment."¹ He is responsible for encouraging Bingley to stay away from Jane, but he is not the one who produces the key issue of misconception between them.

In order to justify his own reputation and disprove the misinterpretations concerning Wickham's "misfortunes", Mr. Darcy is obliged to uncover the story of his younger sister Georgiana's heart-break. At first Wickham refuses to take the church position promised by Darcy's father but chooses to get an amount of money from Darcy. Later on, after squandering all the money, he comes back and tries to seduce his younger sister for her good fortune of thirty thousand pounds, which is discovered before their elopement, "Mr. Wickham's chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune [...] but I cannot help supposing that the hope of revenging himself on me was a strong inducement."² This must be an awful memory for young Georgiana and her brother. Even though having been wronged by Elizabeth the previous day, Mr. Darcy shows his civil and thoughtful manner in the confession letter, "Ignorant as you previously were of everything concerning either, detection could not be in your power, and suspicion

¹ *P&P*, p. 218.

² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

certainly not in your inclination.”¹ It must be a torture for him to recall what has happened to Georgiana. Repressing his own agony, kind-hearted Mr. Darcy even tries to comfort Elizabeth in order to cushion her from blaming herself for the unjust accusation. It is fair to say that the content of this letter combining with its writer’s thoughtfulness work together to overthrow Elizabeth’s ingrained misinterpretations of this gentleman.

Elizabeth’s sprouting admiration towards Mr. Darcy originates from her reading and rereading his confession letter. She is communicating with Mr. Darcy via the intermediate letter after that awkward proposal. This male protagonist is an expressive person only in front of close friends and family members, which leads to people’s prejudices easily. Here the epistolary effect is earthshaking since the passive image of our hero is transformed into an active author-like figure. Moreover, the letter itself is a textual account in which Mr. Darcy is writing himself as a character. Little by little, his written words remove the misunderstandings between them and provide a chance for Elizabeth to have a different view of him. Mr. Darcy is lucky to have such a careful and dedicated reader as Elizabeth. By means of sincere clarification and civility, he succeeds in converting her misinterpretations and rebuilding a positive text about him.

Along with the candid letter, Elizabeth improves her new interpretations of Mr. Darcy through a visit to Pemberley, his grand house. By then, she’s already learned by heart his letter and is quite excited to have a look at the place where he lives. And she agrees to visit to that noble estate only because she’s informed that the owner would not be there at that time. Therefore, the new image of Mr. Darcy is conjured up based on a series of intermediate clues during her Pemberley tour. Without the owner being there, Elizabeth studies him from the lay out of the house, its decorations and style, and other people’s accounts and descriptions. She is making him the hero in her new text, and this time it is a romantic one.

¹ *Ibid.*

David Hume believed that people's aesthetic appreciation about a country house tour arises from "our sympathizing with the proprietor of the lodging."¹ Accordingly, the Pemberley tour is not merely about a great mansion, but the incarnation of its proprietor. For Elizabeth who has already formed a positive interpretation of Mr. Darcy, his estate is no longer a private property; it is "a metonym for its owner and his allure."² Elizabeth feels delighted at the first sight of Pemberley House, a handsome stone building that has no appearance of artificiality. The natural beauty of the woody hills in the back and a swelling stream in front gives her the impression of a peaceful and harmonious life. As for its interior, she appreciates the "real elegance" of those lofty rooms in which the furniture is "neither gaudy nor uselessly fine."³ Elizabeth admits that she admires the good taste of its owner. The most marvelous episode happens when Elizabeth is observing Mr. Darcy's portrait in the house. His portrait seems to come to life when being gazed at and responds to Elizabeth by fixing "eyes upon herself."⁴ And this quiet communication between the person and the portrait narrows the gap between them when Elizabeth turns to interpret him in a different way, "she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression."⁵ This reinterpretation of Mr. Darcy fills her heart with gentle emotions.

Elizabeth rewrites her text of Mr. Darcy with the help of other people's interpretations. The respectable housekeeper Mrs. Reynolds speaks highly of her young master, who "is the best landlord, and the best master [...]. There is not one of his tenants or servants but will give him a good name."⁶ Her comment is opposite to Elizabeth's

¹ David Hume, "Of Our Esteem for the Rich and Powerful," *A Treatise of Human Nature. Vol. 1: Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 235.

² Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 65.

³ *P&P*, p. 270.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

previous opinions, but this old lady is a reliable authority for she has known Mr. Darcy when he was only four years old. In addition, she presents another aspect of this young man that is unknown to Elizabeth before: he is a good brother, “Whatever can give his sister any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing he would not do for her.”¹ Based upon her new interpretations, Mr. Darcy is a good-tempered master and a considerate brother. He is responsible for many people’s happiness and Elizabeth cannot help projecting her own possible happiness from his servants and his sister, “she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!”²

Elizabeth’s uncle and aunt Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner also contribute to the revision of her misconception. Mr. Darcy returns to Pemberley ahead of time and comes across Elizabeth and the Gardiners. Elizabeth is unprepared for his civil willingness to be introduced to the Gardiners, because he used to despise her relatives “against whom his pride had revolted in his offer to herself.”³ He is trying to convince Elizabeth that he has altered and therefore deserves her reinterpretation. He shows his respect towards Elizabeth by treating her relatives with attentive civility. And Mrs. Gardiner agrees with Mrs. Reynolds the housekeeper that he is not a proud person as other people said, “There is something a little stately in him, to be sure [...] but it is confined to his air, and is not unbecoming.”⁴ Mrs. Reynolds attributes this negative label to his reticent character, “I am sure I never saw anything of it [...] it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men.”⁵

Actually, Elizabeth used to have a short talk with Mr. Darcy about “pride,” and he makes a quasi-defense statement that “vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation.”⁶

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³ *P&P*, p. 279.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Yet at that time, Elizabeth has already held a fixed and negative view about him and turns a deaf ear to the justification for his outward coldness in front of strangers. Before the epistolary episode, Elizabeth is not a competent listener/reader but a self-important talker/writer who is busy talking without focusing on what other people have said and enjoys developing her own (mis)interpretations. And this visit succeeds in revising those misunderstandings and developing a new text of Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth moves closer to the hero gradually when she is brought into the role of mistress living with that unassuming gentleman in his house with natural beauty. Based on this, it is impossible for us to misunderstand Elizabeth's humorous statement that her love for Mr. Darcy emanates from her "first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."¹ This Pemberley tour promotes her good opinions of its owner and reinforces her reinterpretations concerning this person, his proposal and their possible future life.

At this point we can say that Mr. Darcy has already overcome the false label and establishes a rather positive text of himself without saying too much himself. Then how about Elizabeth herself? Elizabeth recognizes her opinionated judgement and realizes the destructive effect of her own pride and prejudice. She used to put faith in her construction of Mr. Darcy as an awful person, but now she has to admit her fault, "How despicably I have acted! [...] How humiliating is this discovery! [...] vanity, not love, has been my folly [...] I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away [...] Till this moment, I never knew myself."² It is painful to learn the truth, but it's never too late. The lively and confident heroine could finally throw away the masks of misconception after being humiliated. She will not be doomed because of this fault; instead, she will be rewarded for her great courage of self-examination. This journey from misinterpretation to reinterpretation is not only about Mr. Darcy; it is related to herself as well. The renewal of her interpretations goes hand in hand with the possibility of her romantic relationship.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

² *P&P*, p. 229.

Elizabeth also reinterprets the real situation of her family members. She is not ignorant of the incivility of her mother and younger sisters. Nevertheless, she resorts to passive resistance and harbors a sarcastic attitude about some of the ridiculous things they do, just like Mr. Bennet. As for Mr. Bennet, she is not totally blind to his impropriety as a father and a husband. When being proposed to, Elizabeth burst into anger because of Mr. Darcy's strong criticism, but his words force her to take those things seriously. Though ashamed and disappointed, she has to admit her father's impotence and indifference and tries to remind him of the potential risks of his laissez-faire approach. Mr. Bennet is nevertheless too stubborn to change his habit of being an onlooker. Lydia's elopement humiliates the whole family, which confirms Mr. Darcy's contemptuous views in an unfortunate way.

As mentioned, Elizabeth is not the only one who misinterprets people; Mr. Darcy is her equal in this. At the very beginning of their encounter, he takes Elizabeth as a country girl belittled by other men based on her just "tolerable" appearance, saying, "I am in no humor at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men."¹ Later on, when he's infatuated with this lovely lady with beautiful eyes, he misunderstands her teasing attitude as a kind of interest and attention, as can be observed in the passage, "there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner [...] and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her."² Finally, he's driven by the unrequited passion to the embarrassing proposal. The failure of this proposal is conceivable based on his various misinterpretations of Elizabeth.

Mr. Darcy feels ashamed of the fact that his confession of love is declined angrily, but when he calms down, he is able to see the reason for this failure. Considering Elizabeth's false interpretations of him, there is no doubt that she would say "No". It is his self-importance that leads him to underestimate her and see wealth as the thing to win her heart, which irritates her the most. Only when he returns to his role as a

¹ *P&P*, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

thoughtful gentleman, Elizabeth begins to change her prejudice against him, “He makes an effort to break out of his rank-influenced prejudices and see merit where it can be found, thus achieving ‘gentlemanly’ civility.”¹ In addition, he’s fully aware that it is unreasonable to separate Elizabeth from her family. Actually, he is not better than Elizabeth when we think about what his sister Georgiana has been through and how his aunt Lady Catherine has treated other people. He realizes that he should not look down upon her because of her relatives. The first proposal fails because of their mutual misconceptions.

These interpretative changes on both sides bring about the modifications of their attitudes and behaviors, the alternations of their relationship and the advancement of the whole plot. At the first sight, it is easy for us to jump to the conclusion that Elizabeth is guilty of prejudice against Mr. Darcy while Mr. Darcy is the embodiment of pride. In fact, the title of this novel cuts both ways, in which we have Mr. Pride vs. Miss Prejudice and Mr. Prejudice vs. Miss Pride at the same time. The story starts from prejudice and misconception yet finally diverts into the direction of reinterpretation and love. They undergo the difficulty in realizing their own false ideas, yet the course from prejudice to fact intensifies their understanding of the real self and promotes their true affection. We are convinced of this transformation because Austen “portrays individuals negotiating personal needs with external social demands and internalized moral codes [...] based on understanding another’s feelings and consequently one’s own.”² Both the hero and the heroine are lenient to accept human foibles and are willing to grow up in the process from interpretation, misinterpretation to reinterpretation in order to find a better self and a better half. This evolution of interpretation/misinterpretation and reinterpretation points to the dynamic essence of disnarration, in which Austen gives the characters roles as authors of, readers of and characters in each other’s constructed

¹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 72.

² Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 61.

narratives.

2.2.2 Failed romantic scenarios: from misunderstanding to awakening

Emma follows the same pattern of misinterpretation/reinterpretation as *Pride and Prejudice*, and the narrative impulse of this novel lies in the heroine Emma's misconceptions about other people and herself. Emma plays the role of author and takes pleasure in creating romantic scenarios by match-making real people in her life based on her subjective speculations and misinterpretations. She is content with her creative multi-act play of romance, but all those match-making works are proved to be mismatches in the end, including that of Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton, Jane Fairfax and mysterious Mr. Dixon, and Frank Churchill and herself. This is a journey from misunderstanding to awakening. Humiliated by a series of failures, Emma is forced to reinterpret people and their relationships objectively, and finally learns to acknowledge the real romance between Harriet and Martin, Jane and Frank, and Mr. Knightley and herself.

At the very beginning of the story, we are given a brief introduction of the female protagonist, "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, [who] seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."¹ Emma's mother passed away a long time ago, her elder sister has already got married and her close friend and governess Miss Taylor also got married recently, thus Emma is left alone with her father in the big house at Hartfield. Our heroine has nothing to worry about in daily life, and therefore is willing to care about people around her motivated by the intention to show off her cleverness. It's enjoyable for Emma to manipulate others, but unluckily she usually misinterprets people due to self-conceited

¹ *E*, p. 1.

judgment and fails to fulfill her project.

According to Emma, the marriage between her governess Miss Taylor and the widower Mr. Weston takes place following the plot of her match-making script, “I made the match myself [...] four years ago [...] when so many people said Mr. Weston would never marry again.”¹ This marital success is a sort of incentive for her, “It is the greatest amusement in the world!”² She is determined to take advantage of her strong point in bringing people together because of “the pleasure and triumph of a lucky guess” in which “[t]here is always some talent.”³ She boasts of her talent and is ready to take action right away. Jeanine M. Grenberg observes that Emma’s false self-identification as a match-maker is rooted in her unconscious denial as a lazy and unaccomplished person who could not concentrate on reading and is not good at painting or music.⁴ It is plausible because match-making seems to be a more exciting activity to kill time. In brief, she feels delighted about the role of playwright specialized in romantic stories.

The first target hero of Emma falls on the single churchman Mr. Elton, “Poor Mr. Elton! [...] I must look about for a wife for him.”⁵ It is interesting that she interprets Elton as a “poor” man just because he is an eligible young man without a wife. And she supposes it her kindness to help Mr. Elton out of the miserable situation, “he looked so very much as if he would like to have the same kind office done for him!”⁶ She also misunderstands his behavior during the wedding of the Westons as a deep yearning for a life partner as well. Emma regards herself capable of helping him and takes on the responsibility to create a romantic text for him with great pleasure.

In this new script of romance, her new friend Harriet is chosen to be the heroine,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ Jeanine M Grenberg, “Self-deception and self-knowledge: Jane Austen’s *Emma* as an Example of Kant’s Notion of Self-Deception,” *Con-Textos Kantianos: International Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2015): p. 165.

⁵ *E*, p. 13.

⁶ *E*, p. 14.

Elton's future wife, partially because she is pretty with blue eyes and is humble and grateful. The key factor rests in the girl's mysterious background that she is a natural child, "Somebody had placed her, several years back, at Mrs. Goddard's school, and somebody had lately raised her from the condition of scholar to that of parlor-boarder."¹ With significant information being hidden, she enjoys the freedom of making interpretations and constructing the plot of Harriet's past and future at will. Emma misinterprets Harriet's mysterious family background and decides to make her heroine the daughter of a gentleman in the first place. After that, she encourages the girl to believe in her made-up story, "you must support your claim to that station by every thing within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you."² She is confident in her opinion and tries to convince Harriet her reader with all her might.

Once the background of Harriet is invented, Emma takes it for granted that all her assumptions are objective facts and accordingly Harriet deserves someone better than her old acquaintance, "Those soft blue eyes, and all those natural graces, should not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury and its connexions."³ Based on this interpretation, Emma persuades Harriet to refuse the love of the humorous and friendly farmer Martin against Harriet's wish, "What! think a farmer, (and with all his sense and all his merit Mr. Martin is nothing more,) a good match for my intimate friend!"⁴ Besides, she misinterprets Mr. Elton's attention to her as to Harriet, and urges Harriet to believe that the vicar is suitable for her and has already fallen in love with her, "such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in—what at once bewitches his senses and satisfies his judgement."⁵ She acts on her own to invent the romantic text

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵ *E*, p. 67.

of her chosen hero and heroine based upon various misunderstandings.

Emma's warm-hearted marriage planning for Harriet stems from her own emotional fear and she takes Harriet as a kind of substitute for herself, "Having played adored wife [...] to her weak and coercive father since her mother's early death, she has come to assume that she lacks the qualities more virile men want."¹ It is reasonable to attribute her "hegemony" to her special role in the family as "the mistress of his house from a very early period."² On the one hand, a loving mother is absent from Emma's life since her childhood, so does maternal education and supervision. On the other hand, her only sister has already got married and there is no elder companion to keep an eye on her. Newly married Miss Taylor is more like a friend rather than a governess who fails to give advice to Emma in time. As for her doting father Mr. Woodhouse, he would seldom disagree with his dear daughter. This is the complicated background for the formation of Emma's disposition. In brief, she misinterprets herself and believes that she could not fit into the role of a loving wife and mother, and therefore tries to find comfort by making her new acquaintance young Harriet as a replacement in the script that she could never play.

Marvin Mudrick finds some clues of Emma's homoerotic love towards Harriet.³ I'm reluctant to agree with this stand but Emma does go to extremes in this relationship, "Dear Harriet!—I would not change you for the clearest-headed, longest-sighted, best-judging female breathing."⁴ It is more likely that Emma's excessive involvement derives from her inner loneliness longing for a companion that she could take care of and take charge of. Harriet happens to accord with the picture of companion Emma wants, "not clever, but she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition, was totally free

¹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), pp. 97-98.

² *E*, p. 1.

³ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 190, 192, 203.

⁴ *E*, p. 288.

from conceit, and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to.”¹ In other words, obedient Harriet satisfies Emma’s ambition to be a mentor and this privilege enables her to transform Harriet into the heroine of her new play. Jane Nardin’s observation might be more appropriate. She believes that Emma’s positive or negative attitudes towards people is mainly determined “by the effects the person in question has upon [her] self-esteem.”² Considering her social status and family position, Emma has a reason to be self-centered and manipulative. She enjoys her absolute authority in the relationship with Harriet and also in the match-making text she creates for and of Harriet. She is always the dominant author in front of this passive heroine and loyal reader. However, the binary opposition of their roles is not fixed.

Where there is oppression, there is opposition. Emma’s suffocating control over Harriet finally initiates the latter’s reaction. Innocent Harriet is not content with her misinterpretations and misconstructions and outgrows the set pattern as a pliant character being gazed at and designed. She makes an effort to revolt against Emma’s manipulation by observing Emma and speaking out her own ideas. Converting into a proactive gazer, Harriet predicts that Emma could become “an old maid at last, like Miss Bates,” because the latter has decided that there is no temptation for her to fall in love and get married.³ Emma’s determination to never get married comes from her fear of losing the present situation full of happiness and importance.

Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want:
I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s
house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly
beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eyes

¹ *E*, p. 27.

² Jane Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen’s Novels* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973), p. 112.

³ *E*, p. 90.

as I am in my father's.¹

For Harriet, this is a nice shot to fight against Emma's clutches and influences. She hits the nail on the head by picking up Miss Bates as a reference since this "formidable" old maid is a nightmare for Emma, "so silly—so satisfied— so smiling—so prosing—so undistinguishing and unfastidious— and so apt to tell every thing relative to every body about me."² Emma turns down this prophecy by stressing her undeniably material advantages. At that time, she is not mature enough to make the right interpretations of her own emotions and feelings, which is similar to what Elizabeth has gone through before coming up with reinterpretations of Mr. Darcy and herself.

On the one hand, Emma misjudges Harriet, separates her from the supposedly inferior Martin, and drags her into being a character in her own romantic creation. Following her plan, Harriet falls in love (or believes that she's fallen in love) with Elton since she has "given Harriet's fancy a proper direction and raised the gratitude of her young vanity to a very good purpose."³ On the other hand, Emma misunderstands Mr. Elton's attachment for her and mismatches him with Harriet, "His perception of the striking improvement of Harriet's manner, since her introduction at Hartfield, was not one of the least agreeable proofs of his growing attachment."⁴ She regards Elton's attention and his complimenting her painting of Harriet as a hint of his admiration for the one being painted. When Elton runs errands for them and frames the painting as soon as possible, "going on business which he would not put off for any inducement in the world," Emma is convinced that he's trying to please the image in the painting.⁵ Based on the above misunderstandings, Emma is satisfied with Mr. Elton and

¹ *Ibid.*

² *E*, pp. 90-91.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

acknowledges him as a perfect match for Harriet, “This man is almost too gallant to be in love [...] He is an excellent young man, and will suit Harriet exactly.”¹ She indulges in her misconceptions of them and keeps on creating the text of mismatch.

During all this time, Emma is ignorant of her own charm for Mr. Elton, but she will soon find out that Mr. Elton has always taken Harriet as his inferior, let alone falling in love with her, “Every body has their level [...] I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!”² He confesses that he visits Hartfield in order to see Emma and compliments the painting to please Emma who painted it. Like Mr. Darcy who misunderstands Elizabeth’s sarcastic attitude as a sense of interest, Elton misunderstands Emma’s kindness regarding his visit to Hartfield as an encouragement of love. Here Emma and Elton are standing in the same two-way street of misinterpretations, only that they are moving in the opposite direction. Therefore, Elton’s proposal to Emma is a dramatic scene full of embarrassment and revelation.

As a result, both the hero and the heroine depart from Emma’s romance script. The former gets married very soon after being refused by Emma, while the latter overestimates herself because of Emma’s consistent compliments and chooses Mr. Knightley as an ideal husband for a while, but finally returns to her true love, Martin. After the farce of Elton’s proposal, Emma regrets what she’s been doing towards poor Harriet. It is painful to hurt someone who is totally innocent. At the same time, it is upsetting to destroy one’s own creative production, “She had to destroy all the hopes which she had been so industriously feeding [...] and acknowledge herself grossly mistaken and mis-judging in all her ideas.”³ Yet this is only a beginning of her journey of awaking from misinterpretation to reinterpretation.

Feeling ashamed of herself, Emma resolves to stop doing such ridiculous things

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

² *E*, p. 139.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

of misconstruction, “It was foolish, it was wrong [...] It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious,”¹ but only for a moment. Just like Catherine who is able to return to the world of reality after a series of disillusioned Gothic fancies, Emma will have to learn her lesson through more mistakes and misconceptions. As an author with supreme authority, Emma changes her target heroine to Jane Fairfax after losing control over the script of Harriet and Elton. This time it is more about a dark secret rather than a sweet romance, which accords with Jane Nardin’s analysis of Emma’s ill feelings towards people. She holds a prejudice against Jane Fairfax out of jealousy when they first met each other. When they meet again after two years, Emma’s dislike, or her jealousy, increases, because Jane Fairfax is “remarkably elegant [...] Her height was pretty [...] her figure particularly graceful; her size a most becoming medium. Her eyes [...] had never been denied their praise.”² Honestly speaking, Jane possesses the quality of a heroine in a romance given her beauty and the fact that she is an orphan, who lives with her aunt Miss Bates and grandmother Mrs. Bates. Emma is like a scriptwriter of romantic pieces while Jane Fairfax is her heroine in the new work. At the same time, she is also the reader of her own creation since she has no one to share with this dramatic work that involves scandal of love affair.

The fact that Jane is chosen to be the new heroine has something to do with the girl’s evasive or mysterious nature. Emma is a rather outgoing and sincere person and there is a reason she naturally detests Jane and makes a negative comment of her as such, “disgustingly [...] suspiciously reserved.”³ Jane’s artifice and caution make Emma suspicious, especially when she behaves in a more reserved way with respect to Weymouth and the Dixons, her pseudo-sister and her husband. Having no idea that Jane is just hiding from people her secret engagement with Frank Churchill, Emma insists

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

² *E*, p. 174.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

on a drama of intrigue. She misinterprets Jane's personal reticence and makes up the plot of her love affair with Mr. Dixon at Weymouth. Accordingly, the mysterious gift of a piano from Frank is mistaken as evidence of her immoral adulterous love.

However, our creative playwright has to ditch her twisted script in the end. After learning the truth of Jane, Emma feels sorry for her. Getting rid of her previous malicious prejudice about this orphan girl, Emma tries to understand her plight genuinely, "If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax's."¹ Considering her orphaned status and little fortune, there is a huge gap between Jane and Frank. Their secret engagement at Weymouth goes against her principle and tortures her conscience. Even though Emma still prefers openness herself, "if you knew how much I love every thing that is decided and open,"² she has grown up by keeping an objective eye upon this young girl, the only one she envies in her life.

Emma's misconception of Frank, the son of Mr. Weston by his first marriage, is closely associated with her misconception of herself. When being introduced to this young man, she returns to her old habit of observing people and building up stories. And this time she creates a romance for herself. Frank is a good-looking and amiable young man whose "height, air, address, all were unexceptionable."³ Austen seems to be aware of this way of characterizing Emma and her role of an author, as shown in some of the language she uses. Emma immediately decides that Frank is perfect for a hero in her romantic story and "she should like him."⁴ She also makes a decision for Frank that "he came intending to be acquainted with her, and that acquainted they soon must be."⁵ It is amusing to examine the two modal verbs in the above excerpt. The first

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

² *E*, p. 482.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

“should” suggests that Emma thinks this handsome gentleman is well suited for her in terms of appearance and personality. The second “must” indicates that she’s confident of their future relationship. Emma’s first misinterpretation of Harriet and Elton comes from her unawareness of her personal charm, but on this occasion, she moves to another extreme of self-importance and overestimates herself.

Once Emma steps into the snare made by her own misconstruction, she is unable to follow up Mr. Knightley’s warnings or to recognize the signs of love secretly passed between sly Frank and reticent Jane. This chosen hero is independent from Emma’s design. In order to hide his secret engagement with Jane, Frank fulfills his own script by deliberately avoiding Jane in public and intentionally pleasing Emma as a cover. Frank’s behavior misleads Emma much further in her romantic creation when his “attention” is clearly exposed. For example, after greeting Miss Bates and her niece Jane out of courtesy in a normal way, he directly looks at Emma who is on the opposite side of the circle, and “till he could find a seat by her, would not sit at all.”¹ Not only Emma, Frank’s father and step mother are also misled by his concealment.

By good fortune, Emma turns to reflect upon Frank’s preference and character closely before it’s too late. She takes a pause to review this newly written romance and finds that “the nature of his gallantry was a little self-willed.”² When Frank is temporarily away from the town, Emma is left free for introspection and reinterpretation, and what she foresees between them is friendship instead of love. She admits that she could form a lot of “amusing schemes for the progress” of their story, but “the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she refused him.”³ Emma puts a stop to her misinterpretation of their relationship all by herself in time. This is an abortive creation, but also a success for our brilliant writer.

Before realizing her love for Mr. Knightley, Emma repeatedly misconstrues him.

¹ *E*, p. 229.

² *Ibid.*, p. 260.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

For example, she misinterprets his kindness and consideration towards Jane as love; when she sees him talking with Harriet, she mistakes it as his love for Harriet, while in fact Mr. Knightley happens to converse with her about Martin. All this time, Mr. Knightley doesn't know her bizarre suspicions about him but maintains his love for her as always. Later on, Emma is forced to face her own heart because of Harriet's confession of her admiration for Mr. Knightley. Harriet's words throw Emma into silent shock, "Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes."¹ Her first reaction is an inexplicable reluctance to picture Harriet and Mr. Knightley as a couple. Then she tries to figure out the reason of her feelings by asking herself a series of questions, "Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return?"² Ultimately, she's struck by the truth of her heart that she's in love with Mr. Knightley. An interesting metaphor of truth is applied to demonstrate this awaking moment, "It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!"³ The allusion to Cupid's arrow vividly captures Emma's astonishment when she reinterprets her emotions and realizes her dormant love. At the same time, this harmful image of an arrow refers to the pain of awakening that Emma has to suffer from misinterpretation.

Emma is really very lucky that her silly misconception doesn't destroy the happiness of her and her friends. Harriet returns to her first choice of Martin, other people in the neighborhood have no idea of the invented dark romance between Jane, and Mr. Knightley declares his consistent affection for her at last. Emma feels grateful about the denouement of her relationship with Mr. Knightley, as she should be, "What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

² *Ibid.*, p. 428.

³ *E*, p. 428.

judgment had been ever so superior to her own.”¹ She has grown up in the course of match-making project, and “the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future.”² All those false assumptions and misconceptions become the fundamental steps for Emma to climb up towards maturity and happiness. Only the new Emma of revelation, the one who has made misinterpretations, realized misinterpretations, corrected misinterpretations, and learned from misinterpretations, is worthy of intelligent and charming Mr. Knightley.

2.2.3 Interpretation, misinterpretation and reinterpretation

It looks like prejudice and misunderstanding are the major obstacles in the way of Austen’s characters that stop them from approaching the destination of truth. Austen reveals her understanding of truth through Emma’s words, “Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken.”³ According to the above analyses we can see that her heroes and heroines always have to piece together those scattered fragments of love and life in the circulating process of interpretation, misinterpretation and reinterpretation.

The transformation from misconception to revelation appears repeatedly in Austen’s works and “this does not go beyond what might be expected from the general nature of human life and the general exigencies of a novelistic plot.”⁴ Mr. Bennet has to confess his irresponsibility as a father for he used to underestimate Lydia’s behavior as nothing but silly impoliteness. Sir Thomas Bertram suffers a lot from his daughter

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, “A Note on Jane Austen,” *A Truth Universally Acknowledged: 33 Reasons Why We Can’t Stop Reading Jane Austen* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 108.

Maria's scandal of adultery because his patriarchal authority is only an illusion and he never fully understands his children. The "acquisition of self-knowledge" directs these characters to the path of wisdom by laying bare their false suppositions and taking away their internal obstacles.¹

Another impressive example of miscomprehension is the episode of Edward's ring in *Sense and Sensibility*. Elinor mistakes the lock of hair in Edward's ring as hers, which brings her unspeakable happiness when she assumes it to be a token of love secretly taken by Edward. In fact, Elinor's secret joy is contradictory with her previous attitude towards Marianne. She opposes Marianne's voluntary gift of a lock of hair to Willoughby because it is not appropriate and prudent for a young lady. Elinor is the embodiment of reason and sense in this novel, but in this case, she's misguided by her own preference for Edward. This interlude of misinterpretation successfully enriches Elinor's image with a sense of romantic affection.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section that readers' misunderstanding is directly manipulated by the author or narrator's perspective and narrative strategy. For example, the comic style of *Northanger Abbey* is actualized through the amused eyes of the narrator and we could always perceive Catherine's inner world directly and entertain her naïve but fascinating Gothic fancy. The story of *Sense and Sensibility* is carried out mainly from the perspective of the elder sister Elinor, who could express her ideas, make a reply and organize her thoughts. Yet her sister Marianne has no right to converse with readers and tell her love story directly, since she is "the victim of sardonic remarks [...] rarely seen from inside" and "can only express what she thinks at the moment or be silent."² Marianne exists mainly as the outcome of Elinor's observations and interpretations. If we are one step far from Elinor because of the intermediate narrator in between, we are at least two steps far from Marianne, because she is

¹ Jeanine M Grenberg, "Self-deception and self-knowledge: Jane Austen's *Emma* as an Example of Kant's Notion of Self-Deception," *Con-Textos Kantianos: International Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2015): p. 166.

² Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 53.

“distanced and filtered through Elinor’s mental processes.”¹ In other words, when we are interpreting/misinterpreting Elinor, we are interpreting/misinterpreting Elinor’s (mis)interpretations of Marianne.

Elizabeth Bennet claims that “people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them forever.”² We could modify her words like this: people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be interpreted in them forever. Both misconception of others and misinterpretation of selves belong to the category of false comprehension. Austen makes full use of misconception in creating obstacles for her characters, and their efforts in overcoming those obstacles activate the continuous circulation of interpretation, misinterpretation and (re)interpretation and also the dynamic variation of different roles of author/character/reader. It means that this so-called falsehood is a road one has to take in order to arrive at the true destination. Therefore, the false and the true are mutually dependent and inseparable from each other. Those characters could always move through misinterpretation to a clearer sense of the truth and then are rewarded by love.

2.3 Deception: Diversified Liars and Constructive Lies

Deception pertains to the negative side of disnarration. However, it is not necessarily a negative force in Austen’s hands. She comes up with a lot of important characters who conceal the facts and their real motives or intend to take advantage of other people by mispresenting the truth, and we call them liars. Some well-known liar figures in her novels include Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, Frank Churchill in *Emma*, William Elliot in *Persuasion*, John Thorpe, Isabella Thorpe and General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, and others. None of them belong to the category of popular protagonists, yet this long

¹ *Ibid.*

² *P&P*, p. 47.

list indicates their significance in Austen's writing. It is no exaggeration to say that deception is one of the major pivots around which her work revolves. This section will deal with those diverse liar characters and their lies that perform constructive functions in narrative discourse. To some extent, liars can be regarded as writers and their made-up stories are the texts they create. Those fabricated texts could play positive roles in enriching characterization and moving forward the plot. And the role of liar and victim is not fixed since occasionally those who deceive will be deceived in turn or even ruined by their own calculations. Similar to the pattern of productive misconception, Austen stands for the truth that is achieved from the process of deception and the confrontation between the liar and the victim.

Austen depicts various liars in her works, and it is interesting that most of them are male characters. One major group of liars are duplicitous persons who are charming gentlemen outwardly but reprehensible liars inwardly, including Wickham, Willoughby and William Elliot. Generally speaking, they are the rivals of the protagonists. They compete with the heroes by means of their attractive appearance and amiable demeanor. Even our intelligent protagonists might be fooled by them. In spite of that, their deceptive tricks usually play a significant role in setting off the glamorous images of their counterparts and promotes the relationship between the hero and the heroine. Moreover, not all calculations achieve the desired results in Austen's works. She introduces some characters who make plans to prey on others but are duped by others' lies, like General Tilney and Isabella Thorpe, or get entrapped by their own schemes, like Henry Crawford. Accordingly, the relationship between the one who lies and the one who is lied to is fluid and changeable. What's more, Austen does not declare an absolute approval of honesty or disapproval of deception. Telling lies could be a sensible choice for our heroine Elinor to preserve her dignity, while telling the truth could be a prelude to the failure of our hero Mr. Darcy's proposal. For Austen, this is never a yes-no question. She intends to leave it unsettled or she is attempting to destroy the irreconcilable opposition between the true and the false, and the innate instability of deception and disnarration helps her to maintain the complexity of narrative as well

as real life.

2.3.1 Counterpart liars: from appearance to words

In Austen's novels, the most salient type of liars is a group of love rivals of the heroes, or we could take them as the counterpart characters of the male protagonists. These "gentlemen" deceive people, especially the heroines, by means of their looks and behaviors apart from verbal lies. Here lies a very interesting point about deception in Austen that women hesitate to challenge the lies of good-looking and charming men. Accordingly, the liar/victim relationship is characterized by the gender tension in which men are the liars while women the victims. Tony Tanner presents a brief but pertinent sketch for these "attractive-deceptive" fellows, saying that "[t]hey might glitter and shine—even coruscate—but they are without the true 'inner light'."¹ It's true that other characters might be fooled by their artificial images of good looking and amiable manners, but these liars' superficial appearance and sham manners cannot stand the test of time. As a matter of fact, they serve as a contrast for their counterpart gentlemen and their good conscience and inner morality. The obstacles they create through scheming tricks usually facilitate the romance between the hero and the heroine.

Willoughby appears as a prince and his chivalric rescue of Marianne is full of romantic flavor. He runs into Marianne who hurts her ankle on the hill when it's raining heavily and helps her out just in time. There is no doubt that the debut of Willoughby is dramatic and arresting: "[a] gentleman carrying a gun" who "put down his gun and ran to her assistance [...] took her up in his arms without farther delay, and carried her down the hill."² Elinor and her mother are startled when seeing Marianne brought back by a strange gentleman. At the same time this gentleman leaves a very good impression on them with his physical appearance and graceful demeanor right away, "the eyes of

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 26.

² *S&S*, p. 45.

both were fixed on him with [...] a secret admiration which equally sprung from his appearance [...] a manner so frank and so graceful that his person [...] received additional charms from his voice and expression.”¹ It is interesting that after their first surprise, both Elinor and her mother focus on the handsome young man instead of the injured Marianne, which is powerful evidence of his charm and beauty. The hypothesis of him being “old, ugly, and vulgar” against the fact of “youth, beauty, and elegance” is a humorously ironic comment on their reaction of obsession.

