

JANE AUSTEN AND CRITICAL THEORY

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CHAPTER 4

LOGICAL TIME IN AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*

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LOGICAL TIME IN AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*¹

Desire and the Unproductive Anxious Interval

Isabelle Michalski and David Sigler

In the popular imagination, Jane Austen reigns as the quintessential British novelist of manners, social convention, nation, and family.² But one could just as easily describe her as the novelist of desire, given the longing that motivates the plot of her every novel, or of lack, which she can treat as desire's origin. Austen's protagonists seem to have internalized an elaborate web of rules and prohibitions, which gives them a sense of their own lack and the lack in others, and this, in turn, can tend to generate desire, which, in turn, generates plot. Given this situation, we find it strange how infrequently Austen has been discussed from a Lacanian standpoint. Recent years have seen the first emergence of Lacanian work on Austen, after decades in which nothing of the kind had been attempted.³ Daniela Garofalo, whose work has led the way in this regard, despairs that "Jane Austen has rarely been read in conjunction with Lacanian theory," despite how Austen's subject matter—loss, desire, sexual difference, and social competition—"connects her powerfully to some central Lacanian concerns."⁴ One thing that a Lacanian approach to Austen would help us understand, we suggest, would be the function of time in her fiction. The question of time has been posed often in Austen criticism, especially with regard to *Persuasion*, and yet there remain gaps, which readers powerfully feel, between the subjective experience of time for the characters, the rigors of narrative time, and the steady march of clock time as the novel represents it. Emily Rohrbach has shown how these "gaps and silences" open into problems of "future anteriority," which seem to instantiate a "double 'time of reading.'"⁵ Lacan, as Rohrbach acknowledges, can be especially helpful as we continue to account for the temporal effects of this lack, and its significance for the novel's treatment of intersubjective desire.

In her classic analysis of *Persuasion*, Robyn Warhol points out that

Anne Elliot has no moment of looking at herself, no glance into a mirror or contemplation of any part of her body she might see—she becomes visible in the text only through the comments others make about how she looks.⁶

Others note, additionally, that Anne is often either silent or ignored.⁷ Unable to look at herself directly or be heard, Anne's situation recalls a logic game presented by Jacques Lacan in his essay "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism," included in *Écrits*, in which three prisoners, given no access to verbal communication or a mirror, race each other to deduce, through observations of one another's behaviors, the color of a disk affixed behind each of their backs.⁸ Each time one of the prisoners hesitates to leave, the others can begin to surmise what their own disk must look like. The implicit lesson of Lacan's thought experiment, as Derek Hook explains, is that "I can have no full understanding of what I 'objectively' am."⁹ If the basic stock in trade of psychoanalysis is that, given the unconscious, no one can know one's innermost self, then "Logical Time" suggests that one cannot hope to learn about oneself in any external way, either. Hence psychoanalysis finds itself in the province of the nineteenth-century novel, and especially of Austen: free indirect discourse constructs, exploits, and ironizes exactly this gap between subjective and objective self-understandings.

Persuasion is a novel about repetition, and many of its episodes seem to reenact themselves in new contexts throughout. This essay will examine, in particular, a chain of four scenes, each of which reiterates its precursor: first, as Charles and Mary Musgrove try to leave their son's sick-room to meet Frederick Wentworth; second, when Frederick Wentworth first sees Mr. William Elliot looking at Anne; third, as everyone assembles in the Octagon Room before the concert; and fourth, as Frederick and Anne exchange glances during the concert. Each scene exploits aspects of the previous one, such that the novel becomes, in a way, a series of logic puzzles in which a character attempts to earn the right to leave a closed room or otherwise flee the scene. The scenes build upon each other in the ideological work that they perform: first (in the sick-room of little Charles), asserting that gender identity can be logically derived from one's uselessness; second (with the arrival of Mr. Elliot), that a man's desire is activated only in a triangular relation to the desire of other people; third (in the Octagon Room), that desire depends upon a scopic field which, when properly interpreted, will cost the characters their very subjectivity; and fourth (at the concert), that characters deduce their own desirability to the other only through the ordeal of desubjectivization. These scenes, then, do not replicate each other, so much as lift one element from its immediate predecessor and organize new relations around it, each time a bit more complex in its intersubjective structure than the time before. In these redoubled episodes, *Persuasion* produces, through a network of looks, glances, and measured pauses, a way of thinking about oneself in and through one's lack in relation to the desire of the other, first to anchor a self

within Regency gender hierarchies and second to certify the desire of these gendered subjects. Lack, one might even say, is the very thing produced, and Austen ensures that it must be endured as if it were a positive entity if desire is to function as it should. In the process of its manufacture, a complex temporality emerges that undercuts any distinction between objective and subjective knowledge. The repetition of the scenes ensures that a symbolic frame, separate from any individual character's wishes or the demands of the clock, begins to fashion its own form of temporality that we could call "logical time."