There is no wonder that Marianne the heroine of this accident is deeply captivated by this charming young man who shows up with the aura of a hero from stories, “His person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favorite story.”² This blind admiration makes her believe that this man is perfect in every aspect, including a good name, living in her favorite village, and wearing the most becoming shooting-jacket. For Marianne who has already been bewitched, the pain in her ankle is nothing compared with her romantic excitement, “Her imagination was busy, her reflections were pleasant, and the pain of a sprained ankle was disregarded.”³ Yes, she is in love with heroic Willoughby.

The fabulous image of Willoughby is shattered into pieces by his vulgar deeds. It is found that he conceals his evil history of seducing Eliza, who’s under Colonel Brandon’s guardianship. He also disguises his real intention of taking Marianne as his new prey. He flirts with this young lady and makes her attached to himself by catering to her interest, “Their taste was strikingly alike [...] if any difference appeared [...] He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm.”⁴ He spares no efforts to woo her and cuts off a lock of her hair as a gift, which implies a vow of love between them. Even Elinor and her mother are misguided and believe that these two young

¹ *S&S*, p. 45.

² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

people are going to get married. However, Willoughby squanders money in daily life and impoverished Marianne is never an eligible life partner as far as he is concerned. He is only taking advantage of her youth and beauty. Not long after he gets her lock of hair, he starts to chase after another wealthy lady and decides to desert Marianne as he did to Eliza.

Willoughby's deception is exposed in a simple and crude way. He pretends to not be intimate with Marianne at the ball. When Elinor catches his eye, he only bows out of courtesy and shows no intention to talk to her or come close to her. After being called out, Willoughby is forced to greet her, but in a very perfunctory way, "He approached, and addressing himself rather to Elinor than Marianne, as if wishing to avoid her eye, and determined not to observe her attitude, inquired in a hurried manner after Mrs. Dashwood."¹ The sharp contrast of Willoughby's behavior confuses Elinor and drives Marianne crazy. The latter is almost thrown out of gear in public, "dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair."² Marianne cannot accept his abrupt coldness and indifference, or the fact his love is only a lie.

After the farce in the ball, Marianne still harbors the illusion that Willoughby will come back for her. Then comes the catalyst of a letter. With the same effect as Mr. Darcy's confession letter, the farewell letter from Willoughby compels Marianne to confront his inconstancy and their separation directly. On the one hand, he estranges himself from Marianne and shamefully ascribes her affection to a unilateral misunderstanding, "My esteem for your whole family is very sincere; but if I have been so unfortunate as to give rise to a belief of more than I felt, or meant to express, I shall reproach myself for not having been more guarded in my professions of that esteem."³ On the other hand, he declares his engagement with another lady ruthlessly, which is the last straw for Marianne, "my affections have been long engaged elsewhere, and it

¹ *S&S*, p. 186.

² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

will not be many weeks [...] before this engagement is fulfilled.”¹ It turns out that his eloquence is only a way to deceive others and Marianne is his victim in this game. The pathetic girl is forced to admit that his honeyed and seductive words are both deceptive and destructive.

At the first sight, it is unreasonable that Austen would bring Marianne and Colonel Brandon together in the end, since the former has no good opinion of the latter in terms of appearance, age, disposition and even style of dress. Nevertheless, after the short relationship with Willoughby, heartbroken Marianne would never accept a man like Willoughby the liar and heartbreaker; she prefers someone that is different from or opposite to him. And Colonel Brandon, the one who is consistent with Marianne all this time, becomes the right person then and there. It is ironic that Willoughby’s evil deeds cannot tarnish his image of exterior attraction. When Marianne is seriously ill after their breakup, Willoughby pays her a visit. He confesses his regret and guilt in front of Elinor. After hearing his remorseful confession, Elinor could still feel his allure and momentarily wishes that Willoughby could be a widower with his wealthy wife’s fortune for the sake of pathetic Marianne. After Marianne accepts Colonel Brandon, Mrs. Dashwood expresses directly that Brandon does not have the same magnetism as Willoughby, “My partiality does not blind me; he certainly is not so handsome as Willoughby.”² Marianne chooses Colonel Brandon because he is not young, not handsome, not articulate, and not passionate. This gentleman triumphs over his counterpart for his maturity, responsibility, consistency and above all honesty.

Wickham is also a lady-killer who immediately wins the favor of our heroine Elizabeth as well as other young girls by his good looking and agreeable manner, “Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned [...] the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill

¹ *Ibid.*

² *S&S*, p. 361.

of the speaker.”¹ From his first appearance, he establishes a charming image in stark contrast with his cold and proud rival Mr. Darcy. His deceptions further promote his popularity as a victim and damage the reputation of Mr. Darcy. Therefore, before his lies are uncovered, the image of Mr. Darcy is overshadowed or dwarfed by him in every way.

Though being regarded as the smart one of all the Bennet girls, Elizabeth is totally taken in by handsome and amiable Wickham, “Whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully.”² Then it is not difficult to understand that Mr. Darcy’s younger sister Georgiana and Elizabeth’s younger sister Lydia could also be deceived by Wickham. Bearing his positive image in mind, Elizabeth believes in every text Willoughby presents to her, “it was not in her nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Wickham.”³ Therefore, she’s fully convinced that Wickham is the pathetic victim who lost his fortune and career because of the cruel Darcy, “names, facts, everything mentioned without ceremony. If it be not so, let Mr. Darcy contradict it. Besides, there was truth in his looks.”⁴ Like a credulous reader, Elizabeth falls for Wickham and his made-up stories, and she goes to the Netherfield ball with the ambition of conquering this young man, “all that remained unsubdued of his heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening.”⁵ His absence from the ball somehow prevents Elizabeth from getting further drawn in.

In addition to Wickham’s pretend pleasant manners, Elizabeth’s credulity might be explained in relation to Mr. Darcy’s initial insult (saying that she’s not pretty enough to tempt him) in the assembly, “The sexual admiration of a handsome, agreeable man,

¹ *P&P*, p. 85.

² *P&P*, p. 94.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

compensating for Darcy's 'mortifying' scorn on their first meeting."¹ Another possible reason might reside in her unconscious self-abasement. Mr. Darcy is "disagreeable" because of his superiority, but handsome and pleasing Wickham is different, "Elizabeth's favorable response to him is in part because she assumes that she and he are equal and alike."² However, it turns out that this agreeable young man is just another unprincipled rake full of lies. Mr. Darcy's confession letter diverts the development of the plot and foreshadows the fate of three major characters, "[Elizabeth] grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd."³ Briefly speaking, Elizabeth is able to realize her folly by discarding her previous misunderstanding of Mr. Darcy and seeing through the bald-faced lies of Wickham at the same time. Consequently, the previous contrast between these two men is turned upside down. The agreeable one is found a liar while the disagreeable one is proven a real gentleman. The exposure of Wickham's lies is dramatic and influential. It not only changes Mr. Darcy's negative image but also elevates him to a very high level in the heroine's heart.

As for the outsiders, it is still difficult to connect Wickham with impudence and deception. After learning the truth about these two men, Jane is shocked by the reversal of her perceptions of their personalities for no one could deny that "there is such an expression of goodness in [Wickham's] countenance! such an openness and gentleness in his manner!"⁴ Elizabeth is right in her new view that there is certain mismanagement in their education, since "[o]ne has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."⁵ Language could be flowery and deceptive but a lack of language might stand in the way of truth and love. Mr. Darcy is an introvert, but he has to expose Wickham's

¹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 62.

² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³ *P&P*, p. 229.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

lies to save his beloved girl. That confession letter is an ingenious arrangement for our hero to tell the heroine everything without the awkward situation of face to face conversation. Because of his interference, both Georgiana and Elizabeth are only the would-be victims of Wickham's deceptive schemes. Lydia is not that fortunate; she is marching forward directly towards the net of Wickham's lies without parental supervision and self-guidance. For Austen, the truth is not what it appears to be and narrative can deceive as much as it can explain.

William Eliot, the distant relative and heir of Sir Walter Eliot, is another charming conman. Having no interest in titles, he married a lower-class woman for her fortune and became estranged from Sir Walter for a long time. As time goes by, he changes his mind and pretends that he would like to reconcile with Sir Walter and his family. Sir Walter feels contented with his friendly intentions, and his "gentlemanlike appearance."¹ In fact, Sir Walter does not look as old as he is and thinks highly of people's looks. It is quite easy for William Eliot to please him with the help of "his air of elegance and fashion, his good shaped face, his sensible eye."² Lady Russell, the God mother and intimate friend of our heroine Anne, is also very satisfied with this young man, especially when he is taken as a suitable husband for Anne. Here is a list of his excellent qualities: "good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart [...] strong feelings of family attachment and family honour [...] fortune."³ This man creates a seemingly perfect image united with everything positive.

Because of Mrs. Eliot's early death, Lady Russell plays the role of mother in Anne's life. Whether she likes to admit it or not, Anne is dependent upon her in a lot of ways. Years ago, she persuaded Anne to give up a hasty engagement with Wentworth, the naval officer who has no fortune to support their future life. This time, Anne is likely

¹ *P*, p. 164.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

to accept her opinion about William Elliot as well. She agrees that this widower cousin is a sensible man with great manners, “so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable,”¹ and he demonstrates a discerning mind by “[h]is tone, his expressions, his choice of subject, his knowing where to stop.”² Obviously, false narratives can persuade, but Anne is no longer the young girl of seven years ago. She is now a mature lady who has learned the lesson about how to deal with other people’s persuasions. She discovers that there is something suspicious about Elliot’s great desire for reconciliation. She could not see eye to eye with Lady Russel, who finds nothing that requires investigation. In this way, Anne is more perceptive and therefore much closer to the truth of his hidden motive.

Like Emma Woodhouse who finds Jane Fairfax’s reticence suspicious, Anne finds William Eliot not completely trustworthy because he is not open: “There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others.”³ This quasi-perfection is exactly the decisive blemish. Considering the age of Austen’s female protagonists, Anne (27 years old) is much older than Marianne (16 years old) and Elizabeth (20 years old), and comparatively speaking more mature. Her age and experience enable Anne to avoid the risk of giving credit to William Eliot “whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped.”⁴ Anne has no advantage in the marriage market in light of her age and fortune. Yet she keeps a clear head when confronted with William Eliot’s intention of marrying her and avoids the tragedy of being deceived.

Compared with this seemingly perfect gentleman, his counterpart Captain Wentworth might have a lot of things to improve. He is inconsiderate when socializing with the Musgrove girls and his frivolous attitude gives them the wrong indication of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³ *P*, p. 190.

⁴ *Ibid.*

his feelings. To some extent, he's partially responsible for Louisa's accident. The girl insists on jumping off the stiles because he thinks highly of the quality of perseverance and she wants to please him in her own way. After the accident, he is thrown into a great panic and agony and fails to make the right decision and call for the surgeon at first. These drawbacks might compromise the image of our hero Captain Wentworth and terminate the renewal of his romance with Anne. Fortunately, our heroine is immune to false impressions of perfection and prefers frank people who are "more dependent upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing."¹ Apart from to their consistent affection, Anne chooses Captain Wentworth because he is not flawless.

Anne is rewarded for her sensible judgement and survives William Elliot's calculation, "Anne could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry him, as made her shudder at the idea of the misery which must have followed."² It turns out that William Eliot intends to marry Anne in order to secure his inheritance, because Mrs. Clay, the widowed daughter of Sir Walter's lawyer, is trying to flatter Sir Walter into marriage, which might endanger his portion. Anne's friend Mrs. Smith discloses more of his immoral deeds. He used to drag his friend, the late Mr. Smith, into great debt so as to support his extravagant way of life. As the executor of Mr. Smith's will, he took no action to help Mrs. Smith, leaving her alone in destitution and illness. Anne has never foreseen that perfect William Elliot will be transformed into the avaricious fraud. This result confirms her view that there is something deceptive in so-called perfection.

Based on Austen's moral ideals, perfection is a constructed mirage. All the above liars succeed in deceiving people on the basis of their dashing appearance and pleasant manners together with alluring words, which could be taken as a lesson and warning for our heroines: be careful and stay alert in front of such seemingly perfect people

¹ *Ibid.*

² *E*, p. 248.

because “this disciplined obedience [...] the very hypocrisy which forms a part of it [...] may be exerted in a way that may be far from agreeable, in order to deceive you.”¹ What’s more important, Austen builds up these liar characters as rivals against the heroes. There is also a gender issue that usually women are the audience for these false narratives and men the liars. Their deceptive tricks and lies glamorize the images of the male protagonists and contribute to the dramatic development of the plot. Austen’s novels are partly narratives about the dangers of narrative. The liars tell false stories, and in order to attain true love, the characters need to learn how to distinguish false narrative/deception from “truth.”

2.3.2 Trapped Liars: failed calculations

In Austen’s works, the characters are defined and redefined in their relation to truth and falsehood, or true narration and negative disnarration. Some calculating characters get stuck in their own text of lies while some others are deceived by their cunning peers. Henry Crawford enjoys his love game full of lies. Unexpectedly, he falls in love with his new prey Fanny while the latter does not fall for him. When calculating to take advantage of Catherine, General Tilney has already been set up by John Thorp. When making up lies to James, Isabella has already become the victim of Fedrick’s honeyed words. That is to say, the chain from liar to victim is not fixed, and their interchangeable relationship is usually dramatic and satiric. In other words, the innate opposition between the role of liar and victim is removed and what is left is their bilateral interaction.

Henry Crawford is one of the liars who are trapped in their own lies. Comparatively speaking, Henry is not as attractive as Willoughby or Wickham, but only has some “air and countenance.”² He accompanies his sister Mary Crawford to their

¹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon* (New York: The Gregg publishing company, 1920), p. 417.

² *MP*, p. 42.

half-sister Mrs. Grant's house next to the Bertram family who live on the Mansfield Park estate. After a short time, he wins the hearts of the Bertram sisters through his genial manners. It is amazing to have a look at the increase of his popularity: "when they first saw him he was absolutely plain [...] The second meeting proved [...] he had so much countenance, and his teeth were so good [...] after a third interview [...] He was [...] the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known."¹ As an eligible bachelor, Henry enjoys his popularity with these two girls: "the Miss Bertrams were worth pleasing, and were ready to be pleased; and he began with no object but of making them like him."² He has no intention of marrying either of them and is just playing with their emotions, "He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points."³

Different from Willoughby or William Eliot who calculate for money, the purpose of Henry's deceptions is nothing but his selfish vanity. He takes pleasure in fooling the sisters, "handsome, clever, and encouraging, [they] were an amusement to his sated mind."⁴ At that time, the elder sister beautiful Maria has already got engaged to Mr. Rushworth for his fortune. The younger one Julia takes it for granted that Henry is her own and is "quite ready to be fallen in love with."⁵ Ignoring Maria's engagement, Henry flirts with her flagrantly and turns the sisters into rivals, "Each sister believed herself the favorite. Julia might be justified in so doing by the hints of Mrs. Grant, inclined to credit what she wished, and Maria by the hints of Mr. Crawford himself."⁶ In his Vanity Fair, two young ladies are fighting for his love and attention.

Quiet Fanny Price, the niece of Mrs. Bertram who was sent to live with them at

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶ *MP*, p. 119.

the age of ten, has seen through Henry's tricks. She could keep an objective view of him because she is an outsider to their flirtatious game of love. As a plain and timid girl, she is always belittled and neglected, and is not on his list of potential prey yet. As an observer of their scandalous triangular relationship, Fanny dislikes this playboy but admits his talent in theatrical art, "Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor of all: he had more confidence than Edmund, more judgment than Tom, more talent and taste than Mr. Yates."¹ It is proved that this talent of acting is his strong point in seducing Maria and Julia. Very soon he will apply his deceptive acting to Fanny.

Maria's marriage suspends Henry's game of flirtation, and he finds it boring to stay in Mansfield Park. It's not long before he chooses a new prey. The scene of Fanny's reunion with her brother William Price, a naval midshipman, arouses his interest: "the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance was an attraction in itself [...] She had feeling, genuine feeling."² For Henry, it is amusing to become the first love of this silent and devoted girl, "It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the first ardors of her young unsophisticated mind!"³ Resorting to his whim of seduction, Henry tries hard to please Fanny. Nevertheless, Fanny is a cautious reader who stays alert in front of his honeyed words and ill-disposed present (a necklace) because she's familiar with his clichéd tactics: "he was gallant [...] attentive, he was something like what he had been to her cousins: he wanted [...] to cheat her of her tranquility as he had cheated them."⁴ Fanny knows it clearly that this man is always a vicious hunter in the game of love. Her secret love towards cousin Edmund is another support to release her from his romantic lies.

It is ironic that failing to seduce Fanny, Henry finds himself fall in love with her, "I am fairly caught. You know with what idle designs I began; but this is the end of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 242-43.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

them. I have [...] made no inconsiderable progress in her affections; but my own are entirely fixed.”¹ Just like his previous victim Maria, the present Henry Crawford is also totally smitten, caught in the net of love: “Fanny’s beauty of face and figure, Fanny’s graces of manner and goodness of heart, were the exhaustless theme. The gentleness, modesty, and sweetness of her character were warmly expatiated on.”² Henry has never foreseen the development that he would be utterly trapped by his own calculations, “my Fanny will feel [...] a daily, hourly difference, in the behavior of every being who approaches her; and it will be the completion of my happiness to know that I am the doer of it.”³ Facing her indifference and refusal, Henry’s morale and affection are both boosted. Here is the side of deception where a false story can become true when the liar/hunter turns into the victim/prey. This transformation of roles gives rise to more possibilities for the characters and for the narrative progression. It is possible that playboy Henry would get married with Fanny, and accordingly there is a chance that lively Mary could end up with Edmund. Apparently, the characters are determined and defined in complex relations with truth and falsehood as revealed in narrative.

Fanny refuses to trust Henry’s change and declines his proposal uncompromisingly in consideration of his unfavorable record as well as her own heart, “neither imposed on nor gratified by Mr. Crawford’s attentions.”⁴ All the other people think her ungrateful because Fanny herself is a poor girl depending on relatives while Henry Crawford is wealthy and agreeable and has helped a lot in securing William’s promotion in order to make her happy. When Mr. Bertram sent her back to her underprivileged family in Portsmouth in order to make her consider her own decision, Henry runs after her and behaves very nicely in front of her parents and siblings. He’s trying to change Fanny’s opinion of him and prove that he’s different, “My conduct shall speak for me; absence, distance, time shall speak for me. They shall prove that, as

¹ *MP*, p. 301.

² *Ibid.*, p. 303.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

far as you can be deserved by anybody, I do deserve you.”¹ For a moment, readers might pray for a happy ending for the changed Henry Crawford.

However, artful speech cannot redeem Henry from his unfavorable behavior. As mentioned above, he’s a talented actor and could switch between different roles easily. At first, he is a flippant and shameless liar. Because of Fanny, he turns into a penitent victim of love and a conscientious suitor. This time he becomes a detestable betrayer nonetheless. His reunion with the married Maria drags them into a disgraceful affair and consequently causes the humiliation of the Bertram family. Even though without being fully moved by Henry’s solemn vows, Fanny is stricken by the breaking news: “She passed only from feelings of sickness to shuddering of horror; and from hot fits of fever to cold [...] there were moments even when her heart revolted from it as impossible.”² Fanny’s reaction is so strong since her heart had softened due to his efforts, starting to believe that “he really loved her, and to fancy his affection for her something more than common.”³ Her response is to reject the disreputable love affair and also herself, because she thinks that she is closely connected with Henry Crawford, “a man professing himself devoted, even engaged to [her].”⁴ For Mary Crawford, this adultery is only a trifle sin and could be covered and forgiven easily. For Fanny, it is horrible: “too gross a complication of evil, for human nature, not in a state of utter barbarism, to be capable of!”⁵ There is no way for Henry to get Fanny in the future since she has seen clearly through his unsteady affection and wavering vanity. He is the one who destroys the possible development of their romance.

What takes place in *Northanger Abbey* could be regarded as a complicated case of lies within lies. As a parody of Gothic fiction, the role of villain in the ancient abbey

¹ *MP*, p. 355.

² *Ibid.*, p. 459.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁵ *Ibid.*

is played by General Tilney, whose “mercenary attitude matches that of the avaricious Gothic bandit, Montoni; yet compared to the latter’s control over the heroine and his inherent power, the General is depicted as comically prosaic.”¹ Here General Tilney’s role of villain liar is overlapping with his role of victim. This double-role situation is displayed in the following chain from liar to victim. On the one hand, General Tilney is a despicable liar while Catherine Morland his victim; on the other hand, he is turned into a credulous victim when John Thorpe is the liar.



Figure 2.3

Briefly speaking, when General Tilney plots to make Catherine the wife of his son Henry in order to get her fortune, he has no idea that he’s been fooled by John Thorpe’s assumptions about and exaggerations of Catherine’s inheritance from the Allens. Later on, when driving Catherine out of Northanger Abbey due to her abject poverty, he’s actually deceived again by John’s false information about her real financial status. As shown in the above chain, General Tilney is trapped in an awkward position in being a liar and victim at the same time.

Although an inherent money worshiper, General Tilney pretends to be careless of material things, claiming that “he only valued money as it allowed him to promote the happiness of his children.”² In order to bring Catherine and his son together, he fawns over Catherine in order to invite her to their house with pompous words , “If you can be induced to honor us with a visit [...] no endeavors shall be wanting on our side

¹ Anthony A. Mandal, “Revising the Radcliffean Model: Regina Maria Roche’s *Clermont* and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*,” *Cardiff Corvey: Reading The Romantic Texts* 3 (1999): p. 6.

² *NA*, p. 229.

to make Northanger Abbey not wholly disagreeable.”¹ Naïve Catherine has no idea that she has become his prey. She takes it as a sincere invitation and is immediately trapped by those flattering remarks: “These were thrilling words, and wound up Catherine’s feelings to the highest point [...] To receive so flattering an invitation!”²

When Catherine arrives at Northanger Abbey, General Tilney works hard to show off their wealthy way of life in order to trap her in his avaricious calculation of marrying her with Henry and exploiting her allegedly large fortune. It gratifies his vanity when Catherine couldn’t help bursting into praise in front of their grand house, “and it seemed as if his own estimation of Northanger had waited unfixed till that hour.”³ What is ridiculous is that he couldn’t let go until Catherine expresses her wonder and admiration to the full, “flattered by her looks of surprise, which told him almost as plainly, as he soon forced her to tell him in words, that she had never seen any gardens at all equal to them before.”⁴ Besides, he tries to squeeze more complements by showing Catherine every decoration from cellar to rafter, and he provides additional details himself in a high spirit, “It was very noble-- very grand--very charming!--was all that Catherine had to say [...] and all minuteness of praise [...] was supplied by the general.”⁵

As analyzed in the first section, gullible Catherine is easily misled by her own imagination and Henry Tilney’s influential words. Here her credulity makes her become the victim of General Tilney’s deceptive flattery. When she expresses her admiration for Henry’s cottage at Woodston, General Tilney makes use of this opportunity and gives a strong hint, “it will very speedily be furnished: it waits only for a lady’s taste [...] You like it [...] it is enough [...] The cottage remains.”⁶ This girl is innocent but not a fool. She could perceive General Tilney’s implication of matching her with Henry,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

² *NA*, p. 153.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

and “[s]uch a compliment recalled all Catherine’s consciousness, and silenced her directly.”¹ By now she’s already given up her Gothic fancy of General Tilney and feels regretful about her absurd suspicions. General Tilney’s words encourage her to envisage a happy ending with Henry.

Catherine’s regret doesn’t last long because she’s driven out of the abbey suddenly by General Tilney in a rude way and she has to go back home alone without a servant. This man does not commit Gothic-style crimes as Catherine imagined, but he commits mercenary crime and schemes to take away Catherine’s fortune under the cover of marrying her to his son, “Materialistic, grasping, false, egotistical, mercenary and overbearing General Tilney is a Gothic villain.”² It is interesting that what starts as fantasy ends up being true in a different sense. At first, Catherine thought that he might have found out her ridiculous fancy and has been offended. It turns out that she’s done nothing wrong and her only guilt is that she is not as rich as he expected, “The general had had nothing to accuse her of [...] but her being the involuntary, unconscious object of a deception.”³ She was wrong about what type of villain he was, but she was right about him being a villain, “she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty.”⁴

Then comes a paradox that deception ends up with truth. General Tilney’s mercenary calculations have failed, but it does not affect his original plot of bringing Henry and Catherine together. Henry feels shamed and angry after learning about the greedy cruelty of his father, whose “indignation on hearing how Catherine had been treated, on comprehending his father’s views, and being ordered to acquiesce in them, had been open and bold.”⁵ At the same time, he sympathizes with Catherine for what

¹ *Ibid.*

² Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 164

³ *NA*, p. 275.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁵ *Ibid.*

she's been through and takes it as his responsibility to marry this innocent girl, "bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland."¹ Therefore, he takes the decisive step to look for her in Fullerton and exposes his father's plot. This decision goes against General Tilney's will but facilitates his relationship with Catherine. The deceptive scheme actualizes this romance in helping Henry in winning Catherine's affection, "which he had been directed to gain," and in consolidating their union, "no unworthy retraction of a tacit consent, no reversing decree of unjustifiable anger, could shake his fidelity, or influence the resolutions it prompted."²

For a moment, General Tilney is the wolf while Catherine the sheep, but for another moment, he turns out to be the sheep of swaggering John Thorpe. At the outset, General Tilney happens to notice his son Henry's attention towards Catherine and inquires of John Thorpe for information. At that time, John is planning to marry Catherine himself. Propelled by vanity and avarice, the hypocritical John exaggerates Catherine's fortune in front of General Tilney. As a result, what is presented to the general is the fabrication of John's expectations and imaginations, far from the truth, "by merely adding twice as much for the grandeur of the moment, by doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland's preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children."³ Ironically, crafty and calculating General Tilney takes the made-up intelligence for truth without suspecting its authority.

When the plot of an advantageous connection is under way, General Tilney happens to meet John Thorpe again. But this time, John is in a totally opposite mood. Catherine has refused his proposal and Isabella's engagement with James Morland was broken due to her love affair with Frederick Tilney. There is no way for them to reconcile with the Morlands. Since he can obtain nothing from this relationship, he decides to defame Catherine and make up a new account of the Morlands which

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³ *NA*, p. 276.

contradicts the previous one: “a necessitous family; numerous [...] by no means respected in their own neighbourhood [...] aiming at a style of life which their fortune could not warrant; seeking to better themselves by wealthy connections; a forward, bragging, scheming race.”¹ Unexpectedly, General Tilney is taken in by impudent John Thorpe again. He accepts this new story at once and drives Catherine away directly out of anger since all his calculations have become a useless joke.

Even credulous Catherine learns to see through Isabella’s lies gradually, it is really unbelievable that this experienced general could trip over the same stone twice. One possible explanation is that he is bewitched by his “greedy speculation.”² The first time, all his attention is occupied by the projection of a large fortune and he forms his plot instantly, which prevents him from seeing through John’s tricks. The second time, he feels disillusioned by losing the supposed money and is too furious to think twice of John’s words. Finally, he’s informed that Catherine is neither wealthy nor needy, “he had been scarcely more misled by Thorpe’s first boast of the family wealth than by his subsequent malicious overthrow of it.”³ As for John Thorpe, he intends to show off his chosen life partner through the first lie, which makes General Tilney to match-make Henry and Catherine in turn. He aims at damaging the reputation of Catherine and her family through the second lie, which separates the couple for a while but strengthens the connection between them as well. Here Austen presents an amusing distortion of liar and deception through the character of John Thorpe and his tricks. All his calculations take effect in a converse way and he becomes a matchmaker for Henry and Catherine.

Isabella Thorp and her brother John Thorp work together to deceive another pair of sister and brother, Catherine and James Morland. They are two covetous opportunists

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

² *Ibid.*, p. 283.

³ *NA*, p. 283.

full of “idle assertions and impudent falsehoods,”¹ and make plots about Catherine and James based on the wrong information regarding the Morlands’ economic worth. The Morlands are neighbors of Mr. and Mrs. Allen, who are rich and have no children. Mr. and Mrs. Allen invite Catherine to Bath with them and take good care of her. This enables the Thorps to make the wrong assumptions that Catherine would inherit a large fortune from them and the Morlands could receive their financial support.

John’s deception is motivated by his plan of marrying Catherine for her alleged inheritance. He spares no pain in ruining the image of his love rival Henry while glorifying his own. For instance, he deliberately causes Catherine to believe that Henry does not keep the promise to take a walk with her so as to convince Catherine to go out with him. After being caught telling lies, he resorts to complete denial shamelessly, “Thorpe defended himself very stoutly, declared he had never seen two men so much alike in his life, and would hardly give up the point of its having been Tilney himself.”² In order to create a good impression on Catherine, John keeps on bragging about himself and even forces Catherine to reach an agreement with him. He insists that his equipage is the best and even forces Catherine to admire it until they reach an agreement that “his equipage was altogether the most complete of its kind in England, his carriage the neatest, his horse the best goer, and himself the best coachman.”³ Against the original design, his aggressive boasting only makes Catherine want to stay away from him.



Figure 2.4

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

² *NA*, p. 94.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

As shown in the above chain from liar to victim, Isabella Thorpe is another character who plays double roles. She is the one who deceive Catherine and James, and also the one who is deceived by Frederick Tilney. Similar to her brother, Isabella applies the scheme of exaggeration, but her barefaced affectionate lies succeed in making James her lover and Catherine her bosom friend. Her deception of James is presented through her falsehearted confession to Catherine, “The very first day that Morland came to us last Christmas — the very first moment I beheld him — my heart was irrecoverably gone [...] John introduced him, I thought I never saw anybody so handsome before.”¹ Naïve Catherine does not suspect the sincerity of her feelings; instead she is amazed by the power of love because she has never thought highly of his brother’s physical appearance out of family fondness and partiality. Similar to General Tilney who denies his interest in money, Isabella is also trying to hide her avaricious nature resolutely: “If there is a good fortune on one side, there can be no occasion for any on the other [...] I hate the idea of one great fortune looking out for another. And to marry for money I think the wickedest thing in existence.”² Catherine notices her disappointed looks when hearing the small amount of money James could get from Mr. Morland for their marriage.

Isabella understands that one way to secure her relationship with James is her friendship with Catherine. She takes advantage of Catherine’s credulity and plays with her innocence, “I never mind going through anything, where a friend is concerned [...] Good heavens! What a delightful hand you have got! Kings, I vow! I never was so happy in my life! I would fifty times rather you should have them than myself.”³ She has the habit of saying beautiful words with passionate exclamations, like siren’s voices. After accepting the bad news of Isabella violating the engagement because of the affair,

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³ *NA*, p. 97.

Catherine receives the wheedling letter from Isabella, who finds it impossible to marry Frederick and intends to make peace with the Morlands. However, Catherine has grown up from her previous lessons and would not be fooled by her words, “Such a strain of shallow artifice [...] Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood struck her from the very first [...] Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent.”¹ She comes to see the nature of Isabella’s character and the tricks of her text.

Isabella’s role of victim could be addressed in two aspects. On the one hand, she makes James fall in love with her for the fortune he could get from the Allens. It is after their engagement that she learns the truth that he couldn’t achieve their financial support. As a result, she is trapped in a possible marital relationship with James, toward whom she has no feelings and from whom she could exploit nothing. She is a victim of her own avarice but does not deserve our sympathy. On the other hand, the lying chameleon Isabella is fooled by handsome and wealthy Frederick Tilney in turn. While being engaged with James, she cannot resist Frederick’s temptation and has an affair with him. When Catherine laments over Isabella’s fickleness and talks about her marriage with Frederick, Henry denies the possibility of his brother marrying her in the end. Frederick is a playboy who enjoys flirting with pretty girls and has no moral burden of taking advantage of those frivolous ones. In account of her little fortune and property, Isabella is only a victim of Frederick’s game of love, because “[h]e has his vanities as well as Miss Thorpe, and the chief difference is, that, having a stronger head.”² After all, Isabella is doomed in the vortex of deception. Reviewing the characters from General Tilney to John and Isabella, it appears that one major story line of *Northanger Abbey* is working through unmasking liars and uncovering their lies.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

² *NA*, p. 244.

2.3.3 To lie or not to lie

To lie or not to lie? That is a question. Austen does not take a fixed stand about that question, because “she knew that a world in which everyone was totally sincere, telling always the truth for the sake of their own feelings and never any lies for the feelings of others, would be simply an anarchy.”¹ She leaves the complicated issue of deception or truthfulness unsettled in her works, and provides more possibilities within the concept of deception. For Austen, not all of the liars should be treated with the same standard or should be brought to the same fate of being rejected and detested.

The liar characters have a range of motivations. One of the major motivations for them is their pursuit of money, which could be found in the story of Wickham and William Elliot or that of General Tilney and the Thorp brother and sister. In most cases, they are not cornered by financial difficulties but their pleasure-seeking desires. For instance, all the counterpart liars spend money in a careless and wasteful way, and consequently become debt-ridden. Therefore, they scheme to exploit other people so as to support their extravagant lifestyle. Austen does not turn a blind eye to earthly life nor stick exclusively to the emotional world. When she was very young, Austen already realized the significance of wealth and her own situation of poverty from her wealthy cousin Eliza, “Jane felt the seductiveness of Eliza’s life—the bonnet, the carriage, the treats—and she wanted it all [...] Eliza mirrored Jane’s desire for freedom, pleasure, possessions.”² Eliza represents a different kind of life to which she aspires yet cannot achieve.

On the surface, the main theme of Austen’s novels is love. Nevertheless, the undercurrent theme is the amorous effects of money. It’s not that those characters should never go after money; they crave money at the expense of love and their conscience. As the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* shows, money is always an indispensable

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 85.

² Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 50.

part in consideration of marriage. Austen inserts the choice between love and money in the issue of deception and conveys her ideal of the perfect match: the combination of sincere affection and economic support. This combined success with both money and love results from negotiating their way properly through narration and disnarration. That is the reason why Edward Ferrars and Frank Churchill are also liars, but it is much easier for readers to accept their lies and Austen also creates a prosperous future for them.

Edward Ferrars hides the truth of his secret engagement with Lucy Steele years ago when he forms an attachment to Elinor. His personality, whose reticence resembles Jane Fairfax to some extent, proves that it is difficult to uncover his secret courageously, “his manners required intimacy to make them pleased. He was too diffident to do justice to himself.”¹ Austen feels pity for the bashful young man who suffers a lot in his immature commitment and gives him another chance as the plot moves forward. Scheming Lucy chooses Edward’s younger brother Robert Ferrars when Edward is disowned from his family and could not receive an inheritance, which frees Edward from the burden of loyalty and offers him the right to marry Elinor.

Frank Churchill is depicted as a favorable young man with good looking and pleasant manners. It is ironic that a man with such a name “frank” should make use of his magnetism and deceive people. To some extent, Frank is a Satan like character because he “tries insidiously to shape or influence the thoughts of another, usually aiming to deceive or exert cognitive control over the other.”² He deploys the tactic of pretended flirtation in order to hide his real connection with Jane Fairfax. During his stay in Highbury, he flirts with Emma by dropping ambiguous clues without telling directly that he loves her, as pervasive and mischievous as Satan. Yet it might do justice to him when considering his intention and his suffering. He is blameworthy for playing

¹ S&S, pp. 15-16.

² Mira Sengupta Zaman, “‘Your Reasonings Carry My Judgment’: Deception, Mischief, and Satanic Persuasion in Austen’s *Emma*,” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 29.2 (2016): p. 68.

upon Emma's feelings, but he is absolutely different from those womanizers who tell lies for money or out of vanity. His concealment of the engagement results from his dependence upon his uncle and aunt, who might disagree with this match because of the girl's social inferiority. Due to his mother's early death, Frank is adopted and raised by his wealthy uncle and aunt, and for this reason he has no choice but to obey their rules. It is obvious that Austen also feels sympathetic for his bitter romance and facilitates his marriage with the sudden death of his aunt.

Austen shows a compassionate concern for the liar Willoughby when he reveals a sense of sincerity and repentance. He is given an opportunity to speak his real feelings, the good part as well as the evil part, to Elinor when Marianne is seriously ill and may die at any minute. In spite of the fact he deserts Marianne and marries another wealthy woman, he admits his affection for Marianne, "I found myself, by insensible degrees, sincerely fond of her; and the happiest hours of my life were what I spent with her when I felt my intentions were strictly honorable, and my feelings blameless."¹ He also provides a full view of his seduction and abandonment of Eliza, in which Colonel Brandon's partial account does not cover "the violence of her passion, the weakness of her understanding."² He pleads for forgiveness with a penitent heart. For the first time, this notorious heartbreaker Willoughby is not presented to the readers through a series of subjective accounts taken from others' perceptions. Elinor might share a sympathetic view when she transforms his fondness towards Marianne into "ardent love"³ in her recollection of their story.

Austen also addresses the protective function of deception. As love rivals, Elinor and Lucy are not candid with each other either. After noticing Edward's delinquency, Lucy deliberately cultivates her friendship with Elinor and proclaims authority by disclosing their secret engagement. For Marianne, it is impossible to say something

¹ *S&S*, p. 343.

² *Ibid.*, p. 344.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

against her heart, but Elinor adheres to civility, “telling lies when politeness required it.”¹ Her startled silence in relation to Edward’s engagement is a way to retain her dignity. This concealment of her own feelings gives an indication of Elinor’s codes of propriety and decorum. For Elinor, a broken heart full of secrets calls for “good breeding as more indispensable to comfort than good nature.”² By means of concealment, Elinor protects herself unscathed from rumors and gossips while Marianne brings disgrace on herself in the climatic episode of ball when detached Willoughby gets away quickly and attached Marianne cries out loudly. Tony Tanner claims that this is a “quiet struggle between screaming and screening.”³ Here lies the crucial difference between Marianne, who detests lies and speaks out frankly all the time, and Elinor, who seeks to preserve civil order by covering the discordance of society at the expense of her own feelings. Marianne’s scream is a symbol of her resistance to suffocating convention. Yet her subsequent sickness, which nearly takes her life away, demonstrates the risk of unlimited sincerity, “an anarchy of speech comparable to the anarchy of behavior which would result from allowing action to be wholly determined by honest impulse.”⁴ It is easily perceived that absolute honesty is also not Austen’s concern.

The two failed proposals in *Pride and Prejudice* could testify that Austen does not approve of the opposite extreme of deception. For our heroine Elizabeth, these two proposals are different in nature. Mr. Collins’ proposal is a stuffy business speech compiled with rhetorical extravagance, while Mr. Darcy’s proposal is an affectionate declaration of emotion. In addition to the same heroine and the same blind confidence of success from the suitors, the same result of failure is caused by their similar straightforward expression of the suitors’ real ideas. Mr. Collins’ proposal is as formal

¹ *S&S*, p. 129.

² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 90.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

as a clear argumentation with strong logic:

My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honor of calling patroness.¹

Readers might make fun of his pedantic presentation, but no one can deny the authenticity of his own views about getting married. It is true that this speech lacks romantic passions as a proposal, but it sticks to his real feelings. As the heir of Mr. Bennet, Mr. Collins is determined to marry one of the Bennet girls to compensate their loss, “I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place.”² In this sense, he is kindhearted and responsible. His first choice of the elder daughter pretty Jane is changed by her approaching engagement with Bingley (according to Mrs. Bennet) and he settles with the second daughter Elizabeth accordingly. Since they just met a few days earlier, it might be sheer nonsense if he declares his deep love for Elizabeth brazenly.

As for Darcy’s first proposal, it is frustrated in spite of being passionate and romantic, because the suitor is honest about his ardent admiration for Elizabeth and also his contempt towards her family at the same time, “he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation— of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were

¹ *P&P*, p. 118.

² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

dwelt on with a warmth.”¹ The development of the plot proves that Mr. Darcy is right in criticizing Elizabeth’s neglectful parents and ebullient sisters. At that particular moment, his unconscious sense of superiority hurts Elizabeth’s pride, and the harsh truth is nothing but a humiliation that leads to her anger and rejection. Nevertheless, this failed proposal forces Elizabeth to face the disadvantages of her family and herself and teaches Mr. Darcy to pay attention to the art of language. Austen is trying to remind us that truth-telling shares the same principle of storytelling and calls for the application of proper narrative strategies, otherwise it could be more offensive and destructive than telling a lie.

Austen’s narrative practice of imagination, misconception and deception comprise the narrative domain of neonarrative disnarration. Her characters are always defined and redefined by how they are positioned in relation to narration and disnarration, and at the same time the truth is constructed from a gradual development of false or hypothetical narrative. It is fair to say that her novels are narratives about the dangers of narratives, since truth is never what is appears to be and narrative can be illusory, misleading and deceptive as much as it can be reasonable, justifiable and credible. She examines the reversal of roles of author/character/reader and that of liar/victim along with the slippage between false and true narratives, and during this process love and wealth are rewards for the correct negotiation of conflicting narratives. Even though it is not as simple as to say that Austen always only values honesty, those characters still need to arrive at a clear perception of the “true” narrative. The combined success with both money and love results from negotiating properly through narration and disnarration.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

Chapter III. Narrative Incapacity and Narrative Refusal:

Neonarrative Unnarration in Austen's Novels

Neonarrative unnarration deals with what is not said or not narrated in the text. There are different modalities of unsaid text, including what Robyn Warhol proposed as the supranarratable or the antinarratable¹, which mainly focus on the aspects of incapability or prohibition, and narrative refusal, which chiefly serves the cases of narrative choice. According to her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, Austen refused to follow other writers' to meddle in the subjects that she had little knowledge of, such as "politics, law, or medicine, subjects which some novel writers have ventured on rather too boldly, and have treated, perhaps, with more brilliancy than accuracy."² She was not afraid of displaying her ignorance in certain fields, "of Science & Philosophy of which I know nothing," and straightforwardly admitted her incapability in dealing with these issues in a letter, "a Woman, who like me, knows only her own mother-tongue & has very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving."³ As a self-aware writer, she chooses to build up her own narrative world on "the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory [...] with so fine a brush"⁴ and aims at working on the story of "[t]hree or four

¹ Referring to section 1.2.2. "The supranarratable" deals with what cannot be described in words. "The antinarratable" indicates what is against the social convention.

² *Memoir*, p. 25. This proves to be a prejudice against the interpretation of Austen's works. Referring to literature review in Introduction.

³ JA to James Stanier Clarke, Dec. 11 [1815] *Letters*, p. 319.

⁴ JA to James Edward Austen, Dec. 16 [1816] *Letters*, p. 337.

families in a country village.”¹

Austen demarcates the boundaries of her narrative domain, cultivates her familiar and favorite ideas, and makes a decision about what to keep and what to discard, in other words, what to narrate and what to unnarrate. This chapter will trace the aesthetic concept of unnarration in her life and works and deal with its two subcategories respectively, unnarration out of incapability and unnarration out of choice. On the surface, unnarration/silence seems to be exclusively contradictory with narration/voice. In fact, they are codependent on each other and jointly form the process of narrative communication. Austen applied the concept of unnarration by publishing her works anonymously since she wanted to preserve a writer’s freedom in narrating. She was inclined to the method of unnarration in her correspondence when confronting the ups and downs in life because they were beyond her ability to express. The earliest practice of unnarration in her literary works could be dated back to her adolescent creation. This aesthetic scope, partially out of her disposition, becomes more advanced and elaborate in her mature works in terms of the interactive relationships between different characters and the narrators’ manipulation of discourse. Although it is impractical to exhaustively discuss everything that is omitted and excluded, it is natural and productive to probe into what is hidden and what is repressed in her novels and why so.

Austen is skillful in representing the dialogues between different characters, and the unnarratable communication caused by emotional turbulence is an indispensable part of it. Silent listeners Fanny Price and Anne Elliot usually cannot convey their ideas directly, but they are entrusted with the power to take over the discourse via observation and unnarration. General Tilney and Sir Thomas are two representative figures who dominate others through patriarchal authority, which deprives people’s ability to speak and consequently provokes their rebellions in various forms. The strategy of narrative refusal is mainly applied on the level of discourse. On behalf of Austen, her narrators interfere in the narrative process with direct declaration that there’s no need to address

¹ JA to Anna Austen, Sept. 18 [1814] *Letters*, p. 287.

certain events, and discordance and vulgarity are deliberately repressed in her works, which implies her ideas concerning the standards of narratability. Austen refrains from providing a definite conclusion for Fanny and Edmund or Anne and Wentworth and their unions are postponed because of undisclosed troubles or possible difficulties, which undermine the seemingly settled denouement. She also applies narrative refusal in climatic scenes of love confession involving Mr. Darcy, Mr. Knightley and Captain Wentworth, which goes against the convention of romantic storytelling but accords with her arrangement of plot. As for the level of story, such characters as Jane Fairfax or Colonel Brandon resort to the strategy of narrative refusal in order to keep a secret, which complicates the development of plot and strengthens their characterization. According to Austen, unnarration/silence and narration/voice should be weighted equally. She succeeds in vitalizing the under-valued force of unnarration and the fusing of unnarration with narration broadens the horizon of her narrative discourse.

3.1 Aesthetic Tradition of Unnarration in Austen's Works

The reassessment of unnarration (or silence, exclusion, omission, etc.) is consistent with the trend of Post-classical narrative study, which breaks away from the confinement of structure and form and strives for a new perspective of multiplicity and diversity. Shaking off the stereotypes of absence, passivity or failure of communication, unnarration has been shown to be an active agent in the writing and reading literary works, including those of Austen. Austen starts writing short pieces as a teenager and since then the keyword of “narration” is inseparable from her name. Interestingly, she exhibits a particular interest in the concept of “unnarration” in life as well as in her career. It is not difficult to find traces of unnarration at crucial moments of her experience when she chose to be an anonymous writer or when she refused to mention her first love in personal correspondence. One of her adolescent pieces, “The Mystery”, involves a series of whispering, narrative refusal or omission, and could be taken as a

perfect embodiment of the narrative strategy unnarration.

3.1.1 Justification of unnarration/silence

From the eastern canon *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Zi leaves a famous saying that “It is natural to speak little.”¹ He was trying to illustrate the art of ruling a country through the law of nature. According to Lao Zi, nature operates spontaneously, and its essence abstains from being put in language, which demonstrates the limitation of language/narration in rendering the principle of nature and could be extrapolated into the incompetence of language in relation to some areas of human experience. In the western canon *Bible*, the natural variation of narration and unnarration is presented clearly, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven [...] a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.”² This inevitable alteration gives equal importance to what is said and what is not. The general truth of unnarration/silence is contained in the above two proverbs. Before harkening to the muffled voices within Austen’s course of life and early creation, it is worth examining this overlooked concept of unnarration, which often appears in the form of silence in literature.

Above all, it is necessary to keep a neutral view towards the concept of silence or unnarration. For a long time, the idea has largely been neglected and excluded from the study of dialogue in linguistics or the study of narrative in literature, because it is usually taken negatively as the absence of language, the failure of communication, the evidence of inaction or the inconsequence of background.³ Yet silence itself should not be labelled as positive or negative. It could be productive when those negative things

¹ Lao Zi, *Chinese-English Edition. The Old Master Modernized Laws Divine and Human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), p. 48. The Chinese version is “希言自然”.

² Ecclesiastes 3:1, 3:7, *Holy Bible* (New Revised Standard Version).

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+3&version=NRSV>.

³ Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike, *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), p. 3, 15.

are unnarrated while could also be unproductive when the positive things are unnarrated.

It is easy to fall into the danger of excessive emphasis on active narration over passive unnarration if we comprehend silence based on its conventional definitions in the dictionary. I agree with King-Kok Cheung that “silence [...] can speak many tongues.”¹ In fact, silence is more than meaningless absence and inaction. There is a term called “rest” in music, referring to an interval of silence.² Although no note will be played during this pause, the authorized silence has a corresponding symbol to represent its note value and to indicate its duration, which accounts for the rhythm and tempo of the whole piece of music. That is to say, silence is by no means a marker of nothing nor does it play the function of establishing the limits of existence. It is an essential component contributing to the composition and performance of the music. In a broad sense, communication incorporates silence/what is unsaid as well as sound/what is said, and we must interpret their meanings and functions at the same time. In this context, silence could be regarded as another form of articulation because “the time-spaces occupied by silence constitute an active presence [...] in communication.”³ Therefore, the opposing pair of silence and sound turns into an organic unity of communication, and silence is no longer the antithesis of action.

Unnarration is correlated with possibility and infinity. Wolfgang Iser believes in the absolute aspect of unnarration and insists that “no tale can ever be told in its entirety [...] it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism.”⁴ This extreme interpretation is reasonable because “even the most innocent-seeming texts must be more than they appear to be.”⁵ In his *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach expresses

¹ King-Kok Cheung, *Articulate Silences* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 1.

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rest_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rest_(music)).

³ Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike, *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), p. 10.

⁴ Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach.” *New Literary History* Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972), p. 284.

⁵ Peter Hunt, “Introduction: Fantasy and Alternative Worlds.” *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 27.

similar ideas that “it is a hopeless venture to try to be really complete within the total exterior continuum.”¹ Since it is impossible to exhaust the details in narration, writers have to “prune and isolate arbitrarily” and “the people whose story the author is telling experience much more than he can ever hope to tell.”² In other words, this ineluctable unnarration engenders infinite possibilities rather than terminating narration and communication.

John R. Searle claims that “one can utter words without saying anything,” and by the same token, one can utter something without saying any words.³ Then how to interpret the meaning of unnarration? Generally speaking, it depends on the whole context of communication. As a particular form of communicative method, silence plays the same role in the imparting of information and could be managed to “question, promise, deny, warn, threaten, insult, request, or command, as well as to carry out various kinds of ritual interaction.”⁴ To be sure that we cannot use the concept of locution to make sense of silence, but both illocutionary force and perlocutionary act could be applied to clarify the significance and function of silence. Here it is necessary to highlight the premise that silence does not put an end to the flow of communication and consequently entails further interactions among the participants.

The illocutionary force of unnarration focuses on the (present) speaker’s intention of keeping silent, which alludes to the text anterior to unnarration. To be specific, it is what has been said by the previous speaker that gives rise to the present situation of silence and the previous speaker/narrator has been transformed into the role of present hearer/narratee. The perlocutionary effect of unnarration places emphasis on the consequence of silence, which refers to the text after unnarration, or its influence

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 548.

² *Ibid.*, p. 548, 549.

³ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 24.

⁴ Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike, *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), p. 6.

upon the present hearer and what will be said by the present hearer. Under the circumstances, silence/unnarration draws a connection with narration by indicating its anterior utterance and predicting its posterior saying. Besides, it plays a dual role in communication by conveying diametrically opposite messages: one pertains to the narrator's "cognitive need to organize thought" while the other to the narratee's "need to attribute motives to a break in an established flow of speech."¹ In other words, unnarration is not so much a hostile contradiction between two independent participants as a friendly compromise connecting them. It brings about a confluence of a diachronic continuum by bridging the past, present and future of the communication process and composing a polyphony of dialectical perspectives by transcending the binary roles of narrator and narratee.

3.1.2 Inclination towards unnarration in Austen's life

There is a biographical foundation for Austen's aesthetic concept of unnarraion. During her lifetime, Austen chose to hide the fact that she was writing novels and only her intimate family members knew her secret profession. This is a deliberate unnarration. That's the reason why her works were published with the author's name reduced to "a lady" at first and later as "the author of *Sense and Sensibility*" or "the author of *Pride and Prejudice*." Without a private study room for her own use, in most cases Austen spent her time writing letters and of course those excellent stories in the general sitting room, interrupted by her much-loved nephews and nieces or other visitors from time to time. Her nephew Austen-Leigh recollected that "there must have been many precious hours of silence during which the pen was busy at the little mahogany writing-desk, while Fanny Price, or Emma Woodhouse, or Anne Elliott was growing into beauty and interest."²

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

² *Memoir*, pp. 129-30.

In order to preserve her anonymity, Austen usually “wrote upon small sheets of paper which could easily be put away, or covered with a piece of blotting paper.”¹ Besides, she objected to repair the creaking swing door between the front door and the sitting room, because the noise could give her timely warning that someone was coming, and she could slip her manuscripts under the blotting paper immediately. When the first copy of her *Pride and Prejudice* arrived at the Chawton cottage, a friend in the neighborhood happened to visit them for dinner. Austen read the book aloud, which was a family tradition as entertainment, without telling the friend that she was the author of this interesting novel, “Miss Benn dined with us on the very day of the Books coming, & in the even^g we set fairly at it & read half the 1st vol. to her [...] & I believe it passed with her unsuspected.—She was amused, poor soul!”²

Perhaps Austen kept the secret of her writing career because of “the prevailing societal opinion that writing novels wasn’t quite an acceptable occupation for a lady.”³ It is more likely that she intended to preserve her anonymity and live an ordinary life. In spite of her own low profile, Austen found herself known as a novelist gradually due to her brother Henry’s overenthusiastic promotion. Once hearing that a particular reader wanted to meet her, Austen expressed her anxiety in a playful tone, “I should like to see Miss Burdett very well, but that I am rather frightened by hearing that she wishes to be introduced to me. If I am a wild Beast, I cannot help it. It is not my own fault.”⁴

Actually, it has been proved that becoming lionized as a famous writer would have deprived Austen of her freedom. During her stay in London, Austen was recommended to the Prince Regent by a physician of her brother Henry. It is said that the prince was a great admirer of her works and kept a set of her books in each of his residences. At that time, Austen was preparing the publication of *Emma*, and she was

¹ Kim Wilson, *At Home with Jane Austen* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2014), p. 116.

² JA to Cassandra Austen, Jan. 29 [1813] *Letters*, p. 210.

³ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁴ JA to Cassandra Austen, May 24 [1813] *Letters*, p. 221.

given a hint that the prince “gave his permission, which amounted to a royal command, for one of her future works to be dedicated to him.”¹ Although not a fan of the future George IV, Austen was obliged to change her plan of publishing *Emma* anonymously as her previous novels. To a certain degree, Austen’s intentional unnarration of her profession is an effective way to maintain her liberty and integrity in creation.

The tradition of unnarration could be traced in Austen’s personal correspondence, the record of her happiness and sorrow. In 1795, 20-year-old Austen met her first love Tom Lefroy, the nephew of her good friend in the neighborhood, Mrs. Lefroy. She only briefly mentioned him after their acquaintance, even so we could still feel her cheerfulness.

“[...] I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together [...] He is a very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man [...]

[...] we received a visit from Mr. Tom Lefroy [...] he has but one fault [...] that his morning coat is a great deal too light. He is a very great admirer of Tom Jones, and therefore wears the same coloured clothes [...]”²

Austen held her tongue about their reunion in London in 1796. That letter she wrote to Cassandra from Cork Street on August 23 remains the shortest among the ones she wrote to her sister, and it is noteworthy that she did not provide details of her day as usual. Austen made reference to their plan of entertainment, “We are to be at Astley’s to night, which I am glad of.”³ Jon Spence dissects and penetrates this seemingly plain

¹ Kim Wilson, *At Home with Jane Austen* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2014), p. 132.

² JA to Cassandra Austen, Jan. 9 [1796] *Letters*, p. 1, 2.

³ JA to Cassandra Austen, Aug. 23 [1796] *Letters*, p. 5.

statement: since Astley is an equestrian circus, it is reasonable to express her expectation about something amusing; but her expression sounds a little bit unusual, which indicates her wish of not staying at home or her wish of some other things that might happen; her expression is “excited but vague, even cryptic.”¹

The spark of their young love was smothered due to the crucial reality that Tom was the eldest son and thus had to shoulder the responsibility of his family and marry a wealthy woman instead of penniless Jane Austen. For this reason, the name of Tom Lefroy became a sort of taboo in Austen’s life and correspondence. In a letter to Cassandra in 1798, Austen revealed her distress. She mentioned that Mrs. Lefroy paid a visit, but out of kindness Mrs. Lefroy kept silent about the news of her nephew in case that would cause her pain. It was impossible for Austen to speak of the name and the man, “that of her nephew she said nothing at all [...] She did not once mention the name [...] to me, and I was too proud to make any enquiries.”² Both women chose to be reticent not because they did not care about the topic and the person, but vice versa. Mrs. Lefroy was rather considerate, which “enabled Jane to maintain a façade of composure [...] everything was communicated in silence.”³ Under the restrained silence flows the undercurrent of agony of two hearts.

Since then, the name of Tom Lefroy has never appeared in Austen’s letters (at least in the remaining ones). Spence might be right in his conjecture of Austen’s silence out of dignity: “She had loved Tom Lefroy and had waited for him but he had not come. There was no more to be said. It was as absolute as the death of Cassandra’s fiancé.”⁴

Indeed there is no evidence that Austen and Tom Lefroy were secretly engaged, but it seems that in Austen’s own perception, “she had engaged herself to Tom Lefroy, and

¹ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), pp. 98-99.

² JA to Cassandra Austen, Nov. 17 [1798] *Letters*, p. 19.

³ Spence, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁴ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 113.

had believed their attachment had the same force in his mind.”¹ That might be the reason why Austen would warn her niece Fanny of the danger of engaging “in word or mind” when it’s hopeless to get married, because “such sort of Disappointments kill anybody.”² She did not name the specific person or refer to her memory and experience, but we all know what is left unsaid. Due to her unnarration out of shyness at first and subsequent affliction, we could only get a rough sketch of Tom Lefroy and their romance.

When it comes to the death of Austen’s father, George Austen, her reserved expression is a reflection of her disposition as well as of possible depression. George Austen died after being sick for months on January 21st, 1805. In the letter to her brother Frank, Austen only made a simple report of their father’s fading moments, from sudden seizure of “feverish complaint” to brief improvement, from the call of the physician to his final coma.³ There is nothing but an objective record. Spence thinks that Austen didn’t expose her personal grief as she was supposed to, and gives a feasible explanation, “She takes for granted that Frank knows what she is feeling. The letter is about their father, not about her own feelings at his death.”⁴ In this case, what is unnarrated is more related to the supranarratable emotions that cannot be put into words. Although Austen did not verbalize her sadness right away, some irrepressible exclamations can still be found within her “unsentimental” letter, “Everything I trust & believe was done for him that was possible! — It has been very sudden! within twenty four hours of his death he was walking with only the help of a stick, was even reading!”⁵ These exclamation marks reveal her unnarrated sadness clearly.

Austen’s aesthetic concept of unnarration is revealed in her life experience, and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

² JA to Fanny Knight, Nov. 18 [1798] *Letters*, p. 293; JA to Fanny Knight, Nov. 30 [1814] *Letters*, p. 298.

³ JA to Francis Austen, Jan. 22 [1805] *Letters*, p. 101.

⁴ Spence, *op. ct.*, p. 147.

⁵ JA to Francis Austen, Jan. 22 [1805] *Letters*, pp. 101-102.

it often works in a reversal way. She chose to keep a secret of her writing career, but this kind of unnarration fails to stop her from being popular and her contemporary readers, including Prince Regent, cannot resist the temptation to know more about her. As for her personal letters, her unnarration of Tom Lefroy or her sadness towards her father's death only proves their significance in her heart. It seems that this strategy of unnarration could replace the role of narration in some cases.

3.1.3 Austen's early practice of unnarration

Austen demonstrated a strong interest in the concept of unnarration in puberty and approaches this narrative strategy in a comic way in an experimental playlet, "The Mystery: An Unfinished Comedy", written around 1788 when she was 13.¹ This is a short play of only one act with three scenes, consisting of a series of examples of unnarration, such as direct omission, narrative refusal and whispering. In this work, what matters is not the content that characters say but their action of not saying it. The following extract is the second scene, which is the major part of this comedy where unnarration takes place.

Scene the 2^d

A Parlour in HUMBUG'S House

Mrs HUMBUG & FANNY, discovered at work.

Mrs HUM:) You understand me, my Love?

FANNY) Perfectly ma'm. Pray continue your narration.

MRS HUM:) Alas! it is nearly concluded, for I *have nothing more to say* on the Subject.

FANNY) Ah! here's Daphne.

¹ *Record*, p. 63.

communication is replaced by three sets of suspension points, one direct narrative refusal (“have nothing more to say”) and three instances of whispering. It’s true that we have no access to the information of their conversation, but I cannot agree with Paula Byrne’s observation that this is “non-communication.”¹ These characters exchange a mysterious message among themselves on the level of story; on the level of discourse, it is explicit unnarration, an indispensable component of communication.

In the final scene of this playlet, the rendering of unnarration is more striking because the whispering happens between two incompatible figures, Colonel Elliott and Sir Edward Spangle. As shown in the extract below, Sir Edward is the listener/narratee who falls asleep literally and could not hear anything at all; Colonel Elliott is the speaker/narrator who knows well that Sir Edward cannot hear him but still chooses to tell him the secret. In his monologue, or a unilateral dialogue, Colonel Elliott accomplishes his whispering resolutely and leaves the stage. This time, the information of the secret is concealed from the characters as well as the readers.

Scene the 3^d

The Curtain rises and discovers Sir EDWARD SPANGLE

reclined in an elegant Attitude on a Sofa, fast asleep.

Enter COLONEL ELLIOTT.

COLONEL) My Daughter is not here I see ... there lies Sir Edward ... Shall I tell him the secret? ... No, he’ll certainly blab it. ... But **he is asleep and won’t hear me....** So I’ll e’en venture.

(Goes up to Sir Edward, **whispers** him, and Exit)²

¹ Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2002), p. 22.

² *MW*, p. 57. Emphasis added.

The purpose of this amusing work is clear that what matters is not the content of gossip but the action of not telling the secret, sometimes to the readers/audience and sometimes to other characters/narratees. In the dedication of this short piece, Austen professes her idea in a humorous way, “the following Comedy, which tho’ an **unfinished** one, is I flatter myself as **complete** a **Mystery** as any of its kind.”¹ Although giving it the subtitle “An Unfinished Comedy,” Austen is convinced that she has produced a complete mystery as shown in its title by applying the strategy of unnarration. Here it is appropriate to borrow Auerbach’s words when he compares Homer’s work (which tells out) and the *Bible* (which does not tell out), “it does not interest the narrator, [therefore] the reader is not informed.”² The secret itself does not interest Austen, therefore we (including the sleeping Sir Edward) are not informed. The brilliance of this incipient dramatic work grows out of Austen’s innovative employment of unnarration in the context of mystery.

Austen carries on the concept of unnarration in her later creations in a broader sense. All of her works are designed to focus upon a small group of ordinary people, usually the gentry class, and their daily life instead of great men and women and historical occurrences. Superficially, Austen is confined within a small space with moderate materials, like dinner parties, dances, picnics and walks in the countryside of southern England or the tourist city of Bath. All these details contribute to her realization of a truthful miniature of mundane life, interpersonal relationships, and human consciousness. Just as Eudora Welty proclaims “[h]er world, small in size but drawn exactly to scale, may [...] be regarded as a larger world seen at a judicious distance [...] at which all haze evaporates, full clarity prevails, and true perspective appears.”³ Moreover, it happens that some people oversimplify Austen’s works as

¹ *Ibid.*

² Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 8

³ Eudora Welty, “The Radiance of Jane Austen,” *A Truth Universally Acknowledged: 33 Reasons Why We Can’t*

different versions of “Boy meets girl, boy gets girl.” In fact, this oversimplified pattern only proves her exceptional refinement of this conventional yet universal theme. Austen transcends the simple archetype by establishing a counterpoint between the original paradigm and variations.¹

The seeming limitation of Austen may also be found in her avoidance of visual representation. It is not difficult to find that Austen pays little attention to the physical description of her characters. The most commonly used words are nothing but “beautiful”, “pretty”, “handsome”, “amiable”, or “pleasing”. Jenkyns also agrees that in Austen’s works “physical description is so sparing” when compared with another well-known writer born in Hampshire, Charles Dickens, who often makes use of mood setting or cinematic technique.² Austen puts more effort into polishing the dialogue and psychological world of different characters. This personal style of unnarration usually makes her characters remarkable in their individuality but vague in appearance, which enables the readers to feel more involved because they are free to fill in the image of the characters with their own imagination. It is fair to say that the alleged limitation of unnarration has been translated into a kind of narrative liberation. To some extent, this so-called drawback is actually the trump card of Austen’s success and popularity.

Moreover, in spite of being an expert in characterization, Austen is more accomplished in depicting female characters, especially young women. It does not mean that she fails to portray male characters, and such impressive figures as Mr. Darcy and Captain Wentworth are substantial examples of her craft. The point is that the male characters in her works are always observed and illustrated “against a feminine background,” which makes some people feel suspicious that “Jane Austen has little idea how they talk and behave when they are away from the ladies.”³ According to this

Stop Reading Jane Austen (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 15.

¹ Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

³ J. B. Priestley, “Austen Portrays a Small World with Humor and Detachment.” *A Truth Universally Acknowledged:*

opinion, it seems futile to look for the evidence that Austen could present male figures totally detached from the focalization of their female counterparts despite her limited life experience. I would like to accept this as her unique strategy rather than limitation. Actually, seeing the men from a feminine perspective is a kind of unnarration, which is Austen's strength. Through her vivid characters and humorous language, Austen demonstrates "an exquisite mastery of whatever can be mastered."¹

Harold Bloom maintains that "all achieved literary works are founded upon exclusions." It has become popular to address Austen's exclusion of socioeconomic issues in her writings.² Bloom participates in the discussion and asserts that Austen could be appraised as the unrivalled master of exclusion in the art of fiction and all her works "could be called an achieved ellipsis, with everything omitted that could disturb her ironic though happy conclusion."³ Austen has a sharp comprehension of what should be put in the background and what should be foregrounded. As a highly self-conscious writer, Austen knows clearly that she should keep her creation within certain boundaries, and "deliberately left out of her picture nine tenths of life."⁴ Hence there will be no objection to the narration of casual talk in the pump room in Bath and the unnarration of Napoleon and his army in her novels. The aesthetic sense of literary priority helps Austen to make the right decision and only center around what is of consequence, namely relationships leading to marriage and the relevant aspects of social life, without being distracted.

In *Tristram Shandy*, the representative fiction of digression and sidetracking, Laurence Sterne vividly captures the anxiety of completeness a writer might confront

33 Reasons Why We Can't Stop Reading Jane Austen (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 98.

¹ André Gide, *André Gide Journals Volume 3: 1928-1939* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 40. The French version is "Une exquise maîtrise de ce qui peut être maîtrisée".

² Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 257.

³ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 263.

⁴ J. B. Priestley, "Austen Portrays a Small World with Humor and Detachment." *A Truth Universally Acknowledged: 33 Reasons Why We Can't Stop Reading Jane Austen* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 95.

in creation, “the more I write, the more I shall have to write.”¹ In brief, as long as there is narration, there is unnarration. In other words, narration and unnarration are inherently codependent. Austen does not fall into the illusion to create a complete story because she has already recognized the fact that there is always something more that we can see and we can say. Her works are preoccupied with narrative play between what is narrated and what is unnarrated. This is not a violent tug-of-war in which only one side could win the game by dragging over the opposite side. It might be more accurate to call it an interactive cooperation that gives rise to the meaning of her works. That playlet about mystery could be taken as Austen’s experimental practice of the strategy of unnarration. Later on, this aesthetic practice is internalized in her mature works and demonstrates itself through what cannot be narrated and narrative refusal, the decision of what is not to be narrated.

3.2 Unnarration out of Incapability

According to Stephen A. Tyler, “the limit of the world is what can be spoken of. What cannot be spoken of is the mystical.”² One type of unnarration falls within the boundaries of the “mystical”, or what is unable to be expressed in words. Conveying something without saying it, this approach addresses narrative incapability in the form of supranarratable emotions, prohibited voices, or repressed dialogues and highlights the “something” that is muted, forbidden or covered. For Austen, communication should never be confined within the boundaries of language. Those supranarratable moments of happiness or sadness are impressively depicted in her works by means of emotive silence. When a character is thrown into the role of listener, it doesn’t mean that this character is a passive object that only occupies a position. Anne Elliot and

¹ Laurence Stern, Chapter XCIX, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1849), p. 219.

² Stephen A. Tyler, *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 171

Fanny Price are the two representative silent listeners who play key roles in taking over the development of narrative discourse. They don't talk a lot, but the story is carried out through what they see, what they hear and what they feel. To a certain degree, they do away with the long-term inequality between voice/speaking and silence/listening. Austen also touches upon such autocratic figures as General Tilney and Sir Thomas who deprive people's right to speak their minds and make them stay silent. When things become too extreme, people go into reverse. Their patriarchal authority is overthrown because of their hegemony in the discourse and they have to suffer dethroning in the end.

3.2.1 Emotional silence: unnarratable communication

Communication takes a leading position in the study of Austen's fiction and "[a]lmost exclusively the characters define themselves in their speech."¹ In fact, her characters communicate with each other and define themselves through unnarratable speech as well. Jaakko Lehtonen claims that "silence can make up a silent speech act and thus becomes the message itself or part of it."² In Austen's novels, the silent speech act is inseparable from those characters' emotions, their unspeakable happiness, sadness, surprise, anger or gratitude and other sentiments. Something is conveyed though nothing is uttered. In most cases, the silent speech of supranarratable emotions takes in the most essential messages to make sense of the plot and the characters. The inexpressibility enhances the image of characters and expands the dimension of communication, which should not and could not be confined within the domain of language.

It is common to see that people lose the ability to utter anything when they are in

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 41.

² Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike, *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), p. 199.

ecstasy. Catherine Morland used to think that she has offended General Tilney because of her absurd guesses about past events and could never have the chance to make up with Henry. The latter comes to visit her after she is driven back home from Northanger Abbey. This unexpected visit rekindles Catherine's spirits, and she "said not a word; but her glowing cheek and brightened eye made her mother trust that this good-natured visit would at least set her heart at ease for a time."¹ Catherine might be too excited to utter a word, but her animated facial expression has already expressed her feeling quietly. Then Henry exposes his father's greedy calculation and confesses his affection for Catherine. The narrator explains that this hero's attachment emanates from the heroine's partiality for him at first, "a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of a heroine's dignity."² Nevertheless, our unsophisticated heroine Catherine has no idea of this, and for her there is nothing to worry about but happiness to enjoy then and there, "rapt in the contemplation of her own **unutterable happiness**, scarcely opened her lips, dismissed them to the ecstasies of another tête-à-tête."³ Catherine's emotional silence in the face of overwhelming happiness contrasts with the narrator's knowledge of the negative inside story, which violates the convention of traditional love story. This slight shadow over the story is in fact a continuation of Austen's humorous play of parody in *Northanger Abbey*, but on the subject of romance instead of Gothic literature.

Edmund Bertram experiences inexpressible felicity in his pursuit of love. After getting out from the shade of Mary Crawford, Edmund could finally establish a new opinion of his cousin Fanny Price, whose "mind, disposition, opinions, and habits wanted no half-concealment, no self-deception on the present, no reliance on future improvement."⁴ It takes him some time to realize the great disparity in terms of values and morality between him and Mary. As for Fanny, Edmund is familiar with her taste

¹ *NA*, pp. 272-73.

² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁴ *MP*, p. 489.

and temper since childhood, and they are compatible with each other in every aspect. What is more cheerful is that, Fanny has been waiting for his affection for a long time, and therefore his rapture cannot be put into simple words.

His happiness in knowing himself to have been so long the beloved of such a heart, must have been great enough to **warrant any strength of language** in which he could clothe it to her or to himself; it must have been a delightful happiness. But there was happiness elsewhere which **no description can reach**.¹

Actually, what cannot be described is not only Edmund's intense feelings but also those of Fanny. Her affection for this cousin could be dated back to their childhood when he was the only one that showed compassion and kindness to her. Yet she has to witness his obsession with Mary and wait for his realization of their irreconcilable discrepancy. Edmund's exaltation beyond words is a delayed reward for Fanny's consistency and integrity, and that silence is also a compensation for readers since they're obliged to accept the undistinguished Fanny as a heroine who does not possess the same essential qualities of beauty and charm as traditional heroines.

Fanny is sent back to her parents in Portsmouth, which is supposed to be a punishment when she refused Henry Crawford's proposal and her uncle Sir Thomas thought she was ungrateful. She couldn't help feeling delighted because it has been years since she left home and lived with her uncle and aunt at Mansfield Park. Thus, for Fanny, this is not an exile but a precious reunion with her dear parents, brothers and sisters. She couldn't wait to get away from the place of pain and go to the place of healing. As a silent listener in life, Fanny is inclined to silence in front of strong

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 490. Emphasis added.

emotions, and this time her deep inside happiness is also let out in a controlled way.

[...] **there were emotions of tenderness that could not be clothed in words.** The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation.¹

Fanny's quiet exhilaration results from her extended nostalgia for her Portsmouth days and agony concerning Mansfield Park. Yet the reality turns out to be considerably disappointing. She finds it impossible to expect solicitude from her family since the natural bond between them has tapered off during years of separation. Mr. Price used to be a lieutenant of marines. He is released from the service owing to physical disability and since then he has to support a large family (eight children excluding Fanny) with a low income. The pressure of life has worn him down and he becomes irritable and careless. Married for love but overburdened by life, Mrs. Price becomes an indolent wife and negligent mother "who had no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better, no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company."² The distorted contrast of two contradictory emotions deprives Fanny of the ability to utter any words, which at the same time foreshadows her disappointment towards family members at Portsmouth and her final choice of Mansfield Park as a shelter, which is ironic.

Jane Bennet got engaged with Mr. Bingley after months of separation and misunderstanding. She shares her bliss with Elizabeth, her dear sister as well as confidential friend, "instantly embracing her, acknowledg[ing], with the liveliest

¹ *MA*, p. 382. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 404.

emotion, that she was the happiest creature in the world.”¹ As the witness of the romantic relationship between them, Elizabeth understands well that they have gone through hard times to harvest the fruit of love, and gives her sincere congratulations. The vicarious pleasure Elizabeth gets from their good news is beyond expression, “which **words could but poorly express.**”² The romance between Jane and Mr. Bingley parallels that of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in terms of the interlude of misconception and result of reconciliation. Elizabeth’s joy beyond expression heralds her engagement with Mr. Darcy and their happy ending.

Sometimes, melancholic feelings are not presented by heart-breaking narration but by unnarration. Since being driven from Northanger Abbey, Catherine has been sunk in gloom. She feels shameful about her ridiculous fancy and considers that might be the reason why General Tilney was furious. She feels depressed that Henry has discovered her weakness and it might be impossible for them to get together. It is likely that she also thinks about her experience in Bath and hypocritical Isabella Thorpe who brought her brother great pain. All these feelings take effect on Catherine and even her mother Mrs. Morland notices her loss of spirit that “in her **silence and sadness** she was the very reverse of all that she had been before.”³ This alteration of disposition is persuasive evidence of her inner turmoil, and is an inevitable lesson for her to get rid of ridiculous fancy and naïve credulity before growing up as a mature lady. Otherwise, even Austen herself cannot risk matching this too ordinary girl with Henry as a result, which might offend the readers since she is “not less unpropitious for heroism.”⁴

Maria Bertram’s love affair with Henry Crawford is a great attack upon the whole family. Therefore, Edmund is sent to bring Fanny back to Mansfield Park. Her previous excitement and expectations about Portsmouth have already dwindled, and it’s a great

¹ *P&P*, p. 381.

² *P&P*, p. 381. Emphasis added.

³ *NA*, p. 270. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

relief for her to leave the vulgarity and poverty of that place, “How her heart swelled with joy and gratitude as she passed the barriers of Portsmouth.”¹ As for Edmund, his mind is preoccupied with the skeleton in the closet and it is impossible for him to take care of Fanny’s feelings. He has no intention of talking on their homeward journey, “The journey was likely to be a **silent** one [...] and his attempts to talk on indifferent subjects could never be long supported.”² Edmund’s failure of utterance reveals his anxiety and also reflects the miserable atmosphere of Mansfield Park, which is overclouded by the burning shame of Maria’s adulterous scandal. On the one hand, Fanny is looking for a shelter from Mansfield Park. On the other hand, she will be the one who comfort the Bertrams and helps them out from unnarratable depression.

Another silent sufferer of this disreputable matter is Mrs. Norris, because Maria is her favorite niece. She is the one that contrives the match of Maria and Mr. Rushworth and she feels terrible that she has failed to notice the lack of love between them, “as she had been wont with such pride of heart to feel and say, and this conclusion of it almost overpowered her.”³ She vents her anger on Fanny and blames her for this unfortunate event. In her opinion, nothing would have happened if Fanny had accepted Henry Crawford’s proposal in the first place. Bossy Mrs. Norris is frustrated by reality and becomes silent and indifferent, “She was an altered creature, **quieted**, stupefied, indifferent to everything that passed [...] she had been unable to direct or dictate, or even fancy herself useful.”⁴ Depressive bitterness takes away her pride and her power of speech. Mrs. Norris is not a favorable character, but she really is a devoted aunt for Maria. Austen saves her from becoming a flat character by showcasing her emotional breakdown but quietly.

On occasions, irritation snatches away the ability to express. Insufferably

¹ *MP*, p. 464.

² *MP*, p. 464.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

arrogant, Mrs. Norris looks down upon Fanny and treats her badly all the time. She scolds Fanny for trivial things and abuses her brutally in front of other people, “I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her [...] considering who and what she is.”¹ Edmund is always the protector of poor Fanny, but what he can do is limited because Mrs. Norris is their aunt and he has to treat her with respect. Therefore, confronting Mrs. Norris’ unreasonable rebuke and Fanny’s grieving tears, he could do nothing but was “too angry to speak.”² When compared with other male protagonists in Austen’s novels, Edmund is not a person with strong character. His inability to say something to Mrs. Norris refers to his inability to take good care of Fanny, which accords with the characterization of this hero. This less assertive man with a tender and kind sense of gravity is just suitable for sensitive Fanny with her unassuming honesty.

Unexpected confession can also produce silence. Emma Woodhouse works very hard at bringing Harriet and Mr. Elton together. Harriet has fallen in love with Mr. Elton by virtue of her encouraging messages. As for Mr. Elton, she is certain that he is attached to Harriet as well. Therefore, when Mr. Elton proposes to her all of a sudden, Emma is too surprised to say a word, “It would be impossible to say what Emma felt, on hearing this — which of all her unpleasant sensations was uppermost. She was too completely **overpowered to be immediately able to reply.**”³ Similar to Mr. Collins in some way, Mr. Elton is also an overconfident suitor failing to figure out the awkward situation in time and he thus makes the wrong judgement about the lady’s reaction. He takes Emma’s silence of shock as a sign of joyful shyness and even tries to take her hand again, “two moments of silence being ample encouragement for Mr. Elton’s sanguine state of mind.”⁴ Austen has expressed in a letter that she’s particularly fond of Emma. In spite of that, she does not hesitate to teach her a serious lesson. Emma has

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

² *MP*, p. 152.

³ *E*, p. 138. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*

to undergo this uncomfortable moment of stillness because she is the one who causes this embarrassing situation and hurts Harriet's feelings.

When it comes to Mr. Darcy's confession, it runs into the same reaction of unnarration. Elizabeth is thrown into silence twice in front of the same suitor. The first one is provoked by shock and indignation while the second one by embarrassment and consolation. Mr. Darcy's negative comments about Elizabeth are deeply rooted in her heart, and she has never considered the possibility of his partiality. His image is even more disagreeable after she learns his involvement in breaking up Jane and Mr. Bingley. Then and there, Mr. Darcy makes a proposal, and there is no wonder that "Elizabeth's astonishment was **beyond expression**. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was **silent**."¹ There seems to be a stereotype of the lady who's been proposed to. Our suitor takes this silence as a bashful encouragement and continues his avowal of affection.

Later on, Elizabeth feels grateful at heart when she learns what Mr. Darcy has done for her sister and family. He explains that he did all these only for her sake, "That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny [...] I thought only of you."² After hearing this unexpected yet sincere clarification, Elizabeth is momentarily speechless, "too much embarrassed to say a word."³ Actually, she's been forming an attachment because of Mr. Darcy's letter of explanation, which is augmented by her visit to Pemberley. Considering her ruthlessness towards him when he first proposed, Elizabeth is uncertain whether she still has the chance to marry this kind-hearted gentleman. The unhopd-for confession of consistent love reminds Elizabeth of her previous pride and prejudice, at the same time assuaging her concerns.

Henry Crawford's attention exerts the same effect upon Fanny, who has no idea of and no interest in his affection. Henry starts his plan by helping Fanny's brother

¹ *P&P*, p. 210. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 403.

³ *Ibid.*

William to get a promotion in the navy. When he presents the announcement letter to Fanny, the latter “could not speak.”¹ It is worth noting that Henry is fully prepared for her startled silence along with various facial expressions, “he did not want her to speak. To see the expression of her eyes, the change of her complexion, the progress of her feelings, their doubt, confusion, and felicity, was enough.”² Again, Fanny’s wordless reply is taken as positive feedback. At first, she is only a prey in Henry’s game of love. Step by step, he finds himself truly in love with Fanny, but he’s got a long way to go before entirely abandoning the old habit of being a frivolous playboy. The above mental activity demonstrates that Henry feels contented with an emotional manipulation of his chosen doll.

At times, gratitude cannot be fulfilled by words only. When little Fanny came to Mansfield Park alone at the age of ten, cousin Edmund was the only one who treated her kindly and helped her wholeheartedly. For Fanny, it is impossible to express her appreciation in all respects, “Fanny’s feelings on the occasion were such as she believed herself **incapable of expressing**.”³ Fanny grows up under Edmund’s protection and she feels pleasantly surprised when he gives her a new mare as present, “and the addition it was ever receiving in the consideration of that kindness from which her pleasure sprung, was **beyond all her words to express**.”⁴ In her eyes, Edmund is the embodiment of “everything good and great”⁵, and her mixed feelings, described as being “respectful, grateful, confiding, and tender”⁶, accumulate bit by bit and ripen into supranarratable affection.

People may lose the ability to speak under fluctuating emotions. In *Emma*, after learning of Harriet’s secret crush on Mr. Knightley, Emma falls into great perplexity

¹ *MP*, p. 308.

² *Ibid.*

³ *MP*, p. 17. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37. Emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

because she suddenly realizes her own attachment to him, and it hurts her to consider them as a pair of lovers. When Mr. Knightley tries to talk with her, Emma is afraid that he might reveal his affection towards Harriet as well. Being encouraged by the fact that Emma has never fallen in love with Frank, Mr. Knightley makes a proposal out of the blue, and waits for her answer anxiously, “He stopped in his earnestness to look the question, and the expression of his eyes overpowered her.”¹ Emma’s heart is filled with great joy immediately. Before making a response, she is busy taking in all the circumstances at once: Harriet has misunderstood Mr. Knightley’s kindness; Mr. Knightley is in love with her; she could not refuse him due to her friendship with Harriet. Her absolute silence delays the reply and inflicts suffering on Mr. Knightley, “I ask only to hear, once to hear your voice.”² This prolonged moment without words allows Emma to pull herself together and contributes to the delayed pleasure of the suitor, which shows how much is going on through the process of unnarration.

Anne Elliot and Captain Harville have a long discussion about consistency in love, which results from Captain Benwick’s engagement with Louisa. Captain Harville appears a little bit emotional because Captain Benwick used to be his sister’s fiancé, who died before he could make enough money to support their life together. Considering how affections change, they cannot reach an agreement whether “true attachment and consistency” are known by men or women.³ Anne admits that men also have such noble qualities but the privilege for women is “loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone.”⁴ Inwardly, Anne has not recovered from the trauma of her broken relationship with Captain Wentworth. When mentioning the hopeless consistency of women, Anne is in fact thinking of her own situation, about which “[s]he **could not immediately have uttered another sentence**; her heart was too full, her

¹ *E*, p. 450.

² *Ibid.*, p. 451.

³ *P*, p. 277.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

breath too much oppressed.”¹ An emotional explosion takes away her innermost words, and there is no remedy for her quiet desperation except his reciprocation.

The sense of guilt can also bring about nonverbal speech acts. Catherine is caught red-handed by Henry as she is leaving the spot of her wildest imaginings, Mrs. Tilney’s room. She has no idea that Henry would come back at that time and thus “**could say no more**. He seemed to be looking in her countenance for that explanation which her lips did not afford.”² Henry feels suspicious about her unusual curiosity regarding his mother and in front of his inquiry, Catherine is too ashamed to admit her horrible surmise, “Catherine **said nothing** [...] a short silence, during which he had closely observed her.”³ At that time, Catherine has already realized her absurdity and she has no courage to reveal her irrational imagination since it’s too horrible to be put into words. Reticence cannot make up for Catherine’s folly. Despite all her efforts to remain silent, Henry figures out her dreadful suspicions and feels offended. She has to face herself dauntlessly and get over it.

The above examples of the unnarratable could be well summarized in Marianne Dashwood’s opinion when describing jargon, “I detest jargon of every kind, and sometimes I have kept my feelings to myself, because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning.”⁴ It might be a little bit over-exaggerated but Marianne is right that language itself is too limited when compared with what people can feel and what they are dying to speak openly. Unnarration happens at crucial life-changing moments (marriage proposals, for example), and is used by Austen to signal the life-changing nature of what is happening. The subject-matter is almost always emotional. These events are also used by Austen to signal a possible dis-connection between characters, in which silence is often

¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

² *NA*, p. 216. Emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 218. Emphasis added.

⁴ *S&S*, p. 103.

misunderstood. In short, the participant characters work together to produce emotional silence and define the meaning of the unnarrated words, which expands the flow of communication into the non-language domain and strengthens the interaction between the speaker and the hearer.

3.2.2 Silent listeners: discourse in control of unnarration

Austen is a master in moving forward the plot through the dialogue between different characters. In the cases of *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*, the progress of narrative discourse is in control of the listeners, namely Anne Elliot and Fanny Price, and their privilege of unnarration and observation. The listeners are incapable of taking part in the conversation in the same way as the speakers, and their silence is set against the flow of different voices, which foregrounds their psychological developments and defines their roles in interpersonal relationships. As silent outsiders, they can absorb other speakers' words and observe their interactions with more freedom and perception.

Christien Garcia succeeds in discovering the significant role of silence in the relationship between Anne and Captain Wentworth. I agree with his positive view of silence as “the ongoingness of that which is not articulated but nonetheless has the power to move” in communication rather than “the suppression of positive content.”¹ Different from his effort in tracking the emotional density in those suspensions, I would like to turn attention to the image of Anne as a silent listener who is in control of her affection and life.

As the second daughter in her family, Anne is always a mute listener in the corner without being noticed because she's not as beautiful as her elder sister Elizabeth and has lost the chance to marry well like her younger sister Mary. She does not consent to

¹ Christien Garcia, “Left Hanging: Silence, Suspension, and Desire in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*.” *The Eighteenth Century* 59.1 (2018): p. 99.

the profligate lifestyle of her father Sir Walter and is reluctant to move to Bath when their life is saddled with debts, but she has no say in these issues and has to accept all the decisions quietly. Sir Walter's lawyer Mr. Shepherd comes to visit them and gives an account of their new tenants who will rent their family estate Kellynch Hall after their move to Bath. As a result, Anne's mind is preoccupied with past memory.

"And who is Admiral Croft?" was Sir Walter's cold suspicious inquiry.

Mr Shepherd answered for his being of a gentleman's family, and mentioned a place; and **Anne, after the little pause which followed, added—**

"He is a rear admiral of the white. He was in the Trafalgar action, and has been in the East Indies since; he was stationed there, I believe, several years."¹

It is easy to overlook Anne's little pause or temporary silence before carrying on their conversation if we don't look into her emotional status carefully enough. What makes Anne stop here and what is the reason of her loss of words? The answer is the name of Admiral Croft, whose wife happens to be the elder sister of Frederick Wentworth, Anne's secret lover seven years before. Anne ended their hasty engagement due to the persuasion of her God mother Lady Russel, who thought this relationship was imprudent because at that time Wentworth was only a Commander in the navy and had no means to support their life together. Lady Russel has acted as a mother figure in Anne's life since her mother's early death, Anne took her advice and broke up with Wentworth. The fact that she has remained single since their separation shows that she has never abandoned this relationship in her mind, which is the reason why this short romance becomes a taboo topic for her. Years later, the reference to his relations

¹ P, pp. 25-26. Emphasis added.

activates her memory about him. She needs a short unnarration, in the form of a temporary pause, to get used to this subject and what follows.

It's Mr. Shepherd's responsibility to give a detailed report of the Crofts to Sir Walter, and coincidentally he forgets the family name of Mrs. Croft's other brother, the curate of Monkford. At last, the forbidden name is addressed by Anne herself,

"I shall forget my own name soon, I suppose. A name that I am so very well acquainted with; knew the gentleman so well by sight; seen him a hundred times; came to consult me once, I remember [...] Very odd indeed!"

After waiting another moment—

"You mean Mr Wentworth, I suppose?" said Anne.¹

Here appears another pause before Anne continues the dialogue. From Admiral Croft to Mrs. Croft, from Mrs. Croft to Mr. Wentworth, she is driven closer to the name of her secret ex-fiancé and further towards her memory of him little by little. During the whole conversation, she is always a conscientious listener who reveals no emotion in front of other people and only adds certain basic information about their future tenants when necessary. Nevertheless, under the mask of a listener, or with the help of the identity of a listener, she could take a little pause and calm down when being forced to recall her unnarratable experience of pleasure and pain. Once the conversation is over, Anne is in need of a personal moment of unnarration, which is longer than the little pause, to let go her memory and inner stress.

Anne, who had been a **most attentive listener** to the whole, left the room,

¹ P, p. 27. Emphasis added.

to seek the comfort of cool air for her flushed cheeks; and as she walked along a favourite grove, said, with a gentle sigh, “A few months more, and he, perhaps, may be walking here.”¹

The recollection of Wentworth makes Anne flushed, and she could finally let her hair down when being free from other people. She realizes that she has to face the possibility of their union in a few months and cannot help forming a picture of that man walking in her favorite grove. In her gentle sigh, the man is unable to be addressed by his name but is reduced to a simple pronoun “he”. A pronoun is enough for her sensitive nerves and this unnarration of appellation underlines her anxiety about their reunion.

Apart from to Lady Russel, only Sir Walter and her elder sister Elizabeth know of their secret engagement. It seems that Anne has to suffer the “revival of former pain” alone because of her family’s “general air of **oblivion**.”² To some extent, their indifferent unnarration denies this past relationship and compels Anne to chase away inner agitation by herself, “assisted [...] by that perfect **indifference** and apparent **unconsciousness**.”³ Anne understands Lady Russel’s thoughtfulness, which resembles what Mrs. Lefroy did for Austen in terms of her broken relationship with Tom Lefroy. As for Sir Walter and Elizabeth, it is more likely that the unnarration comes out of negligence, which is a sort of pain relief for which she has to feel grateful, “of the past being known to those three only among her connexions, by whom **no syllable** [...] **would ever be whispered**.”⁴ She doesn’t have to play the role of speaker and talk about her unnarratable suffering with others. For Anne, their collective reticence allows her the chance to wallow in her sorrows without being interrupted and recuperate

¹ *P*, p. 29. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35. Emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

without interference.

Before leaving for Bath, Anne is introduced to Mrs. Crofts and it's inevitable that her brother would be one of their topics. Although seven years has passed and Anne is 27 years old, she still cannot defend the girlish reaction when Mrs. Croft mentions that her brother intended to become acquainted with her: "Anne hoped she had outlived the age of blushing; but the age of emotion she certainly had not."¹ It turns out that the one Mrs. Croft refers to is the curate Edward Wentworth who has already got married. Anne feels awkward about her forgetfulness of Edward their former neighbor and also about her secret fluctuation upon hearing the name of Wentworth. She cannot disclose her anxiety in front of other people but sits through and listens to "them talking so much of Captain Wentworth, repeating his name so often."² Being stuck in her position as a listener, she has to endure in silence and there's no way she can run away from their inevitable reunion: "Since he actually was expected in the country, she must teach herself to be insensible on such points."³ Anne is obliged to equip herself for his coming meeting.

Their encounter takes place when Anne stays with Mary and her husband Charles Musgroves' family. She is prepared for this moment and her only wish is that everything could be over without further ado. Comparatively speaking, this climatic reunion is short but rather powerful. No greeting words or friendly smiles are exchanged between Captain Wentworth and Anne, and what happens is nothing but a bow from the hero and a courtesy from the heroine.

[...] while a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that **it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two**

¹ *P*, p. 57.

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³ *Ibid.*

minutes of Charles preparation, they were in the drawing-room. **Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's, a bow, a curtsy passed;** she heard his voice; he talked to Mary, said all that was right, said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing; **the room seemed full, full of persons and voices,** but a few minutes ended it. Charles shewed himself at the window, all was ready, their visitor had bowed and was gone, the Miss Musgroves were gone too, suddenly resolving to walk to the end of the village with the sportsmen: the room was cleared, and Anne might finish her breakfast as she could.

"It is over! it is over!" she repeated to herself again and again, in nervous gratitude. **"The worst is over!"**¹

The reunion scene is presented through Anne's inward thoughts in broken syntax and repetition, and the incoherent rendering of this episode is a reflection of her disturbed condition. Their cursory communication is accomplished in silence from both sides because they are unable to face each other after that breakup. They don't talk but maintain a sense of politeness through hasty eye contact and a pair of formal greetings respectively. Since none of the Musgroves family know their past relationship, they behave like strangers or worse than strangers. After necessary pleasantries, Anne is completely ignored by Captain Wentworth and other people. Here lies a striking contrast between silence/unnarration towards her and voice/narration, in speaking to others. Unlike his indifferent silence towards Anne, Captain Wentworth saves his words and attention for Mary, for the Miss Musgroves, and Charles. This intentional discrimination reveals that he has not forgiven Anne or has not got over with her in another way. The listener remains silent as always and is assigned to the background of others' dialogues.

¹ P, p. 70.

The room is full of people and their voices, but Anne could not integrate into their world because of her agony and his detachment and she has to act as a quiet listener from the beginning till the end. It's as if Anne is isolated from the external world. Blotting out the heteroglossia, she could hear nothing but her inner exclamation: "It is over! it is over [...] The worst is over!" Based on Captain Wentworth's deliberate avoidance, it might as well be said that her counterpart is longing for the end of this voiceless re-encounter as well. Their mutual intention is repeated five times altogether in the above scene, which encapsulates her highly emotional repression and their highly charged relationship. No words passed between them because their mixed feelings towards each other cannot be put into language.

One day, Anne overhears a conversation between Captain Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove, who says that she prefers Anne to Mary as her sister-in-law. In fact, Anne was Charles Musgrove's first choice, but she refused his proposal due to Lady Russel's persuasion. This recounting resembles what happened between Anne and Captain Wentworth and confirms his prejudice of Anne as a person without independent ideas and perseverance. Anne cannot defend herself because she betrayed their sacred engagement as a young girl seven years ago. At the same time, she has no opportunity to interrupt their dialogue and expose her true feelings about what she heard or overheard seven years later. She is thrown into a quiet desperation and "[h]er spirits wanted the solitude and silence which only numbers could give."¹ As a listener concealed within the background all the time, she can only recover through silent rumination surrounded by other people and their voices.

Anne cannot dispel the curse of being a lonely listener without being listened to, not only in relation to her words, but also her music. When playing piano, she is only entertaining herself since she's got no caring parents to please as do the Miss Musgroves, "her performance was little thought of, only out of civility, or to refresh the others."²

¹ *P*, pp. 104-105.

² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Actually, she has got used to her share of loneliness and negligence, and has already accepted her fate as a listener since her mother's death, "she had [...] never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste."¹ She begins to appreciate her melancholy solo without being noticed and bothered, "though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears [...] she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved."² On the surface, Anne does not have an equal right and ability as a speaker in conversation and life, but that seemingly inferior position leads her into a self-exploration in solitude and an observation of others, which links the flow of interpersonal communication and orients the narrative discourse.

Fanny Price is another solitary listener in Austen's works. When Sir Thomas gets away from Mansfield Park, all the young men and women, except Edmund and Fanny, decide to put on a drama titled *Lover's Vows* at home. At first, Edmund declines the project because it's inappropriate according to Sir Thomas's moral principles. Later on, he agrees to play a role, the lover of the character played by Mary, because of his secret partiality for the latter. Edmund goes to Fanny for suggestion and explains that if he refused, they have to ask some strange young man from elsewhere, which would be improper for a lady. Actually, Edmund has already made up his mind and what he seeks for is only an approving listener. Fanny is disappointed by his inconsistent moral standards, "To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public!"³ In addition, it is a shock for her to see Mary's influence upon Edmund. Conspicuously, Edmund does not treat them with equal respect since he listens to Mary's words but asks Fanny to listen to him. The contrast between two girls' roles or between narration and unnarration is well and truly a blow for Fanny who has admired Edmund for a long time.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³ *MP*, pp. 161-62.

After refusing to perform in the play because of Sir Thomas's moral codes, Fanny becomes an opposite force against all the others. She is isolated and has no right to take part in their social circle, "She alone was sad and insignificant: she had no share in anything."¹ Timid and sensitive Fanny descends to being a quiet outsider at Mansfield Park: "she might go or stay; she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the East room, without being seen or missed."² She could do nothing but plays her usual role as a listener, "being suffered to **sit silent** and unattended to" and passing a day "only to **listen in quiet**."³

It takes a lot of trouble for those young fellows to find a play that could provide enough characters and cater for everybody's tastes. Additionally, there are other tricky issues such as the choice of the site and the enlargement of the plan. In the meantime, Fanny obtains a new identity as a spectator and listener, who "**looked on and listened**, not unamused to observe the selfishness which, more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all."⁴ There are more dramatic scenes before the public performance of the play. Julia has a crush on Henry Crawford and the latter used to trifle with her feelings. Henry seizes the chance of rehearsal to flirt with her engaged sister Maria. There is no wonder that Julia would make such bitter remarks, "Do not be afraid of my wanting the character [...] I have always protested against comedy, and this is comedy in its worst form."⁵ Fanny sees through Henry's tricks upon these two girls and feels compassionate for Julia, "Fanny, who had been **a quiet auditor** of the whole, and who could not think of her as under the agitations of jealousy without great pity."⁶ She is the witness of their entanglement and of its outcome that Julia is kicked out of Henry's despicable game of hunting for love. As time goes by, Fanny gets involved in this family

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 230, 231. Emphasis added.

⁴ *MP*, p. 136. Emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

theatre, or family farce, by means of listening to everyone's complaints.

Fanny, being always a very **courteous listener**, and often the **only listener** at hand, came in for the complaints and the distresses of most of them [...] Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully [...] Tom Bertram spoke so quick he would be unintelligible [...] Mrs. Grant spoiled everything by laughing [...] Edmund was behindhand with his part [...] Mr. Rushworth [...] wanting a prompter through every speech [...]¹

It seems that no one is satisfied with the situation or can enjoy their work wholeheartedly. They always ask for something they don't have and express dissatisfaction towards other people. Paradoxically, Fanny appears to be the only one that has no worries but pure fun in the preparation of this play. As the only listener, Fanny gets rid of her gloomy mood as she finds herself being useful to everyone else, "sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator."² Consequently, the silent listener who's been alienated from the theatre becomes an active spectator who observes the turmoil among these actors silently, which could be taken as a privileged position assigned by Austen to present to the reader an authentic record of this family farce at Mansfield Park.

Fanny provides a kind of comfort zone for those who are looking for someone to listen to and sympathize with them attentively. After coming back from Portsmouth, Fanny becomes the listener for Lady Bertram. Lady Bertram feels devastated because of Maria's scandal and is yearning for pouring out her grievances, "To talk over the dreadful business with Fanny, talk and lament, was all Lady Bertram's consolation."³

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 170

³ *MP*, p. 467.

Fanny is a qualified listener because of her patience and warmth: “To be listened to and borne with, and hear the voice of kindness and sympathy in return, was everything that could be done for her.”¹ She is a generous listener who gives, and life gives back. After the notorious scandal of Maria and Henry, Sir Thomas and other people at Mansfield Park tend to reevaluate Fanny and her qualities and take her words seriously. To some extent, the point of unnarration is to define her character, and she is rewarded as the embodiment of unnarration.

3.2.3 Patriarchal silencers: resistance from unnarration

In Austen’s works, the polar opposite role of silent listeners goes to the role of patriarchal silencers who suppress other people through deterrence and force and make them incapable of speaking out their feelings and ideas. The suppression of narration stems from their strong sense of absolute authority and they cannot accept any sign of non-compliance or disobedience. Yet their dictatorship that stifles people’s voices may also trigger resistance in various forms.

Always serious and stern, Sir Thomas represents the supreme power in his estate Mansfield Park. All the other people, including Mrs. Norris and Fanny Price apart from his wife and children, must always adhere to his principles and comply with his orders, or they just have to listen to his words. According to his codes of conduct, it’s unsuitable to put on a play at home, and therefore the performance of *Lovers’ Vows* could only be realized when the master of the house is far away from Mansfield Park. These young fellows enjoy the great freedom in preparation and rehearsal, but their pleasure does not last long, and the official performance is canceled because Sir Thomas returns from his plantation in Antigua ahead of schedule.

Now comes the dramatic scene. The unwelcome return of Sir Thomas brings

¹ *Ibid.*

about great consternation among these devoted actors, and they cannot help exclaiming the appalling news that “Sir Thomas [is] in the house!” and feeling a sense of “instantaneous conviction.”¹ At once, all their voices are snatched away, “not a word was spoken for half a minute.”² It is interesting that Sir Thomas restores his power of command over Mansfield Park as soon as he shows up. Without uttering any words, he immediately hushes the dramatic dialogue and their voices immediately. In contrast with the extreme silence on the surface is the great bustle deep within, “every other heart was sinking under some degree of self condemnation or undefined alarm.”³ During this terrible pause, they worry about their future and are trying to figure out what should be done to cool the silencer’s temper. Here the narrator only presents these actors’ inner struggles but it’s not difficult to imagine the rage and roar within the speechless intruder. That’s the reason why they are totally stupefied and muffled.

Fanny doesn’t participate in their “crime”. Yet as a timid girl living under Sir Thomas’s support, Fanny finds it impossible to conquer her unnarratable terror. For a moment, she is about to faint facing the one who presides over Mansfield Park and her life: “She was **nearly fainting** [...] She had found a seat, where in excessive **trembling** she was enduring all these fearful thoughts.”⁴ She suffers much more than other people owing to her great fear of Sir Thomas that has been secretly accumulated in daily life since she came to Mansfield Park years ago. Fanny’s unconsciously habitual response gives a clue to her former days of suffering because of this uncle and one of the reasons that she grows up into a silent listener.

Mrs. Norris regards herself as the spokesman for Sir Thomas when the latter is away for business. She takes charge of all the issues at Mansfield Park, including the actualization of the family theatre. When Fanny firmly refuses to take part in it, Mrs.

¹ *MP*, p. 181.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182. Emphasis added.

Norris reproves her as a selfish and ungrateful girl. Sir Thomas counts on her as a reliable guardian for these young people, yet her acquiescence in this case let him down, “He could not help giving Mrs. Norris a hint of his having hoped that her advice might have been interposed to prevent what her judgment must certainly have disapproved.”¹ Mrs. Norris feels ashamed to admit her imprudence and fails to defend herself in front of the real authority of this family, “a little confounded and as **nearly being silenced.**”² In Sir Thomas’ opinion, it might be inconsiderate to form such a plan, but Tom, Edmund and all the other involved actors are still young people and could be forgiven. Mrs. Norris is chosen to be reproached but it’s a pity that she does not see the impropriety and resorts to unnarration out of internal dread.

Sir Thomas used to be too severe towards his children. His severity stifles their true nature and drives them away from his supervision: “he had but increased the evil by teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence so as to make their real disposition unknown to him.”³ It is his repressive education that leads to their reticence and rebellion, and sends them to rely on indulgent and improvident Mrs. Norris, “who had been able to attach them only by the blindness of her affection, and the excess of her praise.”⁴ Mrs. Norris is the one who manages the doomed engagement between Maria and Mr. Rushworth while Sir Thomas is away. When Sir Thomas is back and tries to talk with Maria about this engagement, Maria keeps silent about her true feelings that she doesn’t really like Mr. Rushworth out of her habitual dread of him. His dictatorship exerts the reverse effect on Tom Bertram, his eldest son, who drowns himself in gambling and drinking and ends up with great debts and severe illness. The adultery scandal of his daughter together with the degeneration of his son force Sir Thomas to acknowledge his failure in family education, and he has to draw a lesson

¹ *MP*, p. 195.

² *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

⁴ *Ibid.*

from the tragedy of his children.

When dealing with the image of the patriarchal silencer in Austen's works, the name of General Tilney is always on the list. At first, Catherine has no idea of his scheme and is ignorant of herself being set up as a prey. She appreciates his hospitality but at the same time she can still perceive a sense of inexplicable repression when he shows her around the abbey. The narrator gives a lot of evidence that Catherine feels relaxed when General Tilney is not present, "Catherine's spirits revived as they drove from the door; for with Miss Tilney she felt no restraint."¹ After being left in the grove, she could finally recover her light-hearted spirit and the ability to talk freely, "shocked to find how much her spirits were **relieved** by the separation [...] she began to **talk with easy gaiety**."² This contrast in Catherine's perceptions bears out General Tilney's coercive manner.

There is a vivid episode of Catherine being frightened by General Tilney's high-handed policy. On the first day when she arrives at Northanger Abbey, she experiences the disillusionment of her Gothic fancy concerning the suspicious chest in her bedroom. Then Miss Tilney and she are a little bit behind the schedule for dinner formulated by General Tilney. He does not blame them for being late in words but demonstrates his impatience and irritability by action, "pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand."³ At the sight of their coming, he is too impatient to wait for another second and "pulled the bell with violence."⁴ Obviously, his behavior involves excessive physical force that is not necessary in ringing the dinner bell. The two belated ladies are supposed to realize their own fault of unpunctuality through his order of a short imperative sentence yelled at the servants: "Dinner to be on table directly!"⁵ Miss Tilney must have been used to

¹ *NA*, p. 171.

² *Ibid.*, p. 199. Emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

his daunting style, but this is the first time for Catherine, thus she “**trembled** at the emphasis with which he spoke, and sat pale and **breathless**, in a most humble mood.”¹ It is no wonder that Catherine feels uncomfortable with this figure being around.

Catherine notices that Henry and Eleanor are always trapped in low spirits and stay silent before their father, “General Tilney, though so charming a man, seemed always a check upon his children’s spirits, and scarcely anything was said but by himself.”² They become docile and silent creatures under his patriarchal authority. It is true that Catherine fails to see through General Tilney’s disguise, but she does have the correct intuition towards his tyrannical domination. The general himself also admits that he has the absolute power over his children and they have no courage to rebel against his order or even to utter their dissatisfaction, “accustomed on every ordinary occasion to give the law in his family, prepared for no reluctance but of feeling, **no opposing desire that should dare to clothe itself in words.**”³ This is a very important quote as it shows that the unnarrated was the place where people were allowed sanctuary. They could feel what they wanted as long as they were quiet. In any case, General Tilney could not bear the fact that Henry dares to fight against his decision concerning Catherine, “could ill brook the opposition of his son, steady as the sanction of reason and the dictate of conscience could make it.”⁴ Having been oppressed all his life, Henry is determined to revolt, “his anger, though it must shock, could not intimidate Henry, who was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice.”⁵ To some extent, Catherine’s wild surmises of General Tilney’s evil deeds could be considered as another form of rebellion against this villain and his suffocating manipulation.

Austen’s portrayal of listener and silencer overturns the traditional view of the

¹ *NA*, p. 183. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 279. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

relationship between the one who speaks and the one who listens, in which the role of speaker is the dominant force. Anne Elliot is a silent listener but not a passive one. Her reticence foregrounds the fact that she is emotionally sensitive and intensive. Fanny Price is the only listener while others are busy preparing for the family theatre. She listens to their complaints and distresses attentively and becomes an essential support for them. At the time, she is the only clearheaded one who sees through the hidden tricks of Henry. People are always deprived of the ability to speak boldly in front of patriarchal Sir Thomas and General Tilney. It turns out that their tyranny cannot secure their authority in governing families or preserving dignity. For Austen, the power of unnarration should never be underestimated, and it is necessary to put unnarration and narration on the same footing.

3.3 Unnarration out of Choice

Another type of unnarration in Austen's novels is narrative refusal: something is rejected as a thing to be narrated in the text. This is more related with self-conscious narrative choice made by the author on the level of discourse and sometimes on the level of story. Robyn Warhol regards narrative refusal as a strategy to present the unnarratable, but I would like to take the unnarratable and narrative refusal as two forms of unnarration, because the former focuses on the cause of incapability while the latter the option of exclusion.¹ I do agree with Warhol that the practice of narrative refusal "opens up alternative stories that do for narration what the 'depth effect' [...] does for character."² The selection of one path would produce a totally different story and that's how an alternative narrative discourse gets established. In Austen's works, narrative refusal is unfolded as something that does not need to be addressed, the discord that is

¹ Referring to Chapter I.

² Robyn R. Warhol, "Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn't Happen in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of Poynton*," *The Henry James Review* 28.3. (2007): pp. 259-60.

not narrated, a story that ends without conclusion, a climax that is greatly lessened, and the secrets that are deliberately concealed.

Austen is a highly self-conscious writer and makes full use of her authorial right in choosing what to include and what to exclude. Above all, it is impossible to cover everything in a text of limited length, and she needs to hold a standard of narratability. From time to time, the narrator jumps out and takes part in the narration with a resolute attitude that something will not be narrated. This deliberate narrative refusal functions on the basis of the collaboration between the author/narrator and the reader/narratee: something else is more important or you are free to fill in the unnarration by yourself. As a realist writer, Austen does not encompass the voice of chaos and discordance in her novels, which reflects her ethos in writing. In those seemingly happy endings, she prefers to offer some uncertain factors that translate the final *éclaircissement* into a possible world. We have no idea when Fanny and Edmund could overcome the identity issue and live happily ever after, or what would happen to Anne and Captain Wentworth confronting the threat of the upcoming war. As for the climactic moment of the confession of love, Austen always goes against the literary convention of romance and leaves it for readers to build up a fuller picture in their own minds. The practice of anti-climax is applied when it is consistent with the characters' mood swings or when it plays up to the overall narrative rhythm. When it comes to the narrative choice of her characters, Austen pays attention to those reticent figures and their concealment in front of secrets, which complicates the ups and downs of the plot and enriches the characters' images.

3.3.1 Selective creation and bilateral collaboration

Wayne Booth claims that there is “a positive contribution from the negative quality of

authorial reticence” in modern fiction.¹ The strategy of authorial reticence or narrative refusal confirms that the text we’re reading is a highly refined outcome from the author/narrator’s careful selection, which intends to “make us feel that we have been given a better story, more carefully worked, than would have been possible if he had simply served up his materials raw.”² In most cases, Austen is inclined to interfere with narration by means of her substitute narrator. Then what gives rise to her adoption of narrative refusal in her classical works?

In the beginning part of *Northanger Abbey*, when Catherine encounters the Thorpes family in Bath, our narrator calls an end to Mrs. Thorpe’s tediously long recounting with minute details and makes a summary like this: “This brief account of the family is intended to supersede the necessity of a long and minute detail from Mrs. Thorpe herself, of her past adventures and sufferings.”³ The cause of this intervention is presented humorously. The narrator meddles because loquacious Mrs. Thorpe might set forth “the worthlessness of lords and attorneys” or repeat those words that “had passed twenty years before” and that would “occupy the three or four following chapters.”⁴ On behalf of Austen, the narrator declares sovereignty right away by cutting off what is below her narrative standard.

During her stay in Bath, Catherine is delighted to witness the engagement of her brother James and her new intimate friend Isabella Thorpe. Very soon Catherine finds Isabella flirting with Fredrick Tilney and worries that her brother would get hurt. Henry Tilney comforts her that his brother is not serious about Isabella and he is returning to his regiment very soon. Before leaving for Northanger Abbey, Catherine spends her last evening with James and the Thorpes, and what happens between her brother and her future sister-in-law sets Catherine’s mind at ease, “nothing passed between the lovers

¹ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 306.

² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³ *NA*, p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*

to excite her uneasiness, or make her quit them in apprehension.”¹ The narrator also provides some compelling evidence to support Catherine’s resolution, “James was in excellent spirits, and Isabella most engagingly placid. Her tenderness for her friend seemed rather the first feeling of her heart [...] once she gave her lover a flat contradiction, and once she drew back her hand.”² As for the departing scene between these two close girls, the narrator condenses all the emotional expressions into the readers’ imagination, “The embraces, tears, and promises of the parting fair ones may be fancied.”³ Here the sharp contrast between the explicit narration and the simplified unnarration could be taken as a prediction of the approaching farce between the lovers and the actual farewell between the friends.

Narrative refusal is applied in the episode when poor Catherine is driven away from Northanger Abbey and has to go back home alone. Before continuing her story, the narrator puts forward one possible trajectory of her fate that many writers would choose, which belongs to the strategy of disnarration.

A heroine returning, at the close of her career, to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in their several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a travelling chaise and four, behind her, is an event on which the pen of the contriver may well delight to dwell.⁴

Our independent and idiosyncratic narrator refuses to “share in the glory” by creating such an uplifting episode; instead, the narrator decides to “bring back my heroine to her

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *NA*, p. 261.

home in solitude and disgrace.”¹ On the one hand, the narrator speaks as if she is the one that has been humiliated and therefore is not in the mood to talk with people about her miserable experience: “no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness.”² On the other hand, the narrator realizes that she is the one who brings about the irrevocable situation for our wretched heroine: “in a hack post-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand.”³ Consequently, dejected Catherine is sent back home speedily due to the narrator’s compassion, “Swiftly therefore shall her post-boy drive through the village, amid the gaze of Sunday groups, and speedy shall be her descent from it.”⁴ So here is a narrative practice combining disnarration and unnarration. This vivid record of the narrator’s weighing of the heroine’s possible fate displays Austen’s parody of the convention of romance and her choice to not conform to it.

After learning the truth about General Tilney’s abortive scheme, Henry Tilney heads to Fullerton for Catherine out of his sense of responsibility and affection. It must be very painful for him to expose the dark side of his own father, because of whom Catherine was ill-treated at Northanger Abbey when he had been absent. According to our narrator, the puzzle of the whole issue cannot be completed without either General Tilney’s words, James’s relation or Henry’s own speculation. Yet what matters here is not the process of piecing together different parts of the factual account, which could be left for the readers to figure out slowly, but the result of the truth itself, which will cheer up the heroine and move forward the plot.

I leave it to my reader’s sagacity to determine how much of all this it was possible for Henry to communicate at this time to Catherine, how much of

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

it he could have learnt from his father, in what points his own conjectures might assist him, and what portion must yet remain to be told in a letter from James. I have united for their ease what they must divide for mine. Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty.¹

Based on the above passage, our readers are directly invited to collaborate with our narrator in working out the unnarrated details of the evil scheme. It seems that the narrator doesn't bother to divide these materials as has been done in the previous narration. Warhol clarifies that since the narrator has performed this narrative practice many times: "What warranted telling [...] can now go without saying because the authorial audience of this novel already knows it."² The readers and the author are supposed to reach an agreement in this context.

Henry makes a proposal and of course Catherine accepts it. The Morlands are glad to have Henry as their son-in-law, but the final marriage can only be realized when General Tilney gives his permission, which appears hopeless by then. Thus our young lovers have to suffer long distance and deep lovesickness while waiting for a miracle: "Henry returned to what was now his only home [...] and extend his improvements for her sake, to whose share in them he looked anxiously forward; and Catherine remained at Fullerton to cry."³ It looks like that the narrator borrows the perspective of Catherine's loving parents and insists that we should not look into their agonies: "Whether the torments of absence were softened by a clandestine correspondence, let

¹ *NA*, p. 278.

² Robyn R. Warhol, "Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn't Happen in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of Poynton*," *The Henry James Review* 28.3. (2007): pp. 261-62.

³ *NA*, p. 281.

us not inquire. Mr. and Mrs. Morland never did.”¹ The agreement of narrative refusal from the narrator and her readers as well as that of the Morlands give Catherine a private space so she can receive comfort from a long-awaited letter, which demonstrates Austen’s sympathy towards this untraditional heroine.

With regard to the final outcome for this embittered couple, our narrator takes off the mask and directly tells the readers that she is making up stories. Every Jack will have his Jill. In the narrator’s point of view, only the attached lovers and those who really care about them would worry about their future because our smart readers could tell from “the tell-tale compression of the pages” that they are running towards the destination of “perfect felicity.”² The turning point of their fate is contrived promptly. General Tilney is filled with joy for the good news that Eleanor Tilney marries someone “of fortune and consequence” and thus is persuaded by his prosperous daughter to forgive Henry and gives him permission to marry Catherine, “to be a fool if he liked it!”³

The unexpected marriage of Eleanor removes the obstacles in the way of our hero and heroine. However, the narrator does not bother to spend too much time on Eleanor’s husband, whose appearance changes the rhythm of the whole plot. It is generalized that this man deserves Eleanor’s affection and “[a]ny further definition of his merits must be unnecessary,” because “the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable.”⁴ Apparently, the narrator has a strong sense of narrative standards. This young man only appears to save Eleanor from her miserable life at Northanger Abbey, and then she can help Henry out. Another function of this unnamed character is also disclosed that he plays a decisive role in Catherine’s Gothic fancy. He is the person “whose negligent servant left behind him that collection of

¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 282, 283.

washing-bills” and on account of that our heroine Catherine gets “involved in one of her most alarming adventures.”¹ What a smart coincidence! Despite his crucial effect, the narrator employs narrative refusal because this man is of no significance regarding her design of Catherine Morland and that ancient abbey.

The narrator in *Pride and Prejudice* also resorts to narrative refusal when addressing Elizabeth’s travel with her uncle and aunt, since comparing with Mr. Darcy’s estate Pemberley, no place is worth reporting in detail: “It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay.”² Until then, Elizabeth has already discovered the shameless lies of Mr. Wickham and the good nature of Mr. Darcy. Her tender emotion is tilting towards the one with an apparently cold face yet a warm heart. Considering her ruthless refusal of his first proposal, Elizabeth has no idea whether they could come together in the future. Their relationship requires a catalyst and it proves that this provisional plan to visit Pemberley draws them closer to each other. During her visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth acquires a more comprehensive view of Mr. Darcy from the building as well as the people who live in it. Besides, Mr. Darcy’s return ahead of schedule leads to their reunion after that awkward proposal. Then he happens to learn the news of Lydia’s elopement and thus has the opportunity to help Elizabeth with all his strength. The detailed narration of Pemberley is foregrounded against the narrative refusal of “Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenilworth, Birmingham, etc.”³ This travel with the Gardiners takes about one month. The narrator refuses to narrate the other parts, only what happens at the end when they visit Pemberley and encounter Mr. Darcy, because the Pemberley tour is the turning point of their romance and is the only place that asks for attention.

In the latter part of *Mansfield Park*, our narrator makes a narrative decision in a

¹ *NA*, p. 283.

² *P&P*, p. 265.

³ *Ibid.*

facetious tone: “Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest.”¹ Anna Lott considers this abrupt declaration as a part of the narrator’s theatrical performance.² As far as I’m concerned, Urda’s view seems to be more appropriate in this excerpt. It is more like a reiteration of the narrator’s status and opinions as the commander presiding over the text we are reading: “She is not merely tying up loose ends neatly, but asserting a particular view of character and its nature.”³ Austen as well as the narrator will not cope with social ills in this work. She is trying to remind her readers that she is not someone that would be distracted or who would digress easily and this choice of unnarration is consistent with her original plan.

Austen establishes her own criteria of narratability. By reviewing her works, it is not difficult to find that she represses certain voices in her novels and “her language tends to record movements governed by considerations of decorum and etiquette [that are]—composed and controlled.”⁴ Generally speaking, Austen “mutes, excludes or eludes any kind of violence in her discourse” so as to recreate or secure the social landscape of civility and propriety in her fictional world.⁵ She is not constrained by this creative standard. In fact, her narrative refusal is not contradictory with the existence of discordance. She allows a world of diversity including the voice of disharmony but does not indulge in bleakness.

Austen neutralizes the voice related to violence and vulgarity in *Emma*. Harriet Smith is attacked by a group of gypsies, including “half a dozen children, headed by a

¹ *MP*, p. 479.

² Anna Lott, “Staging a Lesson: The Theatricals and Proper Conduct in *Mansfield Park*,” *Studies in the Novel* 38. 3 (2006): 275-87, p. 283.

³ Kathleen E. Urda, “Why the Show Must Not Go On: ‘Real Character’ and the Absence of Theatrical Performances in *Mansfield Park*,” *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 26.2 (2013/2014): p. 300.

⁴ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

stout woman and a great boy,” on her way back after the ball.¹ We are told that those gypsies are noisy but at the same time we hear nothing from them at all, “all **clamorous**, and **impertinent** in look, though **not absolutely in word** [...] **loud** and **insolent**.”² Tanner observes that Austen refers to perversity but does not go any further, withholding “disruptive rebellious penetration of fragments of a completely other, potentially hostile discourse from some socially dangerous elsewhere.”³ She intends to eradicate the threats to her society and language by silencing the voice of the violent gang. This is a conscious attempt to persevere with her literary doctrine.

The language of roughness and discordance is also excluded from *Mansfield Park*. On the way back to the Portsmouth, Fanny Price is expecting a sweet home with loving parents and siblings. What awaits her at the end of the trip is the “abode of **noise**, **disorder**, and **impropriety**.”⁴ She’s frustrated by the view of her home where no one is in their proper place and nothing is done properly. To some degree, it is similar to the episode of the gypsies as we read such lines as “**noise** rising upon **noise**, and **bustle** upon **bustle**”⁵ but there is nothing specific concerning impropriety:

Mrs. Price, Rebecca, and Betsey all went up to defend themselves, **all talking together**, but Rebecca **loudest**, and the job was to be done as well as it could in a great hurry; William trying in vain to send Betsey down again, or keep her from being troublesome where she was; the whole of which, as almost every door in the house was open, could be plainly distinguished in the parlour, except when drowned at intervals by the **superior noise** of Sam, Tom, and Charles **chasing** each other up and down stairs, and **tumbling**

¹ *E*, p. 349.

² *E*, p. 349. Emphasis added.

³ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 38-39.

⁴ *MP*, pp. 402-403. Emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 398. Emphasis added.

about and **hallooing**.¹

Here is a snippet from this distressing scene of disorder. Our narrator stresses that everyone is acting at will and talking at the same time. Fanny is forced to accept the coexistence of loud voices and overwhelming noise, chasing and tumbling, and talking and hallooing. However, the narrator doesn't address the details of this heteroglossic spectacle. It is sensible that drowning in this heteroglossia, Fanny cannot discern the difference of all these wild voices and is unable to tell them from one another. Therefore, the potential risk of chaos, which tortures Fanny supremely, is muted. On the one hand, the suppression of discordance reinforces Fanny's sense of disappointment and frustration. On the other hand, it is consistent with Austen's narrative standard to "[have] recourse to a protective and sanitizing diegesis [...] rather than risk a possibly contaminating and encroaching mimesis."² She is trying to preserve her land of literature with appropriate language.

I agree with Wayne Booth that the strategy of narrative refusal is "one of the obviously artificial devices of the storyteller", and "artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author refuses to tell."³ Nevertheless, this highly self-conscious approach, a version of meta-fiction, should not be taken as the author/narrator's privilege hastily. Instead, it ought to be seen as a bilateral collaboration between the narrator/author and the narratee/reader. Austen's readers are supposed to understand and appreciate her selective creation and narrative refusal in terms of her standard of narrativity, the consistency in creation, and her principles of literature.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 395. Emphasis added.

² Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 40.

³ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 444.

3.3.2 Inconclusive conclusion and anticlimactic climax

The unique style of Austen's romance consists in her ingenious maneuver of narrative refusal in the ending of her novels that is supposed to be a "happily-ever-after" outcome, and in the episode where love is confessed that is supposed to be the climax of the whole story. She refuses to be confined by the established pattern of romantic novels and makes an effort to work out her own narrative style of inconclusive conclusion and anticlimactic climax.

At first glance, all of Austen's works arrive at a classical happy ending when the hero marries the heroine. Tony Tanner points out that Austen usually deviates from "the convention of marriage-as-felicitous-closure, leaving unanswered—and unaskable—any number of potentially fascinating questions which each novel may prompt."¹ She prefers presenting a denouement without final *éclaircissement*, or clear-cut conclusion. That is to say, no conclusion is her conclusion. In *Northanger Abbey*, readers are left in front of the dilemma between parental dictatorship and filial defiance. In *Persuasion*, it is possible that Anne and Captain Wentworth are going to live an adventurous life in the future because of the upcoming war. This inconclusiveness marks off her avant-garde spirit in literary creation and it is rewarding to step into a world of possibility where Austen/narrator and her readers/narratee cooperate to challenge the concept of certainty and stability.

As analyzed in the previous section, narrative refusal is employed extensively in *Northanger Abbey*, and this strategy is extended to its ending. Above all, the narrator concludes that our hero and heroine achieve their "perfect happiness" by overcoming various obstacles and General Tilney's interference is "perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment."² Right next to the confirmation of their happy ending, the whole story comes to a halt in

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 11.

² *NA*, p. 284.

front of a forking path, “**I leave it to be settled**, by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience.”¹ The narrator’s refusal to draw a definite conclusion demonstrates an objection to taking the role of arbitrator to judge what is good and what is bad, or a preacher propagating moral principles.

According to Booth, there are a lot of literary works in which the moral quest comes to nothing, thus “no one could be the wiser for having read the book [...] Only an unresolved sense of meaningless continuation could do justice to a full nihilism of this kind.”² Austen has no ambition to educate readers through her works, nor can they be connected with “nihilism”, however. This approach could be summarized by Robyn Warhol’s words that “Neither a silence nor a gap stands where the moral would be, because the unnarration is there in its place [...] The shadow moral is that no moral can be drawn.”³ Austen is not devoted to a conventional ending where a certain purpose must be realized. She has a preference for uncertainty instead. Moreover, the playful dodge stands out as a banner to remind us that this is only a made-up story, “rounding off [...] with flippancy and a metafictional insistence on fictionality.”⁴ The parenthesis in that quotation emphasizes that the narrator/author has no intention to take responsibility if readers claim that they have learned a lesson from this romantic story, since everything is invented.

When it comes to the final felicity of Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price, the narrator also makes use of narrative refusal. At first, Edmund feels depressed that he could never step out of the fruitless relationship with Mary Crawford. When he converses with Fanny about his grievance day by day, it suddenly occurs to him that a

¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

² Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 297.

³ Robyn R. Warhol, “Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn’t Happen in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of Poynton*,” *The Henry James Review* 28.3. (2007): p. 261.

⁴ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), pp. 90-91.

different kind of woman could be a better choice. After that, Edmund turns to be aware of Fanny's charming smiles and begins to consider the possibility of their getting married, since "her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love."¹ Now that Fanny's heart has already been exposed to us, we know that their happy ending is coming soon. However, the narrator refuses to move forward:

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire.²

In a half-joking tone, the narrator draws our attention to the fictionality of this story by smashing our illusions. It is interesting that the narrator creates only one paragraph to cover the significant process of emotional transformation as well as final resolution that other writers might use a whole book to portray: "the major part of the action [...] is excluded from the main narrative: it is turned into a postscript to the main action."³ Austen does not bother to repeat those set patterns of romance and the conventional idea of consummation is not her concern explicitly. Tony Tanner reminds us that this deliberate postscript is applied to ease the moral tension hiding within their courtship. Edmund and Fanny are related by blood and "prior to their marriage their relationship

¹ *MP*, p. 488.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 488-89. Emphasis added.

³ Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 37.

is more like that of brother and sister than that of potential lovers.”¹ Besides, the narrator’s unnarration also cushions the possible moral anxiety that the readers might feel about this union. Concerning the turning point of Edmund’s affection, our narrator adds that “With such a regard [...] founded on the most endearing claims of innocence and helplessness, and completed by every recommendation of growing worth, what could be more natural than the change?”² Richard Jenkyns believes that this question mark here shows the author’s uncertainty about human affairs when a happy ending is taken as “a kind of *pis aller*.”³ I think this is a rhetorical question which indicates that their prosperous future is strongly supported by a long term affectionate foundation. Edmund will be healed and learn to appreciate Fanny as a woman and life partner. It’s only a matter of time, and we only catch “a glimpse into the future.”⁴ Indeed, a lot of things will be modified within this unspecified period of time, and eventually the hero and heroine could be able to establish a proper identity through their renewed relationship while the readers would feel satisfied with this development.

Another courtship left to the postscript caused by narrative refusal is the marriage between Marianne and Colonel Brandon. The romance between Marianne and Willoughby is heart-wrenching and it must take her some time to pull herself together. During her recovery period, Marianne turns to reconsider her relationship with the consistent Colonel Brandon, “with a knowledge so intimate of his goodness—with a conviction of his fond attachment to herself, with at last, though long after it was observable to everybody else—burst on her—what could she do?”⁵ Lots of readers feel offended by this outcome and claim that Colonel Brandon is out of Marianne’s league. I agree with Jenkyns that the question mark in the previous quote implies that Marianne

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.172-73.

² *MP*, pp. 489.

³ Jenkyns, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵ *S&S*, p. 405.

is partially “thrust into wedlock by the pressure of all those around her.”¹ Compared with Willoughby, Colonel Brandon cannot be called a perfect match for Marianne in terms of age and physical appearance. Marianne’s decision to marry him does not come from pure affection in her heart. She makes do due to her passional trauma, his unvarying attachment and the recognition of empathy between them. It’s promised that they are going to have a happy marriage, but it will only come true beyond the boundary of the text, “only a considerable time after the book’s closure, in a future beyond the narrative.”² This unfinished fulfilment breaks an expected symmetry set up in the title of this novel since the younger sister’s marriage does not fit into the same degree of compatibility and happiness as the elder one’s. This actually makes the story more penetrating. Austen is reluctant to conform to the convention of so-called balance and symmetry and refuses to conjure up a stereotype of perfect fulfillment in her work.

This kind of future-oriented denouement can also be found in Austen’s final completed work *Persuasion*. The character Anne is different from all the other heroines in Austen’s novels, because she’s the first one who condescends in the marriage market, and “marries downward and out of the gentry class, facing [...] a financially unstable life.”³ Captain Wentworth starts from nothing and makes his fortune in the Napoleonic Wars. It is reasonable that her friend Mrs. Smith feels concerned about their future life. Till the very end of this novel, there is no indication of where they shall live. Anne is very likely to live onboard with Captain Wentworth, wandering here and there. The narrator also foresees an unprosperous onshore life of being a sailor’s wife, “she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.”⁴ In any case, this couple is obliged to face an adventurous life with love in their hearts and difficulties in

¹ Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.192.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 115.,

⁴ *P*, p. 298.

the future.

What's more, there is a hint that a future war could be the greatest threat to Anne's happiness since Captain Wentworth serves in the navy, "Anne was tenderness itself [...]. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less, the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine."¹ Here it is necessary to remind ourselves of when *Persuasion* is set. This novel was written around 1815-1816. As for the story, it begins in the summer of 1814, which is just the end of a decade of wars between Britain and France (1803-1814/15) when Napoleon was defeated and driven to the isle of Elba.² As the story draws to a close, it turns to the spring of 1815, when Napoleon escaped from Elba to France and decided to strike back.³ Anne and the other characters in the story have no idea of the impending war, but Austen does. She sets her story in this particular period of peacetime on purpose when the hero and the heroine have the opportunity to get together. Yet at the same time, possible flames of war are also present in the postscript. Austen's readers have access to the history of the British navy and therefore are expected to appreciate the ambiguous ending of this unique heroine and her beloved husband.

In addition to a preference for postscripts in the denouement, Austen is inclined to shrink back in displaying the scene of love confession, which is supposed to be the representative climax of a romance. Her approach is to present love and words as in inverse proportion to one another: the more love there is, the less is said about it and vice versa. Or just as Mr. Knightley says to Emma, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk it more."⁴ The strategy of narrative refusal changes the most crucial moment into a kind of anticlimax but does not alleviate the tension between the hero and the

¹ *Ibid.*

² Todd Fisher and Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Napoleonic Wars: The Rise And Fall Of An Empire* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), p. 184.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴ *E*, p. 450.

heroine.

The disequilibrium of Mr. Darcy's two proposals is salient. The first one, though it failed at last, is dramatically presented with full details, while the second one, which is successful and ushers in their final union, is just touched upon briefly and excludes the major part of the details. In the beginning, Elizabeth expresses her gratitude towards Mr. Darcy in relation to Lydia's elopement and marriage, which brings about his disclosure that his only purpose is to make her happy. Then Mr. Darcy assures her of his constancy and poses the question again: "My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever."¹ Before the second proposal, Elizabeth has already fallen in love with Mr. Darcy and worries that she has lost him forever because of her previous prejudice and her sister's disreputable scandal. Thus, this confession sets her free from misery and leads her to felicity.

Elizabeth, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances.²

If you are expecting a tearful "Yes, I do", you will be quite disappointed. As a matter of fact, we hear nothing from our blessed heroine. The only thing our narrator reveals is that she accepts his heart full of joy, which is totally different from her long speech of accusations in the first proposal. Jenkins gives a reasonable interpretation of the minimalist style here that Elizabeth has already made her decision before this proposal and the vagueness of indirect speech matches with Elizabeth's inner confusion at this

¹ *P&P*, p. 403.

² *Ibid.*

particular moment since “Austen is writing subjectively, seeing events through the medium of the heroine’s consciousness.”¹ A fluttering heart brings about her faltering mouth. Losing all her assurance and eloquence in the first proposal, Elizabeth could not express herself fully and fluently, and it’s even impossible for her to “encounter his eyes.”² The only thing she can do is to listen to his sweet words quietly, “in proving of what importance she was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable.”³

As for the suitor’s reaction after hearing Elizabeth’s answer, it is reduced to a summary of his joyfulness: “The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do.”⁴ Actually, when Elizabeth suggests that he should talk more, he replies as such, “A man who had felt less, might.”⁵ It’s true that his reticence might blanket his virtues, but truth will out and he will win his lady’s heart after all. This favorable reply is delayed for months and therefore Austen chooses narrative refusal to reproduce Mr. Darcy’s intensified feelings. Here the narrative refusal of the details concerning passion and confession vividly catches our hero and heroine’s supreme happiness.

Similarly, the climax of love confession in *Emma* is also processed in a snapshot through unnarration. After hearing the unexpected engagement of Frank and Anne, Mr. Knightley comes to Emma immediately in order to comfort her. He is delighted about the news because Frank used to flirt with Emma and he feels jealousy when seeing their interaction. Now he’s even more delighted to hear that Emma was never in love with Frank. It’s nothing but a young girl’s vanity, “my vanity was flattered, and I allowed his

¹ Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 11.

² *P&P*, p. 404.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

attentions.”¹ It looks like a perfect chance to cross over the bridge of friendship and move a step further. Therefore, Mr. Knightley exposes his heart, “Emma, I accept your offer [...] and refer myself to you as a friend. — Tell me, then, have I no chance of ever succeeding?”²

With no need to worry about his falling in love with Harriet, Emma gets over her distress and holds happiness closely in her arms. She immediately accepts his passionate heart: “She spoke then, on being so entreated. — What did she say? — Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does. — She said enough to shew there need not be despair.”³ The narrator intrudes in and covers up what appeals to readers the most, Emma’s declaration. What Emma ought to say and what has been said to soothe Mr. Knightley are all excluded from the text. Consequently, the anticipated climax is turned into an anti-climax. According to Janet Todd, “It is bathos from a supremely stylish author, irritating to most readers and going beyond her usual recoil from directly delivered feeling.”⁴ As shown in the previous analyses, this bathos conforms to Austen’s narrative style since she doesn’t want to be occupied with the conventional codes of romantic storytelling. Generally speaking, the experience of love is only a subplot of Emma’s life and of Austen’s design. The core essence of this story lies in our heroine’s growing pains when overcoming misconceptions, and her self-improvement and true love are inevitable rewards.

Then let’s now look at the narrative refusal of love confession in *Persuasion*. Captain Wentworth happens to overhear a dialogue between Anne and Captain Harville about attachment and consistency, which encourages him to pluck up the courage and write a letter to reveal his true feelings. After learning that she is not alone in her persistence, Anne feels so happy that she cannot calm down. When Anne finally has the

¹ E, p. 447.

² E, p. 450.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁴ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 111.

chance to converse with her dear Captain, the narrator only gives a brief account of this decisive scene.

[...] the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed, and prepare it for all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow. There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure everything, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement.¹

Perhaps you cannot help asking: what feelings and what promises? On the one hand, the narrator emphasizes the significance of this conversation, while on the other hand, the narrator just refuses to satisfy your curiosity about its content. The perfunctory simplification forms a sharp contrast with Anne's conversation with Captain Harville only a moment before. Or we could take it this way: Anne's affection has already been expressed thoroughly in the dialogue about consistency. Although not a participant in their argument, Captain Wentworth has heard everything, and his spontaneous confession letter acts as the most striking response to that topic. Both of them have known the other's sincere affections, and thus nothing else need to be repeated here to disrupt the narrative rhythm of their regained romance.

3.3.3 Narrative refusal of secrets

When it comes to the level of story, we have a series of reticent characters who choose to keep their secrets and refuse to reveal the truth for the purpose of protecting others

¹ P, p. 284.

or protecting themselves. There is an overlap between the narrative refusal of unnarration and the deception of disnarration considering the case of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. Frank is included in the list of liars because his concealment involves deliberate utilization of Emma while Jane does not make use of others. Here lies the difference between narrative refusal and deception. The former is an annoying behavior for other characters who prefer openness while the latter is usually marked by its aim of taking advantage of others. We see here how secrets complicate the development of the plot and contribute to the construction of characters.

Emma complains more than once about Miss Jane's cautious reserve, "There was no getting at her real opinion. Wrapped up in a cloak of politeness, she seemed determined to hazard nothing."¹ She finds it suspicious that Miss Jane is reserved on the subject of Weymouth and the Dixons, "She seemed bent on giving no real insight into Mr. Dixon's character, or her own value for his company, or opinion of the suitableness of the match,"² which gives rise to her surmise of a reprehensible relationship between them. Emma also notices that Miss Jane refuses to give a satisfying answer about her acquaintance with Frank Churchill at Weymouth, "It was known that they were a little acquainted; but not a syllable of real information could Emma procure as to what he truly was."³ Unfortunately, Emma's first speculation and Frank's attention prevents her from discovering their secret engagement. Jane's reserve is partially the result of her disposition and partially the makeshift to protect the fragile relationship between Frank and her. When everything is out, those who share the same prejudice against her reticence, would become more compassionate towards this silent figure.

When Emma asks Frank about his encounter with Jane at Weymouth, Frank chooses the same narrative strategy of refusal. He insists that Emma should rely on

¹ *E*, p. 176.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Jane's version, "It is always the lady's right to decide on the degree of acquaintance. Miss Fairfax must already have given her account. — I shall not commit myself by claiming more than she may chuse to allow."¹ Neither of them is willing to go into the subject of their relationship. Emma has never considered the possibility of their mutual love and secret engagement. She only expresses her disapproval of uncommunicativeness, "you answer as discreetly as she could do herself. Her account of every thing leaves so much to be guessed, she is so very reserved, so very unwilling to give the least information about any body."² She also admits that she could never be intimate with Miss Jane because of her "extreme and perpetual cautiousness of word and manner" and "a dread of giving a distinct idea about any body."³ It is a kind of suspicious inclination to conceal something from people that goes against the candid nature of Emma. Till the end of the story, Emma could make up with Jane because the latter is only trying to protect herself and her secret fiancé. The concealment of this secret engagement contributes to the heroine's growing out of misconception and complicates the plot by nearly making Emma the third one between Jane and Frank.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, when Mr. Bingley suddenly leaves Netherfield without a sign that he will come back again, Jane Bennet is upset. She has already fallen in love with that amiable man, but just as Charlotte once said. Jane is a reserved person and would not reveal her true feelings to others, neither happiness nor sadness. Elizabeth finds that Jane's letters include "no actual complaint, nor was there any revival of past occurrences, or any communication of present suffering."⁴ She refuses to mention the person who occupies her heart and mind or to disclose her secret pain even to her dearest sister Lizzy. Her suffering stands out against the background of narrative exclusion. This deliberate unnarration of Mr. Bingley resembles Austen's reticence about Tom Lefroy, which might be a last way to maintain her self-respect. Elizabeth is a rather

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³ *E*, pp. 212-13.

⁴ *P&P*, p. 209.

careful reader who reads Jane's broken heart between the lines, "there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterise her style [...] every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness."¹ It is likely that Austen is expecting more careful readers to tap the unnarrated text and interpret her works comprehensively.

Mr. Darcy's confession letter dismantles Elizabeth's ingrained prejudice and helps her to see through Mr. Wickham's shameless lies. Yet later on she decides to hide the truth since the liar is planning to leave the neighborhood very soon. What's more, the truth itself involves the secret about Mr. Darcy's sister Georgiana who's nearly seduced, and it's a painful memory for both of them. Mr. Darcy exposes the secret to Elizabeth in order to save her from Mr. Wickham's tricks, on a confidential basis, "I feel no doubt of your secrecy."² Unfortunately, Elizabeth implicit warnings about this hypocritical liar prove to be futile for both Mr. Bennet and Lydia. We cannot blame Mr. Darcy or Elizabeth for keeping a secret because of their sincere concern towards Georgiana or a lingering sense of kindness towards Mr. Wickham. This narrative refusal is a kind of turning point in this novel, which causes the irrevocable elopement scandal and at the same time brings the hero and the heroine together.

Elizabeth feels embarrassed when encountering Mr. Darcy at Pemberley after her declining his proposal at Rosings. He behaves himself and treats Elizabeth and the Gardiners with hospitality, which is totally opposite to the image of him constructed at Longbourn. After that, Mrs. Gardiner and Elizabeth have a conversation about their visit to Pemberley and discuss everyone they have seen except "the person who had mostly engaged their attention. They talked of his sister, his friends, his house, his fruit—of everything but himself."³ For Elizabeth, she cannot reveal his secret proposal but longs to know her aunt's opinion of Mr. Darcy, towards whom she has formed certain new feelings more than gratitude. For Mrs. Gardiner, she is suspicious about the

¹ *Ibid.*

² *P&P*, p. 223.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

sudden reversal in this young man's reputation and his attention towards Elizabeth, waiting for her niece to broach the subject. In fact, what concerns them most is the only unmentioned topic, Mr. Darcy. Their narrative refusal only makes each other more involved in this topic secretly.

Elizabeth accepts Mr. Darcy's second proposal happily, but all the other people are startled by the news. Mr. Bennet and Jane suspect that Elizabeth chooses to "marry without affection,"¹ because they have no idea of Mr. Wickham's lies or Mr. Darcy's devotion. Jane thinks that she's been too reserved about her growing affection: "Lizzy, you have been very sly, very reserved with me. How little did you tell me of what passed at Pemberley and Lambton!"² Elizabeth has a reason to keep the secret, since this topic is closely related with Jane's secret pain, "She had been unwilling to mention Bingley; and the unsettled state of her own feelings had made her equally avoid the name of his friend."³ This narrative refusal indicates her whole-hearted protection and consideration for her dear sister.

Colonel Brandon is obsessed with the young and lively Marianne, and the fact that Marianne has an infatuation towards Willoughby makes him feel frustrated. He talks with Elinor about Marianne's romantic view about love that she "does not approve of second attachments."⁴ This opinion is so unrealistic and inconsiderate because their own father actually married twice. In spite of that, Colonel Brand still appreciates Marianne's enthusiasm and youthfulness, "there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind."⁵ This innocent and passionate young girl reminds him of his father's ward and also his former love Eliza Williams, "I once knew a lady who in temper and mind greatly resembled your sister, who thought and judged like her."⁶ All

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

² *Ibid.*, p. 412.

³ *P&P*, p. 412.

⁴ *S&S*, p. 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

of a sudden, Colonel Brandon abandons this topic and refuses to provide more information about this lady: “he stopt suddenly; appeared to think that he had said too much, and by his countenance gave rise to conjectures.”¹ He calls a halt to his narration as well as reflection because it involves a painful secret in his heart. Eliza is forced to marry his elder brother and this marriage ends as a tragedy with Eliza dying in poverty and leaving a little daughter named after her.

Marianne and Willoughby act as if they have already got engaged with each other. He treats Marianne with tenderness and love and behaves sincerely like a son and a brother for Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor. Willoughby takes their little cottage as his own home, and once hearing that they are planning to have it renovated, he insists that “Not a stone must be added to its walls, not an inch to its size.”² It’s a sweet and loving picture to watch Willoughby and Marianne spending most of the day together “by himself at the side of Marianne, and by his favourite pointer at her feet.”³ Moreover, Willoughby takes a lock of hair from Marianne as love gift secretly. As an elder sister, Elinor understands that it might be out of their power to get married immediately since Willoughby is not well-off enough to support a family given his extravagant lifestyle. It makes her confused that they refuse to tell people the good news of their engagement: “It was engrossed by the extraordinary silence of her sister and Willoughby on the subject.”⁴ This prolonged narrative refusal is totally incompatible with their temperament. Until the embarrassing reunion of the couple in London, their secret is revealed that there is no commitment between them at all. It is not fair to say that Willoughby has never loved Marianne, but “no serious design had ever been formed on his side.”⁵ They are not on the same level of attachment.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴ *S&S*, p. 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Marianne believes that her sister Elinor and Edward are perfect for each other. Yet it turns out that Edward has already been engaged with Lucy Steele secretly four years ago, and her sister has suffered from the grievous news during the past months without telling anybody. It's difficult for Elinor to keep silent about the secret since she still loves Edward, but she has promised to the other party of this engagement that nothing will be disclosed, "My promise to Lucy, obliged me to be secret. I owed it to her, therefore, to avoid giving any hint of the truth."¹ Considering it's impossible for her to get together with Edward, Elinor decides to deal with the pain of this affection all by herself, "I owed it to my family and friends, not to create in them a solicitude about me."² It is not only Edward's secret engagement but also her secret attachment. Therefore, Elinor keeps silent about her suffering even towards her confidential sister and this is her way of preserving her dignity.

Austen's application of unnarratable silence or narrative refusal breaks from the tradition that only focuses on what is narrated in the text. No matter if it is narrative incapability or narrative choice, the strategy of neonarrative unnarration provides a new way to shape the plot, characterization and other aspects of narrative discourse. This kind of call for a turn to unnarration can be seen in Austen's rendering of silent but highly emotional communication and reticent but significant characters, or her manipulation of denouement leading to uncertain results and climax without supposed dramatic confrontation. The aesthetic interest in unnarration leads her to the narrative domain of possibility and infinity, which can never be actualized by limited narration. And a consistent articulation of the relationship between what is narrated/voice and what is not narrated/silence strengthens the interaction and collaboration between the narrator/author and her narratee/reader. As a consequence, the tension between

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

² *Ibid.*

narration and unnarration produces a richer understanding of her novels.

Chapter IV. Passion and Sexuality:

Neonarrative Circumnarration in Austen's Novels

George Steiner observes that the major phase of the novel is “inseparable from a definite creative tension between idiom and consciousness in the erotic domain.”¹ He cites some representative figures, including George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, and Tolstoy. Actually, Jane Austen could also be added in this list. After reading, re-reading to be precise, her novels, we may find Austen a stylist of indirect presentation concerning passion, desire, the body and sexuality. According to Warhol, the content of sex in Victorian novels is “antinarratable” (against the social convention to narrate), a subcategory of unnarration, and could only be presented through “euphemism, allusion, metaphor, and especially metonymy to signify sexual connection between characters.”² As far as I am concerned, the above approaches Warhol enumerates belong to the domain of neonarrative circumnarration, which refers to a kind of indirect rendering of what happens. We should be alert to the distinction that unnarration excludes the event, but circumnarration addresses it in a roundabout way. Or in other words, circumnarration occupies the imprecise region between narration and unnarration. Austen's novels are loaded with meanings owing to this kind of indirect narrative method and she succeeds in “maintain[ing] a fine equilibrium between text and subtext.”³ Her characters are always motivated by an inherent passionate vigor, and they are given the right to express their intense instinct and unreflective desire through the vehicle of the physical body. However, she does not treat

¹ George Steiner, “Eros and Idiom,” *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 131-32.

² Robyn R. Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 224.

³ Juliet McMaster, *Jane Austen the Novelist Essays Past and Present* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 15.

libido in a narrow sense nor deal with the undisguised details of what happens in the bedroom.

This chapter is going to examine Austen's manipulation of passion and sexuality through the strategy of circumnarration, which destroys the fallacy that her novels are unpolluted in terms of corporeal reality. It is not difficult to find instances of sexual witticism in her adolescent creations and she invites the reader to decipher her erotic codes and take part in her wordplay. This kind of sexual humor is transformed into a less straightforward method of circumnarration in her mature works. Generally speaking, she assimilates erotic implications into the public activities of courtship and flirtation or the social issues of elopement and adultery, which highlights the passionate interactions between men and women without violating social conventions. Through the prism of circumnarration, we are supposed to become sexually cognizant readers and acknowledge what Austen doesn't claim for herself directly: the rushing blood, pounding pulse and throbbing heartbeat hidden beneath the smooth polished skin.

4.1 Passion and Sexuality: Between Inclusion and Exclusion

Austen exploits the large space between inclusion/narration and exclusion/unnarration and addresses the subject of passion and sexuality with the help of circumnarration. The most popular quote taken from Austen's works would be the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."¹ Right after it, Austen puts forward that "However little known the feeling or views of such a man [...] this truth is so well fixed [...] that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters."² She makes a humorous reflection on the relationship between men and women, and the competitive marriage market. Richard Jenkyns speaks highly of the

¹ *P&P*, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

above proverbial statements:

This pair of aphorisms stands like the two pillars of a proscenium framing the stage. They are entirely generalized; they sit apart from the narration. Then abruptly the general gives way to the particular; the curtain rises, and we are plunged immediately, without so much as a word of explanation about the setting or the characters, into the first scene of a comic drama.¹

These two pillars stand at the entrance of Austen's fictional world and set the keynote of her novels, men and women, and their story is inevitably interwoven with the topic of love and passion, or the body and sexuality.

4.1.1 From love and passion to the body and sexuality

Austen's works are always labeled as elegant, domestic or unpolluted because she usually excludes historical issues, social crises and erotic experiences. Her notorious indifference to the domain of passion offends quite a few people. Charlotte Brontë, for example, is impatient with Austen for her lack in sensibility and passion. In a letter written in 1848 to George Henry Lewes, an enthusiastic promoter of Austen's novels, she made a famous critical comment about *Pride and Prejudice*: "An accurate, **daguerreotyped** portrait of a commonplace face; a **carefully fenced, high-cultivated** garden, with neat **borders** and delicate flowers."² Mark Twain shares a similar distaste for Austen and her stiff and passionless characters. He resents the fact that children are forced to read Austen's works in the lower grades and makes a rather contemptuous

¹ Richard Jenkins, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1.

² Ian Watt, *Jane Austen. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 4. Emphasis added.

remark: “Jane Austen’s books [...] are absent from this library. Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn’t a book in it.”¹ Different from these dissenting voices, George Steiner tries to defend Austen by relating the so-called omission of passion and desire to her elegant style: “She keeps at bay, through a specific **code of permissible expression**, disorders of sensibility—erotic, financial, political—which would have marred the **profound discipline** and **fineness of her design**, but made of it a larger thing.”²

It might not be proper to call them careless readers, but compared with Henry James, they really are not that penetrating and perceptive. In a letter to George Pellew written in 1883, James acknowledged Austen’s rendering of “‘**passion**’ — that **celebrated quality**”, in the seemingly monotonous daily life of her characters: “All that there was of them was **feeling**—a sort of simple undistracted concentrated feeling which we scarcely find any more.”³ Intense feelings provide a constant source of their vitality, which inspires Austen’s creation and invites the readers’ exploration. Jon Spence argues that in her works, ardent emotion is always validated through the filter of characters’ respect for their lover’s morality but “**passion** is always the **animating factor** in [their] decision to marry.”⁴ Surely passion is always the essence of Austen’s stories concerning love and marriage. Only that Austen’s world of passion is illustrated by means of indirect narration or circumnarration. Under the ivory surface of the text, we can find her construction of the natural course from love and passion to courtship and marriage.

In the traditional sense, Austen’s works would be among the least likely texts to be connected with the body and sexuality. Cardinal Newman is one of the representative

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

² George Steiner, “Eros and Idiom,” *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 131. Emphasis added.

³ Henry James, “A letter to George Pellew, June 23, 1883,” *Henry James Letters. Vol. II. 1875-1883* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 422. Emphasis added.

⁴ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), pp. 103-104. Emphasis added.

figures who complain about this flaw: “Everything Miss Austen writes is clever, but I desiderate something. There is **a want of body** to the story.”¹ In order to express his dissatisfaction, Mark Twain even makes personal attacks on her: “Every time I read ‘Pride and Prejudice’ I want to dig her up and hit her over the skull with her own shin-bone.”² Carol Shields believes that Austen is indifferent to “the manifestations of human physicality,” and her works “are propelled for the most part by incident or by reason and not by the needs or responses of the body.”³

In fact, the discussion of body is not absent from Austen’s texts. When addressing the presentation of sickness in Austen’s works, John Wiltshire mentions that the “body [is] the vehicle of self-expression.”⁴ This is also feasible in the examination of passion. We could propose that the body is the vehicle of the expression of passion. As a matter of fact, Austen circumnarrates the passionate overflow in her characters in terms of physical attraction, physical sensation and sensory experience where we can discern an erotic chemistry. It is fair to say that Austen is not only a novelist of manners but also a master of dealing with the physical dimension of the inner world.

W. H. Auden sees through Austen and declares that “Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass.”⁵ In spite of her spinsterhood and determination to stick with her own experience in literary creation, she “is acutely awake to sex, and quite able to convey sexual feeling even though she may not take us into bedrooms.”⁶ The “awakening” of Austen could be dated back to her teenage years, when she witnessed the love triangle replete with passion and restriction among her two brothers and her

¹ B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen: 1811-1870 Volume 1: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 117. Emphasis added.

² Southam, *Jane Austen: 1870-1940 Volume 2: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 323.

³ Carol Shields, “Jane Austen’s Images of the Body: No Fingers, No Toes,” *Persuasions* 13 (1991): p. 132.

⁴ John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁵ W. H. Auden, “Letter to Lord Byron (Part I),” *Letters from Iceland* (1937). https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.81886/2015.81886.Letters-From-Iceland_djvu.txt

⁶ Juliet McMaster, *Jane Austen the Novelist Essays Past and Present* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 109.

cousin Eliza, who was still a married woman then.¹ Sometimes, Austen directly reveals her awareness and views concerning passion and sexuality (such as sexual scandals) in her letters: “The little flaw of having a **mistress** now living with him [Lord Craven] at Ashdown Park, seems to be the only unpleasing circumstance about him.”²

Lidia Curti admits the important role of sex in Austen’s works, but she holds that readers are “kept in utter darkness” because sex is “perversely signaled by its absence.”³ However, it is not absent. Certainly, Austen is not in the same line with D. H. Lawrence presenting details of what happens in bed when dealing with sex. At the same time, she refuses to follow Laurence Sterne who leaves a blank page to represent concupiscent Mrs. Wadman and her lust. Austen does not treat sexuality in a narrow sense but chooses a way between Lawrence who represents narration/presence and Sterne who represents unnarration/absence: “She is interested in dramatising sex in **everyday social life**—in the drawing room rather than the bedroom.”⁴ Steiner also professes that “the sexual turbulence” in her works is “so intelligently faced, so **publicly acquiesced in**” because of the mutual pact established between the author and her readers that “there is no need of localizing articulation [...] in reference to sexuality.”⁵ The point is that in her works, sex happens off stage. By incorporating such elements as elopement, adultery, seduction and illegitimacy, she manages the subject of sexuality and physicality within the boundaries of social convention. All in all, she is candid about sexual experience but in a discreet way. Sexuality is presented through circumnarration in a sociocultural context, which greatly expands the spectrum between what is narrated and what is not narrated.

¹ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 41.

² JA to Cassandra Austen, January 8 - January 9 [1801] *Letters*, p. 74. Emphasis added.

³ Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity, and Representation* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 146.

⁴ Jan S. Fergus, “Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen’s Novels,” *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 66. Emphasis added.

⁵ George Steiner, “Eros and Idiom,” *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 97.

When we develop a broad sense of the body and sex like Austen does, it is not difficult to find that the corporeal reality “is always present, treated with a variety and freedom that most modern readers overlook.”¹ To some extent, Austen is ahead of her time and her contemporaries because the issue of passion and sexuality are neither narrated nor unnarrated, but circumnarrated. John Mullan describes his experience of re-reading Austen’s novels, “suddenly noticing some crucial detail that you have never noticed before, and realizing how demanding she is of your attention.”² Objectively speaking, Austen’s erotic implications can only be excavated in the course of re-reading in this way. Since the straightforward acknowledgement of sexuality is carefully avoided, her readers are encouraged to make out her evasive maneuvers, “which do justice to the small, important complications of life.”³ Once those hidden messages emerge from her text, we could certainly achieve the special delight that Mullan enjoys, “becoming as clever and discerning as the author herself.”⁴ That’s the reward for a perceptive reader. It is similar to the contrast between the newborn Adam and Eve and the awakened Adam and Eve. Austen leaves the fruit of the tree of knowledge/corporeal reality on the bough but covers it by the leaves of circumnarration. Only after taking the forbidden fruit from among the circumnarration, can readers finally withdraw from the original state of ignorance, become conscious of the pain and pleasure in passion and love, and make sense of her narrative world.

4.1.2 Tradition of sexual humor in Austen’s works

Austen’s readers are required to interpret her circumnarration and comprehend her implied meanings. In a letter to her sister Cassandra, she declared that she was not a

¹ Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

² John Mullan, “Introduction,” *What Matters in Jane Austen? Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

superficial writer, “I do not write for such dull Elves / As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves.”¹ Obviously, she was longing to have a conversation with smart readers, who could decipher her code of humor at least. After her death, Austen’s family members and those early biographers spare no efforts to “isolate”, “provincialise” and “domesticate” this “sophisticated” writer.² As a result, for a long period of time, Austen is venerated as a flawless idol who creates innocent works. However, by reviewing her juvenilia, it is not difficult to find ribald puns and sexual witticisms. Young Austen even makes fun of James I’s sexual orientation in her early work *The History of England*: “His Majesty was of that amiable disposition which inclines to Freindship (Austen’s original spelling), & in such points was possessed of a keener penetration in Discovering Merit than many other people.”³ She expresses clearly that she wants her readers to understand her sexual implication and jocularly: “it may afford my Readers some amusement to *find it out*.”⁴ In order to amuse her readers, she gives another clue to the joke about the king’s homosexuality:

My first is what my second was to King James the 1st, and you tread on my **whole**.

The principal favourites of his Majesty were Car, who was afterwards created Earl of Somerset and whose name perhaps may have some share in the above-mentioned Sharade, & George Villiers afterwards Duke of Buckingham. On his Majesty’s death he was succeeded by his son Charles.⁵

¹ JA to Cassandra Austen, January 29 [1813] *Letters*, p. 210.

² Marilyn Butler, “Simplicity,” *London Review of Books* 20.5 (March 5, 1998): p. 6.

³ *History*, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid.* Austen’s original emphasis.

⁵ *History*, p. 17. Emphasis added.

Here the diction “whole” is a homophone pun to “hole”, which indicates that young Austen is confined to so-called forbidden material, but not in a complete way. She makes a detour to her subject through the employment of bawdy humor, which adds flavor to her early works as one of her little tricks in a comic situation “for the fun of it or for an exegesis of women’s lives in patriarchal culture.”¹ This tradition develops in her mature works years later in a more flexible way.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, when being asked who Elinor’s favorite gentleman is, Margaret Dashwood replies that “his name begins with an F.”² Based on the context, young Margaret refers to Edward Ferrars, but Mrs. Jennings and Sir John choose to explain more information from the capital letter itself, which might be the most famous so-called dirty word. The “inelegant subjects of raillery” prove to be great fun for Sir John and his mother-in-law.³ When they finally meet this mysterious Edward Ferrars, “a future mine of raillery against the devoted Elinor,” this meaningful capital letter is alluded to repeatedly and accordingly produces more blue jokes in their dialogues.⁴ To some extent, this joke of the letter F is a kind of circumnarration of sexual energy that successfully livens up the comparatively less passionate romance between Elinor and Edward and enables Austen “to explore the association between bawdy word play and conjugal procreation.”⁵

Bawdy jokes about sodomy reappear in *Mansfield Park* through the character of Mary Crawford. Mary describes her acquaintance with admirals in London: “Of *Rears* and *Vices* I saw enough.”⁶ By italicizing the key words, Mary, or Austen herself is emphasizing its connotation. Similar to her approach in her juvenilia, Austen reveals

¹ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 22.

² *S&S*, p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵ Heydt-Stevenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

⁶ *MP*, p. 61.

that she is expecting or encouraging her readers to extract more from the superficial words. After the joke, Mary adds: “Now do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat.”¹ Jenkyns holds that it is improper for a lady to talk about buggery², but it is unwise to limit our analysis of Austen’s works due to her spinsterhood (which could not necessarily be restrictive of her comprehension of the world) or “purified” life style (which is a bowdlerized invention created by her families and biographers). Now that she is courageous enough to write it down, we should be courageous enough to recognize it.

Austen’s use of bawdy slang creates a kind of interpersonal tension between the characters. Here Mary’s joke brings about a comic moment because Edmund, the moralist, is the one who’s supposed to reply. Edmund is a serious young man who is going to be ordained. He feels uncomfortable about Mary’s flippant remarks and changes the subject harshly: “It is a noble profession.”³ Apparently, Edmund has got the sexual implication, but he refuses to cheer for her humor. His reaction accords with his disposition as always. Mary demonstrates her rebellious spirit, but considering Edmund’s dull response, this joke certainly is not funny at all. This circumnarration of sexual issues contributes to the characterization of Mary, who has been greatly influenced by the corrupt customs of London, and their divergent attitudes display the inherent conflict between their moral values, which foreshadows their separation in the future.

Hélène Cixous maintains that when you “censor the body [...] you censor breath and speech at the same time.”⁴ Austen would never give up her right to breathe and speak, or to write about passion and the body. She makes use of sexual humor, an

¹ *Ibid.*

² Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 126.

³ *MP*, p. 61.

⁴ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Critical Theory since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), pp. 311-12.

amusing style of circumnarration, to get around censorship, which “provides an outlet for her hostility toward ideologies that dominate women.”¹ Once Austen presents the pun through Mary, it is never in control of the author or the censor. Its power spreads and her readers are free to notice it or just ignore it. By resorting to bawdy language and jokes, Austen “gets beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse.”² By beating around the bush of its corresponding taboos, her erotic humor acts as a weapon to fight against patriarchal discourse and helps her to transcend the boundaries of her time to produce an authentic record of what happens between men and women.

From the above instances, we can see that Austen’s bawdy humor incorporates a physical dimension into public culture. The publicity of sexuality in her works, “the constant awareness, the relentless dramatisation—is what makes her examination of it in social life so extensive and powerful.”³ It is no exaggeration that corporeal reality is routinized as a part of everyday life in her fictional world. Jorge Luis Borges asserts that “A writer who knows his craft can say all he wishes to say without affronting the good manners or infringing the conventions of his time.”⁴ Austen is one who knows her craft, and she says all she wishes to say by means of circumnarration without infringing the conventions of her time.

4.2 Circumnarration of Passion: Sexually Charged Courtship

Austen expresses her views of marriage through lively Elizabeth, sincere Jane, rational Elinor, imaginative Catherine, assertive Emma and quiet Anne. All of her heroines

¹ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 207.

² Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Critical Theory since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), p. 315.

³ Jan S. Fergus, “Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen’s Novels,” *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 67.

⁴ Qtd. in George Steiner, “Eros and Idiom,” *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 136. Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Pomographie et censure’, in L’Herne (Paris, 1964).

choose to marry for love, in which passion is a distinct, if unspecified, part. In her works, passion is always the innate force that drives forward the development of love and marriage, and it is circumnarrated through the details of sexually charged courtship, by “subsum[ing] the sexual to the elaborate rituals of courtship, mak[ing] eros subtextually vital to her narratives.”¹ In brief, she manages the circumnarration of sexual passion in her presentation of erotic attraction, playful flirtation, physical sensation and sensory experience.

For Austen, physical appeal is usually the first step in a love story. It’s not that she relies merely on superficial appearances to build up the plot of romantic relationship. The point is that she does not turn a blind eye to the important role of erotic charm between men and women. We can find the highlight of physical attraction in the stories of Jane and Mr. Bingley, Emma and Mr. Knightley, and Anne and Captain Wentworth. She also brings up the opposite case of physical attraction, physical aversion, through the experience of Charlotte Lucas and Marianne Dashwood. In addition, she mentions human weakness and yielding in front of visual pleasure based on the minor plots of Mr. Bennet and Sir Walter Elliot. The story of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy is oriented by sexual passion, especially on the hero’s part. Their romance begins when Mr. Darcy gets attracted by Elizabeth’s beautiful and lively eyes, and a sense of curiosity is enough for him to gaze at her and to flirt with her. In the end, he makes a proposal out of uncontrollable passion that is against reason and rationality. Passionate feelings are indirectly conveyed through her characters’ physical sensations and sensual experience. In the story of Anne and Captain Wentworth, Austen focuses on the heroine’s illness-like feelings, her loss of the visual sense or aural sense due to the hero’s presence or body contact. When it comes to Emma, Mr. Knightley is the one who awakens her in the sensory realm.

¹ Richard A. Kaye, “27 Clamors of Eros,” *The Cambridge History of the English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 440.

4.2.1 Sexual passion within physical attraction and visual pleasure

In Austen's age, the feeling of love is supposed to be established upon "gratitude" and "esteem," and it is almost impossible to read love stories resulting from physical magnetism or sexual attraction.¹ Austen violates those conventions dictated by various conduct books or didactic novels and moves the drama of courtship into the natural development from love to marriage that is initiated by human instinct. Her romantic stories usually pass through stages of affection from visual impression to inward emotion and her characters "register through their bodies the experience of knowing and being known in courtship and marriage, and one important subset in that experience is sexual attraction."² The important role of sexual passion is circumnarrated through her acknowledgement of physical attraction between men and women and also through her warnings of the human weakness in front of the temptation of erotic charm.

The subplot of *Pride and Prejudice* deals with the romance between Jane and Mr. Bingley. From the very beginning of his appearance, we are given an objective description from the narrator that this hero is a "good looking" gentleman.³ After dancing with Jane, Bingley speaks highly of her appearance to his companion Mr. Darcy: "She is **the most beautiful** creature I ever beheld!"⁴ Take notice of his exclamation here. Given Mr. Darcy's reply and demanding nature, this is a rather pertinent comment without overstatement: "You are dancing with **the only handsome girl** in the room."⁵ When being alone with sister Elizabeth, Jane conveys her admiration for this new neighbor: "He is just what a young man ought to be [...] sensible, good-humoured, lively [...] happy manners!—so much ease, with such perfect

¹ Jan S. Fergus, "Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen's Novels," *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 70.

² Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 77.

³ *P&P*, p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

good breeding!”¹ Jane gives a list of Bingley’s good qualities, but Elizabeth points out the indispensable factor for a perfect young man: “He is also **handsome** [...] which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby **complete**.”² It’s expressed humorously that appearance is taken as a part of one’s inherent quality, rather than being separated from it. Naturally, this young couple leave a positive impression on each other at first sight, which serves as an indirect proof of the sexual energy in their relationship.

Emma Woodhouse does not realize her own affection towards Mr. Knightley until the end of the story, but Mr. Knightley has already been in love with her for a long time. Austen only gives an ambiguous description of Emma’s looks, “handsome”, in the very first sentence of this novel, which might weaken our perception of her sexual appeal. Actually, before his confession of love, we could find Mr. Knightley’s favorable opinions of Emma, especially about her appearance. In a dialogue with Mrs. Weston, Mr. Knightley professes that “I shall not attempt to deny Emma’s being **pretty**” and “I have seldom seen a face or figure more pleasing to me than hers.”³ Mrs. Weston also gives an elaborate portrait of Emma to support this argument, consisting of her brilliant “hazel eye”, “open countenance”, “full health”, and “upright figure”, and Emma is eulogized as “**loveliness itself**.”⁴ In this conversation, Mr. Knightley discloses his pleasure in appreciating her physical beauty, “I have not a fault to find with her person [...] I think her all you describe. **I love to look at her**.”⁵ He is the one who witnesses her growing up in height and in beauty, and his love for her is interwoven with her sexual attraction and his visual pleasure.

In *Mansfield Park*, at first Henry Crawford enjoys flirting with the Bertram sisters

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

² *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

³ *E*, p. 41. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

instead of Fanny Price only because the former two are pretty while the latter is “merely a quiet, modest, **not plain-looking** girl.”¹ Therefore when he decides to take Fanny as a new prey in his love game, his sister Mary is totally shocked: “Nonsense! No, no. You ought to be satisfied with her two cousins.”² It is a little ridiculous that Henry seems to be the first one to notice Fanny’s “improving” beauty: “none of you seemed sensible of the wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks” and he concludes that Fanny “is now **absolutely pretty**.”³ Henry’s exploration of Fanny’s inner gentility germinates and slowly grows into an obsession since Fanny becomes a new creature with physical appeal. He behaves like a man who discovers a new continent and cannot help expressing his excitement. In order to convince Mary, he specifies Fanny’s beauty from “soft skin” to mouth “being capable of expression enough when she has anything to express,” from “indescribably improved” manner and even her height: “She must be grown two inches, at least, since October.”⁴ For Henry, the most attractive feature of Fanny might be her sensitivity because she is prone to color under various circumstances, “so frequently tinged with a **blush** as it was yesterday, there is **decided beauty**.”⁵ The purpose of his love game is to satisfy his visual pleasure and hunt for her sexual appeal from her “smiles as well as blushes.”⁶ According to his original plan, the ultimate goal is to hurt Fanny by “making a small hole in Fanny Price’s heart.”⁷ And this metaphor carries an erotic implication of physical temptation and sexual exploitation.

Austen takes up the issue concerning the revelation of physical attraction in her final work *Persuasion*. The protagonist Anne Elliot is a lady of 27 years of age has

¹ *MP*, p. 236. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁴ *MP*, p. 237.

⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

already lost her youth and attractiveness. The serendipity of her romance is closely bound up with the sea, since she regains her beauty and the knowledge of her own charm by the sea side: “her very regular, very **pretty features**, having **the bloom and freshness of youth restored** by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion.”¹ Because of the improved complexion and plumpness, Anne is looking forward to “a second spring of youth and beauty.”² At first, a gentleman is deeply attracted: “Anne’s face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration.”³ Captain Wentworth notices this gentleman’s admiration as well as Anne’s regained beauty and cannot help casting a quick yet suggestive glance at her, which seems to say: “That man is struck with you, and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again.”⁴ If the accident of Louisa on the new Cobb is the turning point for the hero and the heroine’s relationship, the restoration of Anne’s sexual appeal is the foundation of this reunion. In the final love confession, Captain Wentworth insists that his love for Anne has never changed. To some extent, it is Anne’s new attractive image that rekindles his passion for her.

Comparatively speaking, Austen pays more attention to the result or effect of physical appearance and erotic charm especially in the case of Officer George Wickham, who attracts every lady’s attention because of his “most gentlemanlike appearance.”⁵ As a result of his physical charm, everyone is determined to get acquainted with him: “All were struck with the stranger’s air, all wondered who he could be.”⁶ This gentleman seems to be perfect in every aspect because of his physical attraction: “His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine

¹ *P*, p. 122. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵ *P&P*, p. 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*

countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address.”¹ There is no wonder that all the girls in town are bewitched by his charisma. Enchanted by his sexual appeal, Elizabeth shows favoritism towards Wickham right away, but she is fortunate that the true nature of this libertine is uncovered before it’s too late. Poor Lydia is captivated by Wickham’s erotic charm and finally elopes with him. Not only innocent girls, even mature women would be deceived by his appearance. Austen reports it in a humorous way that Elizabeth’s aunt, Mrs. Philips, is also preoccupied with the entertainment of gazing at this young fellow along with her nieces: “She had been watching him the last hour [...] as he walked up and down the street.”² Jillian Heydt-Stevenson holds that their behavior is a kind of “voyeurism.”³ This interpretation uncovers the substance of visual pleasure in pursuing erotic charm. The dominance of sexual passion is vividly implied through this role reversal of gazer and object. In a patriarchal context, a woman is always the object being gazed at by men. Here Austen applies an ironic distortion of perspective that the supposed male gazer is converted into an object being gazed at by women, which could be taken as her mild revolt against patricentric discourse or a light punishment for Wickham.

There is another interesting episode relating to the erotic gaze in *Pride and Prejudice*. Caroline Bingley wants to attract Mr. Darcy’s attention by walking around the room to show off her elegant figure. Considering his interest in Elizabeth, Miss Bingley invites her to join this self-display, and it does catch his attention as her plan: “Mr. Darcy looked up. He was as much awake to the novelty of attention [...] and unconsciously closed his book.”⁴ When Miss Bingley invites him to join them, he declines the suggestion and explains that he understands her tricks very well, “you are conscious that your figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking [...] I can

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 74.

⁴ *P&P*, p. 61.

admire you much better as I sit by the fire.”¹ Mr. Darcy’s behavior underscores the significance of physical appeal, and Austen “augments the list of those who enjoy the erotic gaze beyond men or those of lower rank or intelligence.”² These characters are familiar with the erotic codes in social life and they are free to make use of their sexual charisma in courtship. For Austen, sexual passion has already been suggested through the sociocultural activities (such as flirting and grooming talk), and her readers are supposed to be sexually cognizant to recognize it.

We are given a brief prehistory of Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet and it is disclosed that their union has something to do with Mr. Bennet’s yielding to physical infatuation, “captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give.”³ Their non-reciprocal relationship in middle age seems inevitable because Mrs. Bennet’s “weak understanding and illiberal mind” exhausts Mr. Bennet’s affection.⁴ In his early days, Mr. Bennet indulged in passion and beauty at the expense of “[r]espect, esteem, and confidence,” and correspondingly there is no hope for him to have so-called “domestic happiness” years later.⁵ In *Persuasion*, it is shown that Lady Elliot is much too good to have married Sir Walter, and the motivation for her marital choice lies in physical attraction. Similar minor plots can also be found in *Mansfield Park* between Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, or between Mr. Price and Mrs. Price. And I agree with Jon Spence that Austen addresses this human trait of being conquered by sexual desire in a comic or slightly ironic way: “it is there, distinct if implicit.”⁶ It makes sense that Lydia’s tragedy could be traced back to her inheritance of Mr. Bennet’s weakness. Yet Mrs. Bennet is the one who is responsible for Lydia’s

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

² Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 74.

³ *P&P*, p. 261.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 238.

personal taste for officers' sexual appeal. She admits her partiality towards the officers in uniforms: "I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well—and, indeed, so I do still at my heart."¹ With this kind of inheritance from parents, I should say that Austen is very sympathetic with our heroine Elizabeth, who retains amiable liveliness without being overthrown by sexual wildness. Otherwise she would become another Lydia, a silly girl who cares for "nothing but love, flirtation, and officers."² Austen is trying to remind her readers of the risks of sexual passion from these unhappy unions.

Sexual passion is circumnarrated through Austen's rendering of physical appeal as the origin of love and romance, and its polar opposite, the absence of sexual passion, is indirectly presented through her dealing with physical aversion and separation. In *Pride and Prejudice*, before proposing to Charlotte, Mr. Collins intends to marry Elizabeth. In order to woo her, Mr. Collins invites Elizabeth to dance at the ball. We know that no matter what he does, Elizabeth would never marry him, but this terrible experience of dancing with him only drives her further away from this marriage plan. Elizabeth's suffering is delineated in a comic way:

The first two dances [...] brought a return of **distress**; they were dances of **mortification**. Mr. Collins, awkward and solemn, **apologising instead of attending**, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave her all the **shame** and **misery** which a **disagreeable** partner for a couple of dances can give. The moment of her release from him was ecstasy.³

¹ *P&P*, pp. 32-33.

² *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 101. Emphasis added.

Heydt-Stevenson might be exaggerating to call the above agony an “inverted orgasm.”¹ Yet this notion does vividly capture Elizabeth’s strong discomfort with this physical intimacy. Based on her reaction, we could visualize Charlotte Lucas’s depression regarding the future of her marriage. After getting married, Charlotte tries to secure a space physically detached from Mr. Collins. In their house, she could choose a better sized or better located room in the front side for common use, but at last she chooses the one that is at the back of the house. Only in this way could she bask in moments of solitude, because “the chief of the time [...] was now passed by [Mr. Collins] either at work in the garden or in reading and writing, and looking out of the window in his own book-room, which fronted the road.”² Although having evaded the fate of becoming a spinster without income, Charlotte has to suffer this kind of distaste for the rest of her life. She prefers to stay as far away from her husband as possible, and the momentary separation from him, both physically and mentally, is an “evident enjoyment” for her: “When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really an air of **great comfort** throughout.”³ This kind of physical aversion and detachment suggest the loss of sexual attraction between this couple and the loss of sexual passion of their marriage, which is the price Charlotte is obliged to pay for her choice of material security. Yet considering the plight of women back in the 18th and the 19th centuries, we cannot blame her either.

We could identify Mr. Bennet’s deliberate avoidance of Mrs. Bennet in their twilight years as similar. As time passes by, his original partiality for her superficial youth and beauty is replaced by his resentment against her inward narrow-mindedness and vulgarity. Since then, the library becomes his comfort zone, a private and secluded space away from his wife: “After tea, Mr. Bennet retired to the library, as was his custom” where “he had been always sure of **leisure and tranquility**.”⁴ His habit of

¹ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 77.

² *P&P*, p. 189.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 178. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 379, 79. Emphasis added.

retirement in the library for a short period of time allows him to avoid physical contact with Mrs. Bennet and also allows him to escape his domestic responsibility as a husband and a father, which reflects his quiet desperation in domestic unhappiness. This is an extreme case in which physical attachment transforms into physical detachment and sexual passion dwindles away to nothing.

Marianne has never considered Colonel Brandon as an eligible life partner because she finds no sexual attraction in him. And her aversion towards this man at first results from his age: “an absolute **old bachelor** [...] on the wrong side of five and thirty” and “old enough to be **MY father**.”¹ Austen’s original spelling of capital letters stresses her strong disinclination to be connected with him. Besides, she finds fault with his health condition owing to his complaint of rheumatism, which is regarded as “the commonest infirmity of **declining life**.”² Even his style of dressing in flannel is related to his old age and weakness since “a flannel waistcoat is invariably connected with aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and the feeble.”³ In comparison to Elizabeth’s indignant rejection of Mr. Darcy’s first proposal, Colonel Brandon might be the last man in the world Marianne could ever be prevailed upon to marry. From Elinor’s perspective, we could have a rather objective picture of this silent gentleman: “His appearance however was **not unpleasing** [...] though his face was **not handsome**, his countenance was **sensible**, and his address was particularly **gentlemanlike**.”⁴ Austen points out the stark contrast between physical attraction and sexual passion and the absence of them through Marianne’s opposite attitudes towards Willoughby and Colonel Brandon. Her second choice of Colonel Brandon is a compromise since she has already learned the possible danger of indulging in erotic charm and visual pleasure in her relationship with handsome Willoughby.

¹ *S&S*, p. 36, 40. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36. Emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41. Emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36. Emphasis added.

The circumnarration of sexual passion is realized in Austen's portrayal of her characters' admiration for physical attractiveness and its antithesis of physical aversion, which reveals the physical dimension, particularly the visual dimension, within it. However, she does not assent to excessive dependence on physical charm. And the interrelationship between erotic passion and visual pleasure is reinforced by her counterexamples of those unhappy couples who start a relationship only based on physical appeal.

4.2.2 Sexual passion within physical sensation and sensual experience

Seeing the body as the receptacle and barometer of passionate feelings, Austen draws on the physical language of passion during the process of sexually charged courtship by means of circumnarration. To be specific, sexual passion is indirectly expressed through her characters' physical language of five senses or the loss of five senses and their sensual experience caused by physical contact. It is impossible to get a comprehensive understanding of their romance without revealing the physical dimension of sexual passion in their interactions.

Anne Elliot's reprised courtship with Captain Wentworth is accompanied by sensual moments similar to sickness as a consequence of his words or actions and he is the cause and cure of her physical agony. Compared with Charlotte Brontë, Austen is not sensational in a violent way, but as Adela Pinch says, *Persuasion* explores "the origin of sensation" and demonstrates her mastery in "the representation of feelings."¹ Anne's reunion with Captain Wentworth, or in Pinch's word "re-courtship"², is composed of a series of physical sensations, including the visual, oral, aural, and kinetic senses, which remind the hero and the heroine of their past romance and revitalize the dormant affection between them. Their first encounter after seven years of separation

¹ Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

takes no more than five minutes but “a thousand feelings rushed” upon Anne.¹ It seems that all the world turns into a confusing background, “the room seemed full—full of persons and voices,” while all her feelings are driven to the foreground because of Captain Wentworth’s presence.² This kind of confusion or bewilderment resembles the experience of sickness in the form of vague views and blurring sounds. Other characters in the room cannot find anything suspicious about Anne’s behavior or between them, but her loss of vision and hearing is the circumnarration of her passionate emotion towards her secret ex-fiancé.

After Louisa’s accident at Lyme, Anne goes back to Bath and loses contact with Captain Wentworth for a while. One day, she happens to see him walking down the street. The unexpected sight of Captain Wentworth deprives Anne of the ability to stay calm and clearheaded: “For a few minutes she saw nothing before her; it was all confusion. She was lost,” and in order to behave herself in front of others she has to “scol[d] back her senses.”³ Once again, the heroine undergoes the loss of visual sense because of the hero. Exchanging a few casual words with him, Anne notices that Captain Wentworth blushes due to embarrassment and surprise, which is the first time since their reunion. His facial expression suggests the possibility of his affection in return, and this inference conjures up mixed feelings within her heart. Anne cannot help feeling “agitation, pain, pleasure” simultaneously and this stressful situation “between delight and misery” builds up the circumnarration of her inner passion vividly.⁴

Captain Wentworth and Anne talk about the union of Louisa and Captain Benwick, who was still in grief because of the premature death of his fiancée Fanny Harville a few months earlier. He strongly endorses Benwick’s attachment and declares: “A man

¹ *P*, p. 70.

² *Ibid.*

³ *P*, p. 206.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207

does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!”¹ Here Captain Wentworth is talking about Captain Benwick, but at the same time he is talking about men’s constancy in general, including that of himself. This indirect emotional declaration holds Anne’s attention closely and makes her oblivious to the outside world, including “the various noises of the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door, and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through.”² Perceiving his implication within this pronouncement, Anne suffers the sensation similar to sickness once again, “struck, gratified, confused, and beginning to breathe very quick.”³ The affectionate revelation from her beloved functions as a switch causing her loss of hearing and shortness of breath, and all these symptoms belong to the indirect rendering of her barely controllable emotion inwardly.

In the White Hart Inn, Anne is listening to the conversation between Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft before she notices “an unexpected interest” from Captain Wentworth and is captivated by the sudden feeling of “a nervous thrill all over her.”⁴ We know that Captain Wentworth is writing the crucial letter of confession to Anne, but she has no idea of that, and she only finds he stops writing and “give[s] a look, one quick, conscious look at her.”⁵ His attention makes her anxious, and therefore she loses her aural sense and could not hear anything distinctly, “it was only a buzz of words in her ear, her mind was in confusion.”⁶ The readers would fail to perceive this heroine’s passionate affection like other characters if Austen does not present her state of sensual chaos disguised by her composed appearance.

After reading Captain Wentworth’s confession letter, Anne can no longer hold back her overflowing rapture: “Every moment rather brought fresh agitation. It was

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *P*, p. 272.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁶ *Ibid.*

overpowering happiness [...] the first stage of full sensation.”¹ Ten minutes’ reflection is not enough for her to recover from such an ecstasy, and it becomes difficult for her to react in a normal way: “The absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle; but after a while she could do no more.”² She cannot find her sense of comprehension, “[beginning] not to understand a word they said,” and she has to ask for permission to leave early since “she looked very ill.”³ Her abnormal behaviors and quasi-illness contribute to the circumnarration of her highly passionate inner world. To some extent, Anne is sick, or she has been sick for the past years since their separation, and Captain Wentworth’s letter of confession is the prescription for her aching soul that has been trapped in memory and misery all this time.

Another significant circumnarration of inner passion consists in the physical language of a change of complexion. The blush belongs to the category of physical language that reveals the character’s emotional turbulence indirectly. Anne used to believe that she has already excluded blushing from her life: “Anne hoped she had outlived the age of blushing; but the age of emotion she certainly had not.”⁴ Yet her body always betrays her true feelings. Right after the Lyme accident, Captain Wentworth publicly announces his appreciation of Anne’s ability and insists on her staying to look after Louisa, “speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past.”⁵ After hearing his praise, Anne has to pause for a while in order to stay calm but what cannot be covered up is the fact that “[s]he coloured deeply.”⁶ Here the uncontrollable blush could be taken as the circumnarration of Anne’s ardent emotions.

In Bath, when they talk about Captain Benwick’s change of heart, Captain

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.

² *Ibid.*, p. 281.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *P*, p. 57

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Wentworth professes that men's affection is constant. Anne is strongly affected by his displaced confession and her cheeks redden instantly. Captain Wentworth worries that Lyme might leave a negative impression on her mind due to Louisa's accident, but Anne explains that except for the last hours of anxiety, it has involved "a great deal of enjoyment. So much novelty and beauty!"¹ After this dialogue, Austen inserts a brief description of Anne's expression in the brackets, "(with a faint blush at some recollections)."² Of course, the recollections refer to their mutual memory of that seaside place and Anne blushes only because Captain Wentworth appears in her reflections. I am of the same opinion as John Wiltshire that the blush externalizes desire and passion by denying it, which "heighten[s] whatever erotic tensions may be latent in the conversation or interchange in which it occurs."³ Anne cannot resist the temptation to think of Captain Wentworth secretly and obviously it affects her deeply. The heroine does not expose her inside feelings straightforwardly, but Austen's readers have access to her irresistible passion from her blushing cheeks.

Strictly speaking, there is no direct body contact between Captain Wentworth and Anne, but Austen does allude to some incidents of indirect body contact between them and all of them takes place in public with at least a third person at the scene. The characters' sensual experience during this process serves as the circumnarration of the sexual energy in their courtship. One day, Anne is troubled by her naughty nephew who is riding on her back. Captain Wentworth shows up in time and solves the problem by taking the boy off her back: "In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being released from him."⁴ In this physical contact, the heroine is portrayed as a passive agent who realizes what happened when it's over, which indicates the hero's resoluteness and the heroine's confusion at the same time. Austen does not add any descriptions of the hero's action or thought, but we can perceive his concealed passion

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

² *Ibid.*

³ John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 18.

⁴ *P*, p. 94.

towards the heroine from his prompt action to free her, because there is no sign that he could forgive her until then. His physical emancipation initiates her confused sensations immediately: “Her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless [...] with most disordered feelings.”¹ She feels grateful for his kindness yet his avoidance of her thanks or talking to her is excruciating, “a confusion of [...] very painful agitation [...] she could not recover from.”² This subtle body contact suggests a strong magnetism between Captain Wentworth and Anne considering its cause in the former’s readiness for action and its aftermath in the latter’s disordered sensations.

Comparatively direct body contact can be found in the episode where Captain Wentworth hands Anne into the carriage. What is interesting is that this scene appears twice in the story and both are subsequent to a climactic event concerning the hero’s understanding of the heroine. The first one happens after a long walk in Winthrop, during which Anne overhears a conversation between Captain Wentworth and Louisa. The former proclaims his preference for the quality of “decision and firmness.”³ The latter mentions Charles Musgrove’s admiration for Anne and her refusal to marry him due to Lady Russell’s persuasion. This anecdote acts as an intertext of Captain Wentworth and Anne’s past romance and solidifies Anne’s negative image as the one who is not firm.

Anne is fatigued after the long walk, and on their way back they come across the carriage of the Admiral and his wife. Anne still feels tortured by the awful experience of eavesdropping, but the next moment, she finds herself being handed into the carriage by Captain Wentworth before realizing what has happened. Similar to his liberating intervention in relieving Anne from her nephew, he doesn’t consult with her and takes action resolutely, “without saying a word, [he] turned to her, and quietly obliged her to

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

be assisted into the carriage.”¹ Again this episode is recorded from Anne’s perspective, and she is a passive figure into his physical performance: “Yes; he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it.”² I agree with Pinch that his intruding image makes this physical contact “both erotic and strangely intrusive, described as impingements from the outside world.”³ As a totally passive being at the disposal of Captain Wentworth, she loses her kinetic sense and cannot do anything nor react immediately. Anne’s passionate affection is circumnarrated through her oscillation between heaven and hell, or between mutual love and unrequited love: “she could not contemplate without emotions so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed.”⁴ On the one hand, she understands and is also deeply moved by his kindness because he notices her weariness and helps her out without delay. On the other hand, since he could not give up his resentment and forgive her, this small interlude is not only a reminder of their former happiness but also a confirmation that those days of tenderness and warmth have so far passed away.

The other case occurs after Louisa’s accident. Louisa jumps off the steps of the new Cobb against Captain Wentworth’s advice and appears lifeless after falling on the ground. Confronting the disastrous event, only Anne stays calm and makes a prompt decision to call for a surgeon. When all the other people have no idea of what to do, Anne is the one “to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth.”⁵ Captain Wentworth cannot help counting on Anne and expresses his confidence in her ability to take care of the injured Louisa: “if Anne will stay, no one so proper, so capable as Anne.”⁶ After deciding to leave for Uppercross, Captain

¹ *P*, p. 107.

² *Ibid.*

³ Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 152-53.

⁴ *P*, p. 107.

⁵ *P*, p. 130.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Wentworth directly hands Anne into the carriage before she realizes it for the second time: “In the mean while she was in the carriage.”¹ Outwardly, this moment of physical intimacy resembles the previous one in that Anne is still the passive agent who only regains her consciousness after everything is done. Inwardly, for his part, the image of Anne is totally different from the one after the overhearing event; for her part, Captain Wentworth’s changing attitude and rising admiration compensate for her long-awaited affection. Therefore, this body contact makes Anne feel “full of astonishment and emotion” rather than sickness like confusion or agitation.² Given this unexpected incident, Captain Wentworth starts to have doubts about his stubborn partiality for the quality of firmness, and realizes that “a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness as a very resolute character.”³ That’s when he begins to reconcile with Anne and reconsider their possible future.

The character of Charlotte Lucas is also presented as a lady of twenty-seven years old whose prime age of beauty and youth has passed away. She yields to material security and marries prudish Mr. Collins towards whom she feels no love nor passion but aversion and revulsion. Anne Elliot resorts to passion instead. Janet Todd is correct in the observation of her inner world: “whatever she had properly accepted as a young girl, she now thinks passion, sexual passion, more important [...] than security, rank, and kinship.”⁴ Anne’s father and elder sister take no account of Captain Wentworth in spite of the fact he makes a large fortune from the Napoleonic war since it does not improve his standing on the social ladder and he’s still considered lower class. Besides, as mentioned in the analysis about denouement, Anne’s decision to marry down also means that she’s going to live an unstable life. For all that, she chooses the man who is the source of her passion and sensual experience.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

⁴ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 127.

Emma undergoes a similar sensory experience because of Mr. Knightley. In the story of Emma and Mr. Knightley, it takes some time for our heroine to recognize her heart, and one important advance on her side is related with a moment of body contact, a circumnarration of the physical passion between them. At Box Hill, Emma satirizes Miss Bates openly and Mr. Knightley rebukes her for her rudeness. After that, Emma is repentant for her incivility and spares no efforts to make good with Miss Bates. Mr. Knightley is gratified by her attitude and “looked at her with a glow of regard.”¹ A glance seems not enough for Mr. Knightley to express his feeling: “by a little movement of more than common friendliness on his part. — He took her hand.”² Emma is confused about this behavior because she is not certain who is the one that has taken the initiative, “whether she had not herself made the first motion, she could not say.”³ Facing his tenderness, Emma must have been so nervous that she loses her consciousness and memory at that moment, “she might, perhaps, have rather offered it—but he took her hand.” Todd sees here the turbulence of “erotic charge” and claims that “the pair move so close that physical boundaries disappear.”⁴ Being overwhelmed by an instant instinct of inner passion, Mr. Knightley is about to make a further move: he “pressed it, and certainly was on the point of carrying it to his lips”⁵ Out of the blue, he does not fulfill his original intention: “from some fancy or other, he suddenly let it go.”⁶ This moment of physical sensation together with Mr. Knightley’s unfinished gallantry make Emma puzzled, but before long she could perceive his overflowing affection within.

After realizing her own emotions, Emma suffers a lot since Harriet has a secret

¹ *E*, p. 405.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 112.

⁵ *E*, p. 405.

⁶ *Ibid.*

crush on Mr. Knightley and she is not certain whether Mr. Knightley shares the same feeling. Therefore, Mr. Knightley's confession relieves her. All of her gratitude and delight explode instantaneously: "Her mind was in a state of flutter and wonder [...] She was in dancing, singing, exclaiming spirits."¹ She can only calm down by exhausting her body, "till she had moved about, and talked to herself, and laughed and reflected, she could be fit for nothing rational."² Similar to Anne Elliot's experience of quasi-sickness, Emma is tortured by the symptoms of fever: "As long as Mr. Knightley remained with them, Emma's fever continued; but when he was gone, she began to be a little tranquillised and subdued."³ To some degree, Emma's condition resembles the response of sexual arousal and that means she's been stimulated by Mr. Knightley's presence and utterance.

Austen's treatment of physical experience pertains to what Peter Brooks claims as "epistemophilic project," which focuses on the awareness and acquaintance through the body "since eroticism makes the body most fully sentient and also most 'intellectual,' the most aware of what it is doing and what is being done to it."⁴ Her heroines are conscious of their physical feelings and sensations, and on the basis of sensory experience they come to know their own body and affection and that of the heroes. All their physical perceptions build up the sexual dimension of their courtship.

4.2.3 Passion oriented courtship from visual pleasure to playful flirtation

Jan S. Fergus observes that "flirtation is inherently ambiguous in Austen's social and sexual world — it can be a prelude to serious courtship, it can be merely playful, or it

¹ *E*, p. 498.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

⁴ Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 278.

can be mocking or self-serving.”¹ The ambiguous and public features of flirtation make it a kind of circumnarration in which passion cannot be communicated in a straightforward way. It is interesting to review the flirtatious play between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, a prelude to their serious relationship. Generally speaking, their romance is composed of several stages from physical magnetism and playful flirtation to passionate confession. Elizabeth’s beautiful eyes together with her energetic spirit gradually attract Mr. Darcy. He is bewitched by her intelligence and archness and cannot help following her, flirting with her, and finally proposing to her.

If you take the story of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth as lacking sexual appeal, you might have overlooked some details of emotional transformation happening between them, on Mr. Darcy’s side in particular. It is true that when they first meet each other, Mr. Darcy disparages Lizzy’s physical appearance as only “tolerable,”² and notices “more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form.”³ Gradually he discovers that in spite of all kinds of imperfections, her face becomes favorable for being “rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes.”⁴ Since then, the hero starts to appreciate the heroine in more aspects, including her “light and pleasing” figure and “easy playfulness.”⁵

It is mentioned that the Bennet girls have wild spirits, and if Lydia is the embodiment of this, Elizabeth is not different to her youngest sister, only in a less extreme way. Unexpectedly, her kinetic spirit and physical energy successfully promote Mr. Darcy’s admiration. Jane catches a cold after being caught in the rain and has to stay at Netherfield for a few days. Elizabeth takes a long walk from Longbourn in order to keep her company. Mr. Bingley attempts to justify Elizabeth’s behavior in terms of

¹ Jan S. Fergus, “Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen’s Novels,” *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 78.

² *P&P*, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

the noble quality of good conscience, “an affection for her sister that is very pleasing.”¹ Yet the Bingley sisters see nothing but her “untidy hair” and “dirty petticoat” after a long walk in the mud.² Caroline Bingley attacks Elizabeth’s wildness insolently, “an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum.”³ As for Mr. Darcy, he finds that the outdoor adventure does not affect his positive impression of Elizabeth at all. On the contrary, he is touched by the “brilliancy” of her complexion and her beautiful eyes are also “brightened by the exercise.”⁴ In addition to her beautiful eyes, he enjoys looking at her glowing face after springing over puddles and jumping over stiles. About this episode, Heydt-Stevenson offers a far-fetched yet also amusing interpretation that Mr. Darcy’s appreciation of Elizabeth’s radiant complexion could be examined in medical discourse that exercise is associated with intelligence and fertility.⁵ This episode captures our brilliant heroine’s liveliness and unpretentiousness, which implies her sexual appeal. Elizabeth avoids a tragedy like Lydia’s because she attains a kind of balance between sexual wildness and civil tameness.

Then comes the flirtatious interaction between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, that originates in their bilateral misunderstanding and then is driven forward by their playful banter. When being attracted by her easy playfulness, Mr. Darcy finds his arrogance and indifference replaced by rising curiosity, “[beginning] to wish to know more of her.”⁶ It is interesting that Elizabeth excludes the possibility of his admiration right away and comes to a conclusion that she is only the object of his disapprobation: “there was something more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right.”⁷

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *P&P*, p. 36, 39.

⁵ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 71.

⁶ *P&P*, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Regarding him as the most disagreeable man, she decides to strike back courageously: “He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him.”¹ As for self-important Mr. Darcy, he mistakes Elizabeth’s impertinence as a kind of refreshing interest in himself.

Mr. Darcy’s growing tolerance towards Elizabeth in respect to a series of dance invitations is the circumnarration of his rising passion. He used to have a notorious saying about his aversion to dancing: “Every savage can dance.”² His original negative image is established when he refuses to ask Elizabeth to dance. This time, when Sir William Lucas encourages him to invite her to dance, he does not decline the suggestion and “requested to be allowed the honour of her hand.”³ To his surprise, Elizabeth turns down his invitation determinedly, she “instantly drew back [...] with some discomposure,” and even Sir William could not change her mind at all.⁴ Confronting her refusal, Mr. Darcy is amused rather than offended: “Her resistance had not injured her with the gentleman, and he was thinking of her with some complacency.”⁵ He admits to Miss Bingley that the ball is never boring because of this young lady, “meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.”⁶ Her refusal only excites him further.

Mr. Darcy has no idea of Elizabeth’s true feelings and tries to invite her to dance once again. Considering his negative attitude towards this physical entertainment, Elizabeth chooses to keep silent with a smile. When he repeats the invitation, Elizabeth presents a clever reply:

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³ *P&P*, p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

“You wanted me, I know, to say ‘Yes,’ that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare.”¹

Evidently, there is a great disparity between their interpretations of Elizabeth’s reaction. Elizabeth enjoys dancing and of course cannot consent to Mr. Darcy’s absurd contempt. Mistaking herself as the object of his criticism, Elizabeth is not afraid of expressing her true ideas and she intends to tease him. Once again, she fails to affront this gentleman. His mind is engaged with increasing admiration, and thus there is nothing offensive but “a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody.”² Mr. Darcy gets captivated by the girl, the one he once looked down upon and “had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her.”³ It never occurs to Elizabeth that her arch retort can attract the very demanding Mr. Darcy and give rise to romance between them.

Now that “[t]o be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love”⁴, Mr. Darcy attempts to persuade Elizabeth to be his dancing partner once more. This time, Elizabeth is not prepared for his sudden appearance and accepts his offer. She does not enjoy it better than dancing awkwardly with Mr. Collins. At first, both of them keep silent because of a reticent disposition on his side and uncomfortable reluctance on her side. Then mischievously Elizabeth decides to break the ice since “it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige him to talk.”⁵ Mr. Darcy is not

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*

³ *P&P*, pp. 56-57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

displeased and even smiles when she teases his taciturnity and want of a subject in conversation. Yet his patience fades away when Elizabeth brings up the subject of Wickham and attempts to argue in the latter's favor. There is no doubt that the dance ends in dissatisfaction on both sides but not to an equal degree. For Elizabeth, her resentment towards this man is raised to a new high. As for Mr. Darcy, he forgives Elizabeth for her ungrounded accusations and turns his anger towards Wickham the liar, "for in Darcy's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards her."¹ Poor Mr. Darcy is blinded by his passion, which nullifies Elizabeth's opposition and thus what remains is only her easy playfulness.

Mr. Darcy can always be amused by Elizabeth's witticism and a passionate energy lies in their exchange of teasing remarks. When Mr. Darcy points out Miss Bingley's design to show off her figure by taking a walk in the room while being observed, Miss Bingley asks Elizabeth how they shall punish such "abominable" speech. Elizabeth resorts to her quick humor: "We can all plague and punish one another. Tease him—laugh at him. Intimate as you are, you must know how it is to be done."² Miss Bingley mentions that Mr. Darcy is not someone to be laughed at, then Elizabeth makes fun of his quasi-perfect disposition. I agree with Heydt-Stevenson that Elizabeth's intelligence and liveliness carry a kind of "physical charge" that dissolves her original hostility and intensifies her sexual attraction.³ Her witty words and laughter succeed in drawing Mr. Darcy closer to the swirl of love and passion. As a result, he begins to worry that he's been too preoccupied with this attachment. Considering Elizabeth's unrespectable family members, Mr. Darcy decides to leave Netherfield abruptly. His sudden decision reflects that his inner passion is almost out of his control and the only way to quench his growing admiration towards her is to keep a distance from her.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 81.

After a few months, when they meet each other at the Rosings, Mr. Darcy finds it still impossible to repress his affection for Elizabeth and he cannot help looking at her attentively. Noticing that Elizabeth is playing piano and Colonel Fitzwilliam is sitting beside her, he walks towards her in order to see her clearly, “making with his usual deliberation towards the pianoforte stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer’s countenance.”¹ Elizabeth misunderstands his intention as a kind of disrespect and teases him: “You mean to frighten me [...] by coming in all this state to hear me? I will not be alarmed though your sister does play so well.”² She admits that she’s not good at playing piano in an open manner and makes an effort to resist his sense of superiority: “There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me.”³ It seems that Elizabeth is trying to provoke him and maintain her self-esteem through witty retorts. Familiar with her verbal humor, Mr. Darcy is amused greatly: “I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own.”⁴ In order to eliminate his negative image, he also attempts to explain his coldness at the ball and defend himself for his unsociable inclination. In fact, these two characters form a theatrical couple who are fond of exchanging playful banter. The heroine delights in providing her portion full of wit and vivacity, while the hero “enjoys the flirtatious—even racy—attention she gives him, often with the sting of unusual criticism in its tail.”⁵

Mr. Darcy’s first proposal is a vivid circumnarration of his uncontrollable passion. While Elizabeth is cultivating her prejudice, Mr. Darcy has already overcome his own

¹ *P&P*, p. 195.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 71.

and finally makes a passionate proposal. He admits his weakness in front of a mounting obsession for Elizabeth: “In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed.”¹ Then comes the most famous love confession in Austen’s works: “You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”² It is noteworthy to scrutinize the terms of this proposal. In the main clause, the modal verb, “must”, underscores his irrepressible eagerness and impulse. In the subordinate clause, an exclamatory sentence, Mr. Darcy applies two verbs, “admire” and “love”, to express and emphasize his sincere feelings, and the adverb, “ardently”, is used to highlight the intensity of his love. Just as Janet Todd states “his emotions are as close to sexual infatuation as Austen can reasonably come within the convention of her day.”³ If he could stop here, it might not end as a totally embarrassing failure. Afterwards, Mr. Darcy begins to enumerate Elizabeth’s inferior family members in this romantic confession scene, which turns absolutely unromantic and is very inconsiderate. In spite of that, this incautious proposal against Mr. Darcy’s sense of reason just reveals his overwhelming passion for the heroine. I agree with Jon Spence that although Elizabeth is way better than her mother Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Darcy’s impulsive judgement could not be regarded as superior to that of Mr. Bennet’s years earlier.⁴ In the course of their flirtatious interaction, Mr. Darcy finds that Elizabeth’s only tolerable appearance and her unsatisfactory family ties cannot belittle her beautiful eyes, her lively spirit, her sisterly love, and her witty humor. Driven by sexual passion within, he gazes at her through an ardent filter and dreams about marrying her as soon as possible until being turned down ruthlessly.

Austen is trying to defend sexual energy in the course of courtship, which usually starts from physical attraction, moves to playful flirtation and ends up with passionate confession. That’s the reason why it is easy to take her descriptions of social interactions

¹ *P&P*, p. 210.

² *Ibid.*

³ Janet Todd, *op. cit.*, p. pp. 72-73.

⁴ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 103.

for granted and fail to decipher her implied erotic code. With the help of circumnarration, she uncovers the social dimension of erotic passion and “without embarrassment or alloy, the novel normalizes it, rendering it almost invisible.”¹

4.3 Circumnarration of Sexuality: The Fallen Woman

It is said that the theme of Austen’s work has been set from the very first aphoristic sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*: man and woman, or in other words, what happens between man and woman. We have addressed Austen’s indirect rendering of passion in courtship, then what about the unbridled passion: sex itself? As stated by Jon Spence, sex “is a moving force in all of her novels [...] a strong though inexplicit element in all of her novels.”² I cannot see eye to eye with Irvin Ehrenpreis that Austen does not give narration of “sexual passion at its feverish height.”³ In fact, her discussion of fallen women in relation to erotic gifts and such sexual scandals as elopement and adultery belongs to the circumnarration of sexuality at its feverish height. Austen acknowledges the vital importance of impulsive feelings and raging hormones in the relationships between men and women without showing us what happens in the bedroom. At the same time, she draws a remarkable distinction between the licentious courtship (pursuit of marriage) and the illicit affair (pursuit of pleasure).

Unbridled passion is invested in a love token like a lock of hair. The keepsake of hair is a synecdoche of one’s body that carries a strong sense of erotic implication in a romantic relationship. In Marianne’s story, this sensory gift echoes her resemblance to two other fallen women and a couple of hints of her loss of chastity. As for Elinor, that ring with hair is rather a parody of this romantic fashion in Austen’s lifetime and

¹ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 72-73.

² Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: a life* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 238.

³ Irvin Ehrenpreis, “IV. Austen: The Heroism of the Quotidian,” *Acts of implication: Suggestion and Covert meaning in the Works of Dryden, Swift, Pope, and Austen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 112-13.

suggests that our heroine is only one step from jumping into the same tragedy and being ruined. Acknowledgement of corporal reality has nothing to do with support for the indulgence of fierce desire and sensual pleasure. Austen does not approve of the impulsive choices of elopement and adultery. She spends quite a few words exploring human frailty that is triggered by physical temptation, including the elopements of Lydia and Wickham, Julia and Yates, and Lucy and Robert. What happens between Henry and Maria is an illustrative demonstration of degeneration from sexual attraction to verbal flirtation, from erotic theatrical dalliance to irretrievable adulterous elopement. Austen is ahead of her time when she takes elopement and adultery as weakness of humanity instead of as a property crime.

4.3.1 Erotic love tokens

In a letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen says that “I hope somebody cares for these minutiae.”¹ As John Mullan states, the “wonderful connectedness” of Austen’s novels consists in “minutiae”, because those seemingly trivial details “reveal people’s schemes and desires.”² Here, “minutiae” refers to the details where the body is metaphorically condensed or displaced, which incubates the warmth of ardor and intensity of desire. One detail worth mentioning is the love token of hair. In the traditional Chinese wedding ceremony, there is a custom of knotting the hair of the newly married couple, which manifests the union of husband and wife. It is said that in Britain, lovers gave hair as a love gift in the 18th and 19th centuries.³ The preference of hair as a token in a romantic relationship is not a coincidence in spite of great disparities between eastern and western cultures. According to Mariana Warner, different from other organs, one’s

¹ JA to Cassandra Austen, May 20 [1813] *Letters*, p. 218.

² John Mullan, “Introduction,” *What Matters in Jane Austen? Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), pp. 5-6.

³ Shirley Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery. Victoria and Albert Museum Introductions to the Decorative Arts* (Owings Mills, MD: Stemmer House; London: Victoria and Albert, 1985), p. 36, 41.

hair “is organic, but less subject to corruption” and “like a fossil [...] it lasts when parted from the living organism to which it once belonged.”¹ The fashion of hair exchange stands for a kind of promise and engagement between two lovers.² In Austen’s works, the hair token is more like an erotic circumnarration of sexual connections. Above all, one’s hair is the manifestation of one’s physical body and thus is closely related with sexual desire and sexual energy. Besides, the custom of hair exchange (usually taken from the female to the male) as a love token indicates their intimate physical relationship, which points to the loss of chastity and the image of the fallen woman. Therefore, the relevant episode of the hair token is always a disguised way to address the topic of sexuality.

An awareness of sexual energy in *Sense and Sensibility* is conjured up by a lock of hair. Margaret, the third daughter of the Dashwoods, exposes a secret to Elinor: “I have such a secret to tell you about Marianne. I am sure she will be married to Mr. Willoughby very soon.”³ Elinor doesn’t believe her groundless assertion by pointing out her previous misunderstanding. Margaret claims that she is quite certain because Willoughby has got Marianne’s hair and she was the witness to that scene: “I am almost sure it is, for I saw him cut it off.”⁴ This time, Elinor has no choice but to accept her surmise. Based on Margaret’s description, it is Willoughby who has asked for Marianne’s hair at first, which could be regarded as a way of proposing: “he seemed to be begging something of her.”⁵ Therefore, Marianne’s granting permission to have her hair cut shows that she is positive towards his proposal: “presently he took up her scissors and cut off a long lock of her hair.”⁶ More than that, since hair is an extension of her body, this permission indicates that Marianne agrees to give her body to him.

¹ Mariana Warner, “Bush Natural,” *Parkett* 27 (1991): p. 7.

² Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³ *S&S*, p. 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*

In a more sensual episode, Willoughby kissed Marianne's hair. It means he is synecdochally kissing Marianne's body and this dramatic scene reveals their physical intimacy with erotic intensity. After the amorous kiss, Willoughby "folded [the hair] up in a piece of white paper; and put it into his pocket-book."¹ According to Leigh Hunt, Willoughby's action is quite in fashion at that time when a lover's hair was regarded as the "most precious of all keepsakes" and was often used as a bookmark.² In Marianne's eyes, as well as in Elinor's, Willoughby's careful and intimate arrangement of the hair is a revelation of his love and an embodiment of his promise and their engagement. In consideration of the erotic implication of hair and the subplot of Eliza and Willoughby, we could come up with a different view: after taking advantage of her body, he just adds a new name (marked by her hair) on his list of victims.

The lock of hair is soon returned to Marianne along with Willoughby's heartless denial of their relationship: "I have been honoured from you, and the lock of hair, which you so obligingly bestowed on me."³ It is difficult for Marianne to believe that the supposed proof of their secret engagement turns out to be a joke: "I felt myself [...] to be as solemnly engaged to him, as if the strictest legal covenant had bound us to each other."⁴ She lays bare Willoughby's infidelity and betrayal: "This lock of hair, which now he can so readily give up, was begged of me with the most earnest supplication."⁵ For Willoughby, it is only an embodiment of her body and sensual beauty. Accordingly, the act of kissing her hair is a circumnarration of his sexual exploitation, and the erotic love token becomes a circumnarration of her loss of virginity.

Heydt-Stevenson is especially interested in Austen's diction of the "lock" and "hair". By referring to the psychological connotations, she finds that "hair" represents

¹ S&S, p.64.

² Leigh Hunt, "Pocket Books and Keepsakes," *The Keepsake* (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1828), p. 18.

³ S&S, pp.193-94.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁵ *Ibid.*

“female sex” while a “lock” signifies “female pudenda”.¹ Therefore the collocation of lock and hair doubles the erotic sensation of this episode: it “punctuates the literal and symbolic hybridity of this erotic moment.”² After shaking off the illusion of love and commitment, this lock of hair is nothing but an eroticized symbol of Marianne’s body and a manifestation of their sexual connection. Heydt-Stevenson adds that the term “pocket” has revealed Willoughby’s scheme because it also means “to connive at; to do anything clandestinely.”³ In this way, Willoughby’s conduct only uncovers the essence of his concupiscent seduction, which results in Marianne’s ruin.

Austen leaves charged puns to decipher the circumnarration of Marianne as a victim of Willoughby’s sexual exploitation based on the accident when they first meet. Sir John and Mrs. Jennings are two representative figures who seek pleasure in spicy allusions. Austen implies that Marianne is a victim of Willoughby’s seduction by saying “tumbling” twice and “spraining of ankles” once. In a dialogue with Elinor, Sir John makes a comment on Willoughby, “he is very well worth catching [...] and if I were you, I would not give him up to my younger sister, in spite of all this **tumbling** down hills.”⁴ On the surface, this “tumbling” refers to the accident that Marianne falls downs and Willoughby helps her out. According to *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, another entry is worth noting in this context that to “tumble” means to “lie down to a man” and “tumble-in” means sexual intercourse.⁵ Sir John repeats this suggestive topic to Marianne afterwards, “you will make conquests enough [...] Poor Brandon! he (Austen’s original spelling of lower case) is quite smitten already, and he is very well worth setting your cap at [...] in spite of all this **tumbling** about and

¹ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 366, 489.

² Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 36.

³ *S&S*, p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47. Emphasis added.

⁵ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 915.

spraining of ankles.”¹ By repeating this sexual slang, Austen is trying to build a connection between the loss of hair and the loss of her purity.

Here Sir John brings up another interesting term “spraining of ankles”. On the one hand, this phrase refers to the fact that Marianne breaks her ankle in the accident. On the other hand, there is a vulgar entry about “ankle” that “a girl who is got with child, is said to have sprained her ankle.”² Marianne is not pregnant, at least according to the text, but the previous victim of Willoughby’s temptation, Eliza, is found pregnant after being abandoned, like her poor mother Eliza, Colonel Brandon’s first love who was forced to marry Colonel Brandon’s elder brother. She cannot suffer the desperate marriage and lands herself in adulterous relationships. She was seduced and ruined, and later on died in poverty and illness, leaving a daughter named after herself, “the offspring of her first guilty connection”.³ Yet her misfortune is repeated in the fate of young Eliza who was seduced by John Willoughby. The same name here implies their similar tragic fate, and the intertextual link between Marianne and two Elizas leads us to the erotic circumnarration of her loss of chastity. Consciously or not, Sir John drops a dubious hint that something has already happened between Marianne and Willoughby.

Heydt-Stevenson points out that she is also alluding to Alexander Pope’s comic poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, which intensifies its tragic implication.⁴ There is another clue that refers to Marianne’s “fall”: the hill where Marianne falls down and then is rescued by Willoughby is called “High-Church Down”, which “implies a fall from grace—or, at the least, a fall from propriety.”⁵ This name emphasises Marianne’s physical movement from a higher place to the ground and suggests her loss of purity

¹ S&S, p. 47. Emphasis added.

² Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: S. Hooper, 1785), p. 6.

³ S&S, p. 220.

⁴ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions Subversive Laughter Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 37.

⁵ Sharlene Roeder, “The Fall on High-church Down in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*,” *Persuasions* 12 (1990): p. 60.

and reputation. The above evidence about circumnarration of sexuality gradually builds up Marianne's image as a fallen woman.

The parody of the hair token finds a parallel in the story of Elinor and Edward. Marianne notices Edward's ring "with a plait of hair in the centre."¹ Edward behaves awkwardly when being asked who the owner of the hair is. He does not deny Marianne's guess and asserts that the hair belongs to his sister Fanny. Both Marianne and Elinor have suspicions about his explanation, because the color is a little different from that of his sister and his embarrassment is too obvious to ignore. The Dashwood sisters believe that the hair belongs to Elinor, only that "what Marianne considered as a free gift from her sister, Elinor was conscious must have been procured by some theft or contrivance unknown to herself."² By offering and withholding information at the same time, this erotic ring of hair complicates the plot by creating sexual tension between Elinor and Edward.

Very soon, Elinor is obliged to accept the fact that what she takes as a flattering confirmation of Edward's affection has nothing to do with herself. When realizing that Elinor might be a love rival, scheming Lucy Steele deliberately discloses her secret engagement with Edward: "I gave him a lock of my hair set in a ring [...] and that was some comfort to him, he said, but not equal to a picture."³ According to Lucy's words, we could generalize about several things. Different from Willoughby's active request, this plait of hair is a gift from Lucy to Edward, which thus represents her subjectivity and hypostatizes her longing for physical intimacy. As a displacement of its owner and her body, this ring with a hair token in it becomes a circumnarration of both the physical relationship and affectionate connection between them. There is no further evidence of Lucy losing her chastity to Edward, but it is still reasonable to leave her as a "possible" fallen woman.

¹ *S&S*, p. 104.

² *S&S*, pp. 104-105.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Ironically, Edward forms an attachment to Elinor while constantly wearing the hair token that represents unswerving love round his finger (although Lucy herself proves to be unworthy of it), which turns into an embodiment of his disloyalty. Later on, Lucy marries Edward's brother Robert because the former is disinherited, and that hair token is undeniably reduced to a joke. In her letter to break off their relationship, Lucy provides a possible plan for that unique gift: "Please to destroy my scrawls—but the ring with my hair you are very welcome to keep."¹ Of course Edward won't keep it; instead he would be quite excited to dispose of that ridiculous ring and the fetter of a hasty betrothal. Up to now we can say that Elinor almost shares the same fate as her sister to become a fallen woman since she falls in love with a man who has already been affianced to another woman. Austen allows Elinor the opportunity to avoid this catastrophe just in time because she is the incarnation of sense as the title proclaims. Therefore, Elinor should be an "almost" fallen woman.

Austen expands the erotic dimension of the love token in terms of physical intimacy and sexual exploitation, which leads to the portrait of the fallen woman. In this way, she successfully makes a detour to the subject of sexuality and at the same time avoids referring to sexual behaviors in the text that might offend the readers in her lifetime. Consequently, the fossilized object of hair is endowed with sexual vitality and participates in the development of romance as an active agent.

4.3.2 Elopement out of human frailty

Austen does not broach the details of sex but treats the social issues of elopement and adultery as the circumnarration of sexuality in relation to the portrait of the fallen woman. For Austen, what matters is not the behavior itself but its motivations and corresponding results, and it is of great importance to interpret sexuality with the premise that there is

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

a difference “between the pursuit of a woman as an object of pleasure and the courtship of a lady whom one is to marry.”¹ Her period was known as the Age of Scandal, where citizens are familiar with royal scandals about adultery, mistresses and illegitimate children.² At that time, both adultery and elopement belong to the category of property crime: the former is a damage to a husband’s goods while the latter a damage to a father’s goods.³ Nevertheless, in Austen’s works, these scandals are never related to money and wealth but closely associated with human nature, passion and sexuality. Such conduct is against both social order and religious doctrine. But as the daughter of an English parson, Austen does not turn a blind eye to the frailty of humanity. Instead, she makes a candid record of human instinct and weakness and gives expression to both condemnation and sympathy. Besides, she does not restrain herself to the presupposition that the fallen woman is always the innocent and passive victim in sexual scandals.

The most famous elopement episode in Austen’s novels is that of Lydia and Wickham. We learn the news of this disgrace from Lydia’s own letter: “I am going to **Gretna Green**, and [...] there is but one man in the world I love, and he is an angel [...] it will make the surprise the greater, when I [...] sign my name ‘Lydia Wickham.’”⁴ The key words in Lydia’s note include her revelation of the man with whom she falls in love, and the name of the place she’s planning to go, “Gretna Green”. Here we need to have a quick look at the *Act of Parliament* issued on March 26th, 1753 in Britain, based on which it was illegal for young people under 21 to marry without parental permission.⁵ Comparatively speaking, Scottish law was not that demanding, and people only needed to make a declaration in front of a witness to get married. Therefore,

¹ Irvin Ehrenpreis, “IV. Austen: The Heroism of the Quotidian.” *Acts of implication: Suggestion and Covert meaning in the Works of Dryden, Swift, Pope, and Austen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 139.

² Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 57.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴ *P&P*, p. 319. Emphasis added.

⁵ Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Sydney: Jane Austen Society of Australia Inc, 2004), p. 82.

those determined couples made their way northwards, and the first town across the border, Gretna Green, became a haven for the elopers.¹ Lydia is only 15 years old when the story begins, and she has to ask for permission before getting married. Wickham is a playboy in great debt and there is no doubt that Mr. Bennet would never approve this union. Therefore, Gretna Green is surely their optimal choice.

It is likely that Wickham has made Lydia a promise otherwise she will not show off her happiness in the letter. Yet it turns out that Gretna Green is not Wickham's destination and they settle in London with no sign of marrying. During this period of time until Mr. Darcy finds them, this young couple live together in London, and we can draw the inference that they must have become de facto man and wife. Moreover, Wickham seduced Mr. Darcy's sister Georgiana and the only reason that the plan failed was that Mr. Darcy discovers his scheme in time. Otherwise, Georgiana would be another victim. As a sexually irresponsible recidivist, it can be inferred that Wickham has taken full advantage of thoughtless Lydia. In addition to her ludicrous letter, Lydia leaves behind her "muslin gown" in which there is "a great slit".² This torn gown is another circumnarration of sexuality that Lydia has lost her chastity to Wickham.

However, this fallen woman should not be taken as a totally innocent victim. The elopement of Wickham and Lydia is possible because of the former's impudent seduction and the latter's reckless indulgence. If Wickham is a shameless seducer, Lydia is a proactive seducee. She never hides her sexual spirit and takes pleasure in flirting in public, especially at balls when she could dance with young men. As mentioned, Lydia inherits Mrs. Bennett's preference for officers in red uniform and Mr. Bennett's yielding disposition in front of sexual attraction. She often expresses her infatuation towards Wickham before eloping with him. Their flirtation flourishes in public, triggers seduction, and leads to a final elopement. This result could not be actualized without Lydia's help and encouragement. For all that, Lydia never sees the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

² *P&P*, p. 319.

whole thing as a dishonor for herself or for her family. In her eyes, it is full of fun: “You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I am missed [...] What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing.”¹ Paradoxically, she herself becomes the laughingstock in the neighborhood because of this scandal. She has to pay the price for her impulsive decision in regard to material life and spiritual life in the end. Due to their extravagant lifestyle, this couple have to move from place to place and ask for help from her sisters. Moreover, Wickham’s passion wears out very soon and he often goes out to enjoy himself while leaving Lydia alone.

In *Mansfield Park*, compared with the dramatic turning point of the extramarital affair between Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram, the elopement of Julia Bertram and Mr. Yates is less shocking and remarkable. It is still interesting to penetrate into Julia’s motivation in this matter. “[L]ess flattered and less spoiled,” Julia lives in the shadow of her beautiful and attractive sister, and is always in “a second place [...] a little inferior to Maria.”² She is fond of Henry Crawford too, but the latter pays more attention to Maria in spite of the fact that she’s already engaged to Mr. Rushworth. Feeling jealous about their intimacy and erotic flirtation, Julia can do nothing but suffer the “bitterness of the conviction of being slighted.”³ With no intention to reciprocate his love, she accepts the attention from Mr. Yates in order to distract her from her attachment to Henry.

Julia is always shadowed by the glamour of her Maria, even when it comes to the most fatal decision in her life: “Maria’s guilt had induced Julia’s folly.”⁴ The exposure of Maria’s adulterous scandal with Henry Crawford strengthens her dread of her father Sir Thomas Bertram and she dares not go back to Mansfield Park alone. She is the one

¹ *P&P*, p. 319.

² *MP*, p. 484.

³ *MP*, p. 484.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

who accompanies Maria all the time and she knows full well of their love affair. Therefore, she chooses to run off with Mr. Yates, and this is a hasty decision out of “selfish alarm” instead of sincere feelings or sexual impulse: “imagining its certain consequence to herself would be greater severity and restraint, made her hastily resolve on avoiding such immediate horrors at all risks.”¹ Julia’s life is an inferior parallel against that of Maria. At first, she follows her step and crosses over the locked gate. And now, she follows her to the road of no return. She is doomed to be a fallen woman when she chooses elopement out of selfishness and vanity initiatives.

Comparatively speaking, the elopement of Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars is a great relief for the readers as well as for the hero and the heroine rather than a moral degradation, because Edward is freed from his impulsive engagement years before and Elinor can finally get together with her beloved without being trapped in a love affair. Lucy breaks up with Edward only because the latter is disinherited when he insists on keeping his promise and marrying Lucy, who is not good enough for him. For snobbish Lucy, penniless Edward is definitely no longer her concern, and Edward’s brother Robert seems to be a convenient choice then and there. Without doubt the motivation for Lucy to run off is self-interest rather than love and passion, and Robert is just a silly man snared by her calculation. That’s the reason why we show little sympathy towards this fallen woman.

Austen disapproves of forced marriage, but at the same time she does not applaud the reckless decision of elopement and irresponsible sexual relationships either. She approaches the issue of elopement to address the topic of sexuality, but that’s not her final object. She keeps on exploring its causes and its influence. In her six completed novels, most cases of elopement are taken as a way to demonstrate human frailties, which consist of lust, avarice, selfishness, indulgence, irresponsibility and so on. She asks her readers to acknowledge the existence of human instincts and something more

¹ *Ibid.*

than that.

4.3.3 From theatrical flirtation to irretrievable adultery

The notorious adultery between Henry and Maria is another case of the circumnarration of sexuality. In Austen's works, sexual energy is channeled into the social form of flirtation, and "super-subtlety is required to gauge the recessed sexual desires and plots beneath the beguiling sociability of [her] protagonists."¹ Different from Mr. Darcy's seriousness, Henry only takes flirtation as a means of entertaining himself, "liking to make girls a little in love with him."² Their extramarital affair starts from Henry's erotic flirtation and gets accomplished by Maria's infidelity to her husband. Instead of dealing with the details of their sexual profligacy, Austen focuses on the process of how they are led to the love affair and how Maria is transformed into the fallen woman. It is mentioned that flirtation could be taken as a particular kind of circumnarration because it incorporates ambiguous implications and usually takes place in public. We can observe two crucial turning points in the process when Henry demonstrates his talent in managing flirtatious circumnarration: one is related to the erotic metaphor of the locked gate, and the other is related to their sexual intimacy by means of theatrical rehearsal.

It is a paradox that the prelude to the locked gate scene happens in the chapel, where the divine altar that witnesses the union of man and wife is situated. At Mansfield Park, Henry carries on his playful flirtation with the Bertram sisters and takes delight in turning them into love rivals. The group of people, including the Bertram sister, Edmund, Fanny, Mary and Henry, take a visit to Mr. Rushworth's house of Sotherton. When they are in the chapel, Julia calls Henry's attention by emphasizing the fact that

¹ Richard A. Kaye, "27 Clamors of Eros," *The Cambridge History of the English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 441.

² *MP*, p. 375.

Maria has become engaged to Mr. Rushworth: “Do look at Mr. Rushworth and Maria, standing side by side, exactly as if the ceremony were going to be performed. Have not they completely the air of it?”¹ Henry does not give a comment, but walks toward Maria and whispers: “I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar.”² On the surface, Henry is talking about her physical position in that chapel, yet Maria gets his circumnarration from his lowered voice that he is talking about her plan to marry Mr. Rushworth. She feels unsettled because of his oblique regret of her engagement: “Starting, the lady instinctively moved a step or two, but recovering herself in a moment.”³ Just a couple of words succeed in dragging Maria into the preset snare.

In want of “air and liberty”, the group of people walk out of the chapel to enjoy “the sweets of pleasure-grounds.”⁴ Then comes the notable episode of the iron gate. In the wood of larch and laurel, there is an iron gate that leads to a park, but the gate is locked. When Maria expresses her desire to pass through the gate in order to have a better view of the park, which can be read as the representation of uncivilized wildness and nature, Mr. Rushworth decides to go back and fetch the key. While waiting for Mr. Rushworth, Henry once again implies his pity for Maria’s imminent marriage and their future life in Sotherton: “I do not think that I shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now.”⁵ Henry is pushing Maria to face her inner anxiety of being stuck in a doomed marriage without love through this kind of circumnarration, and Maria’s uneasiness indicates that she has already been trapped by his suggestive tricks.

Maria admits to Henry: “the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. ‘I cannot get out,’ as the starling said.”⁶ This significant metaphor or circumnarration is taken from Laurence

¹ *MP*, p. 90.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶ *MP*, p. 102.

Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* in which the hero is imprisoned in France like a caged starling.¹ Maria feels kinship with the pathetic bird or the hero in Sterne's novel. She can see the park of freedom and joys but cannot reach it. Therefore, she feels much more agonized. Henry's appearance wakes her up from that self-deceiving dream of marriage, and she could no longer marry Mr. Rushworth as she has willingly planned. There is no doubt that Henry is delighted to witness her awakening passion and secret desire against the drive for material security and responsibility.

Cunning Henry plays down the option of waiting for the key from Mr. Rushworth and suggests that he could help her out of the plight if she wants. First of all, he offers another choice: "you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my **assistance**," in addition to the key or "Mr. Rushworth's **authority** and **protection**."² In his evocative persuasion, Mr. Rushworth's ownership of the key refers to his legal authority as a husband in their future marriage. Acting as the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Henry intends to convince Maria that he is the one to save her from confinement and bring her freedom, "if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not **prohibited**."³ The diction of "prohibition" somewhat stimulates Maria's rebellious spirit to resist against so-called authority and protection: "Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will."⁴ It is conceivable that she is tempted to take a bite of the forbidden fruit, cross over the hedge together with Henry, and escape her identity as a fiancée, because she is awakened and aroused by his indicative circumnarration.

Tony Tanner gives an insightful comment that although there is no substantial development in their relationship, the future destruction is implicitly demonstrated: "the confused, often furtive, criss-cross moving around in the increasing liberty and

¹ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 81.

² *MP*, p. 102. Emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* Austen's original spelling of lower case.

concealment of [the] garden [...] portends the more serious disorder that many of the characters will make of their subsequent lives.”¹ Fanny is a spectator of this remarkable scene of flirtation and seduction or stimulating circumnarration since he does not convey anything directly. She recognizes the erotic code and warns Maria of the possible injury: “You will hurt yourself.”² Here “hurt” refers to the present risk when she crosses over the gate but also predicts the future one when she betrays her marriage. Unfortunately, Maria refuses to take her words seriously and the prophecy comes true. This locked-gate episode is a metaphoric circumnarration that incorporates aspiration and temptation, incarceration and opposition, and the present and future.

Henry does not stop at the verbal level and extends his sexual circumnarration to the theatrical stage. Above all, the erotic aspect of their theatrical experience lies in the exciting fact that the home theatrical is prohibited by Sir Thomas and the content of the play they choose to perform is sexually arousing. It is not difficult to understand that this group of young people, excluding Fanny, could not resist the temptation to revolt against the prohibition while Sir Thomas is away from Mansfield Park. After a series of discussions, they come to an agreement about *Lovers' Vows*, which is adapted from a German script called *Das Kind der Liebe* (*Child of Love*) by Elizabeth Inchbald, and includes such steamy elements as flirtation, seduction, adultery, illegitimacy and libertinage. Maria and Henry play the roles of the deserted mother and her illegitimate son. Influenced by Sir Thomas, Fanny believes it improper to put on a play at Mansfield Park. Meanwhile, Fanny is offended by its content that involves illegitimacy, “the issue of unlawful, thoughtless eroticism”, and the representation of “indelicately blunt” courtship.³

At first, Edmund is hand in hand with Fanny to follow Sir Thomas' principle and protect Mansfield Park from being corrupted. Later on, he is assimilated by the thrilled

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 162.

² *MP*, p. 103.

³ Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

majority. She sees through his excuse for preventing strangers taking part in the play which might not be proper for Miss Crawford. In fact, it's only "an abdication of his true self in order to indulge a passional impulse."¹ Edmund's compromise gives Mary and him the opportunity to cultivate the tender bud of their relationship. From beginning to end, only Fanny is sober minded in this theatrical issue because she has realized the hidden peril of rampant desire, "in a house alive with sexual frisson it must prove dangerous."² She is the one that lends an ear to their lines read out with repressed feelings and witnesses their rehearsals performed with unrestrained passion. For these actors, acting serves as a kind of protective circumnarration in which is buried their overflowing passion and burning desire.

If the Sotherton episode only endows Henry and Maria with a half-expressed freedom of sexuality, the theatrical episode gives them a chance to develop a closer relationship, "suppressed and dubious desires start to emerge because of the release permitted by the playing of roles."³ Under the disguise of acting, Henry enjoys his flirtatious game with Maria in public with less restraint. On stage, he is free to express his affection with flowery words and loving eyes. He is given the right to touch Maria as well, and since physical contact is rarely seen at that time, this opportunity encloses "greater sexual and emotional power."⁴ Henry takes the Mansfield Park theatrical activity as "a pleasant dream!" and the recollection of this unforgettable experience always brings him "exquisite pleasure."⁵ Austen does not give a description of Maria's feelings during the flirtatious rehearsal, but we could infer it from Henry's exhilarating impression: "such an interest, such an animation, such a spirit diffused [...] We were

¹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 164.

² Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008), p. 83.

³ Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁴ Jan S. Fergus, "Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen's Novels," *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 80.

⁵ *MP*, p. 232.

all alive [...] I never was happier.”¹ Maria must be very excited that she could indulge her secret passion for Henry without being criticized as an engaged woman. The dream like ecstasy comes from shaking off all the shackles and discharging all their spirits through dubious lines and physical contacts. Edmund gives a plain explanation of the fatal attractiveness of acting that it could “do away all restraints.”² For Henry and Maria, acting is a kind of liberating circumnarration through which they can set free their repressed aspirations and actualize their illicit desires. This theatrical performance charged with erotic power helps them extend their instinctive longing to a new level and finally leads them to the sexual scandal of adulterous elopement.

The termination of Mansfield home theatricals is rather dramatic when Sir Thomas suddenly returns and the play is called off before Mansfield Park is destroyed in chaos: “The disordering and desecration of Sir Thomas’s ‘own dear room’ [...] ‘enacts’ a destructive disarrangement [...] to the essential centre of social order and authority.”³ I appreciate Tanner’s idea that this closure is also the end of “the larger, unnamed play of Mansfield’s Vows.”⁴ Based on the script, our professional actor Henry makes an end of his erotic play with Maria as his plan. Unprofessional actress Maria goes too far and cannot get herself detached from the erotic power of the stage as well as that play. Fergus maintains that Henry’s “playacted devotion” reinforces “the sexual tension” to a degree that can no longer be extinguished, “allowing Maria’s infatuation to become the sexual passion.”⁵ To be more precise, the sexual tension is a bilateral aftermath when we consider the fact that Henry is tempted to have an affair with married Maria after he has already fallen in love with Fanny and decides to show his sincerity and constancy. Austen domesticates the convention of introducing a sexual

¹ *Ibid.*

² *MP*, p. 159.

³ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 167.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵ Jan S. Fergus, “Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen’s Novels,” *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 81.

threat through theatrical paly, which could only be discharged by fulfilling it in reality.¹ Before the theatrical activity, their flirtation stays within the safety zone of verbal communication. After that, sexual implication is not enough to exhaust sexual desire, and that's when Austen comes up with the circumnarration of sexuality at its feverish height.

To some extent, “the attempt to turn Mansfield Park into a theatre [...] is like transforming a temple of order into a school for scandal.”² The play of *Lover's Vows* is halted by force in the middle of the novel, and the effect of the circumnarration of sexuality is delayed almost until the end of the story when Henry and Maria's pretended affection and body contact turn into a sexual scandal that strikes Mansfield Park unexpectedly. For Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, flirtation is safe and playful, and can also spice up their romantic relationship. Yet for Henry and Maria, it is dangerous and destructive. This scandal of adultery turns Maria into a fallen woman deserted by the Rushworths and the Bertrams and deprives Henry of the right to chase after his beloved Fanny Price.

This adulterous relationship constructs a unique circumnarration with multiple layers. The outer one refers to Austen's circumnarration of sexuality, which underlines its public dimension rather than the private one. The inner one refers to Henry's manipulation of circumnarration in order to seduce Maria, which takes form in flirtation (through suggestive remarks) and acting (through physical contact and erotic lines). Different layers of circumnarration work together to reveal the process of degradation of her characters. Despite her rendering of the fallen woman and sexual scandals, we should not take Austen as a preacher spreading the doctrine of female chastity. She is helping her readers (not only the female ones) to figure out the tricks of sexual avarice and exploitation in the name of striving for love or liberation.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

² Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 162.

According to Roy Porter, sexual knowledge is “a complex thing, desired, dangerous, denied all at once. And readers surely enjoyed playing with fire.”¹ For Austen’s readers, the fun of fire consists in perusing the desired (the sexual passion) and dangerous (the potential risk) part that is denied (referring to indirect presentation or circumnarration). The power of passion is revealed within the natural course from physical attraction to emotional attachment, from playful flirtation to sincere love and from sensory experience to ardent affection. Based on the characterization of the fallen woman, she alludes to the theme of sexuality in discussion of erotic gifts or sex scandals. Her circumnarration of passion and sexuality is accomplished by connecting corporeal reality with its social dimension and showing the sexually charged social interactions between men and women. The method of circumnarration challenges those stereotypes of Austen that she excludes the body and related matters and spurs a reevaluation of her work.

¹ Roy Porter, “The Literature of Sexual Advice before 1800,” *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 137.

Conclusion

This neonarrative study of Austen's novels needs to be situated in terms of the atmosphere of Austen criticism and changes in thinking about narrative discourse. The past two hundred years have witnessed shifts in emphasis of approaching Austen and her works from the literary domain to a broad sociocultural domain. In recent years, the interest of the Janeite members has expanded to almost every aspect related to her

works as well as the vivid life spanning the turn from the 18th to the 19th centuries. Therefore, we have such enthusiastic Janeite works as Kim Wilson's who brings about a series of interesting volumes with nice pictures and photos integrating Austen's novels with her life experience, including *In the Garden with Jane Austen* (2011), *Tea with Jane Austen* (2011), and *At Home with Jane Austen* (2014). And this booming cultural phenomenon acknowledges Austen's role as a cult figure rather than a writer only. Henry James was one of the representative figures that took Austen's popularity as "overdone reactions" due to commercial promotion in the early 20th century. He would repeat his violent rebuke if he saw the dramatic expansion of the Janeite phenomenon at present:

[...] we are dealing here in some degree with the tides so freely driven up, beyond their mere logical reach, by the stiff breeze of commercial, in other words of the special bookselling spirits; an eager, active, interfering force which has a great many confusions of apparent value, a great many wild and wandering estimates, to answer for. For these distinctively mechanical and overdone reactions, of course, the critical spirit, even in its most relaxed mood, is not responsible. Responsible, rather, is the body of publishers, editors, illustrators, producers of the pleasant twaddle of magazines; who have found their 'dear,' our dear, everybody's dear, Jane so infinitely to their material purpose, so amenable to pretty reproduction in every variety of what is called tasteful, and in what seemingly proves to be saleable, form.¹

Objectively speaking, it is not necessary to underestimate or ignore the driving forces of the publishing industry, commercial promotion and advanced multimedia technology in promoting Austen all over the world. In addition, we should keep a critical eye upon

¹ Henry James, "The Lesson of Balzac," *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 96 (1905): p. 168.

this phenomenon: one cannot but have mixed feelings in applauding the high visibility of Austen and wide circulation of her works on the one hand, and worrying about the focus on her literature itself undermined by the flourishing cultural industry on the other. Against this background, this project aims to explain her everlasting appeal especially for contemporary readers by revealing the modern spirit of her narrative art within apparently traditional works.

The emergence of neonarrative theory, a branch of postclassical narratology, not only changes the paradigm of thinking of narratology by liberating narrative study from structure but also offers a refreshing perspective from which to interpret Austen's novels. It can be shown that her way of writing challenges the conventional concept of narration by applying neonarrative strategies. By reviewing the development of neonarrative theory, this project clarifies the definition and application of the new concepts of disnarration, unnarration and circumnarration, and presents a systematic paradigm of relevant narrative methods in Chapter I. Neonarrative theory gets away from the static modes or universal principles that govern a text and invites readers to look into what is uncertain inside the text or outside the text, including what does not happen but is narrated, what happens but is excluded from the text, and what happens but is conveyed indirectly. These new concepts supplement the existent corpora of postclassical narratology, which replace classical narratology by alluding to other academic disciplines, and accordingly postclassical narrative study is more encompassing and comprehensive. It is worth mentioning that neonarrative theory still values and relies on the tool kits of classical narratology in terms of such ideas as narrator/narratee/reader in analysis.

Chapter II describes Austen's manipulation of disnarration in the form of imagination, misconception and deception, and deconstructs the opposition between the true and the false. Her characters are established in their interaction with hypothetical or false narratives when they are forced to modify and revise their perceptions of the world and themselves from various manifestations of disnarration, like fancies,

misinterpretations and lies. The essence of disnarration does not lie in its negative force but in its constructive and productive force that revitalizes the interchangeable roles of author/character/reader or liar/victim as her characters negotiate the difference between true and false narratives. It is interesting that as a master of narrative, Austen attempts to remind us of the risks of narratives during the process of discovering the “truth”. Or we can say that what matters is not the destination of the so-called truth, but the dynamic process in which her characters improve self-awareness (especially as an inevitable part of the heroines’ growing up), emotional intelligence (in respect to love and friendship), and social relations (usually about marriage).

Chapter III notes Austen’s management of unnarration on account of what is unable to be narrated and what is chosen to be narrated respectively. As a highly self-conscious writer, Austen knows that what can be narrated is limited and thus she only focuses on a small group of ordinary people in a country context and narrates their daily life within a small social circle. Yet the notion of unnarration greatly expands her supposedly narrow scope. She exposes the indispensable role of unnarration in the flow of communication through the presentation of highly emotional silences and the characterization of reticent heroines who take charge of narrative discourse by listening instead of saying, which thus transcends the boundary between narration and unnarration. In addition to disclosing her literary standard of narrativity, the operation of narrative refusal links her stories to the possible world of uncertainty and redefines the traditional view of the happy ending and romantic climax. The concept of unnarration integrates the past, present and future by referring to what has been narrated and what will be narrated, and the role of writer/narrator/speaker is bound together with that of reader/narratee/listener in the polyphony composed of narration/voice and unnarration/silence.

Chapter IV argues that the circumnarration of passion and sexuality uncovers the theme of corporeal reality in Austen’s novels. It is paradoxical that the sexual aspect has always been ruled out from the discussion of Austen although the key words of her

stories are love and marriage, which are interwoven with men and women and what happens between them. Her rendering of courtship is sexually charged in consideration of physical attraction (usually the first step of how the characters fall in love), sensual experience (usually in the form of losing the five senses or the symptoms of sickness) and playful flirtation (an essential component of romance). As for the subject of sexuality, she never invites her readers into the bedroom but resorts to portraying the fallen woman through erotic gifts and sexual scandals. Instead of turning a blind eye to human instincts, Austen examines passion and desire in the social context, which makes up the infinite space between narration and unnarration. At the same time, she verifies the potential risks of libido.

Creative and in-depth readings of Austen are made possible due to the employment of neonarrative theory, bringing a fresh light upon narrativity. It is fair to say that her narrative world is constructed in narration, and deconstructed and reconstructed in disnarration, unnarration, and circumnarration. The significance of what is revealed by looking at her novels through the neonarrative lens consists in her modern spirit of fluidity, possibility and infinity, which will be a new addition to the Austen study in the days of booming Janeite culture. According to W. Somerset Maugham: “What makes a classic is not that it is praised by critics, expounded by professors and studied in college classes, but that the great mass of readers, generation after generation, have found pleasure and spiritual profit in reading it.”¹ Austen has become an irreplaceable figure in the western canon because her works bring great pleasure and spiritual profit for her contemporary readers when they are deconstructing and reconstructing multiple interpretations in her dynamic narrative world.

This new reading of Austen’s novels further testifies to the applicability of neonarrative theory. Up to now, the theoretical study and relevant criticism in this area are still only beginning. This case study of Austen intends to draw more attention to this

¹ W. Somerset Maugham, “Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice*,” *A Truth Universally Acknowledged: 33 Reasons Why We Can’t Stop Reading Jane Austen* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 38.

provocative branch of postclassical narratology. Warhol has touched upon the cinematic field by means of neonarrative analysis, and we are looking forward to more studies of experimental practices in film and other types of media. Moreover, the situation in China is even less developed. As mentioned, only a few translations of neonarrative works can be found at present. It is reasonable that Chinese scholars should start from translating neonarrative theory and then make use of it in literature and other forms of narratives. And hopefully the unique style of Chinese literature and Chinese narratology could contribute to the development of neonarrative theory in turn.

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