Persuasion begins with two characters seeking, and failing, to know what they are "objectively": we have Anne Elliot, who tends to view herself as others see her; and her father, Sir Walter Elliot, who takes pleasure in locating himself in the pages of the baronetage. The novel is all too pleased to make a contrast between them: Anne, regretful and withdrawn, provides a poignant counterpoint to the overconfident and proud Sir Walter. But what exactly is the difference? Both, unable to understand themselves through introspection, are searching for evidence of themselves in the eyes of external authorities. In the long aftermath of her split with Frederick Wentworth, Anne has taken on "all the additional pain of opinions ... totally unconvinced and unbending," and has identified with those painful opinions to the point of thinking herself "only Anne."¹⁰ When informed that Frederick has found her "so altered he should not have known you again," she nods "in silent, deep mortification" for "doubtless it was so" (P 65). Though the narrator seeks to draw a contrast between Sir Walter's pretension and Anne's self-loathing, we can see how these are both, at root, narcissistic formations: learning to see oneself from the perspective of the rules and systems that surround one is, too, a sort of narcissistic attachment, for it enables one to maintain an attachment to the ego-libido as a "deflection of sexuality."¹¹ Narcissism, Freud explains, is not self-love but the love of the lack in oneself: it involves objectifying one's lack and loving it, and so loving what one used to be, or might have been.¹² To put the difference in Lacanian terms: Anne tries to locate herself in the imaginary register, comparing herself against the idealized models of behavior and systems of rules designed to control her destiny, while Sir Walter looks for himself in the symbolic, fearful that he might disappear if he cannot find his family name in the public record, and relieved to be plotted within a network of places, names, and dates meant to confer prestige (P 3). The daughter is governed by the ego ideal; the father by the superego. In this sense, Anne and Sir Walter have simply found different levels, imaginary and symbolic, at which to invest ego-libido at the expense of object-libido. The significance of "Logical Time" is that it crosses those levels: it enables a symbolic structure to emerge from the play of imaginary identifications.

"Logical Time" is an exceptionally complex essay, even by Lacanian standards, yet the premise is simple: three prisoners are attempting to earn their freedom from an apparently sadistic prison warden. Knowing only that as many as two black disks and three white disks might be in play, each prisoner must deduce,

without the aid of a mirror or verbal communication, based on the actions of his two counterparts and the observed colors of their disks, the color of his own disk, which is affixed behind his back. The thought experiment at first seems to be about game theory, which would be unusually rationalistic for the world of psychoanalysis; quickly, though, it begins to incorporate the experience of time as it crosses between subjective and objective registers. Because, as it turns out, all three of the disks are white, the winning contestant must quickly learn not only to see himself through the eyes of his two counterparts, but also to see each of them as the other sees him. Effectively, the game parodies but negates any sort of affirmative logic based on everyone's pursuit of their own rational advantage; one needs to objectify oneself radically—indeed, do away with any sense of oneself as a choosing subject—to arrive at the correct answer. In this sense, it disassembles the model of subjectivity prized in Michael Chwe's *Jane Austen, Game Theorist*, with its emphasis on rational strategic choice,¹³ and becomes an allegory for subjectivity writ large. It also reverberates, allegorically, with questions of civil rights, given its criminological bent, the perpetual whiteness of the disks, and the failed processes of recognition at play. Lacan uses the thought experiment to illustrate several things: the way that subjectivity is built intersubjectively through the regard of other people; how the mirror stage plays out all the time in social situations, even in the absence of a mirror; how we become subjected to symbolic arrangements automatically, once a lattice of identifications is built at the imaginary level; and how time functions in multiple ways, at the subjective and objective levels, all at once—and even undoes any distinction between those levels—as the subject learns to inhabit and respond to its rhythms.

All of these lessons are relevant to *Persuasion*, which presents courtship as a similar sort of intersubjective prisoner's dilemma. Its characters must learn how to desubjectivize themselves if they are to become marriageable: Anne, in particular, learns to stop trying to fill the gaps of her self-knowledge through external validation, and instead learns to accept and embody the gap that she "is." It is a puzzle without an easy answer because, as we shall see, she can fathom her own nothingness only once Wentworth discerns it. Having learned to identify with her own lack, she next learns to measure the way that the intersubjective field around her bends to accommodate it, and to reason from that field's inhuman perspective. Successful courtship in *Persuasion* is about learning to see how one's lack is taken up in the eyes of the other, and to accept, before others do, that it will never be successfully accommodated into the social register. Desire is, consequently, irreducibly alien and excessive, and it gives way to a strange temporality. This is a novel in which time can seem to have a life of its own: *Persuasion* focuses the reader's attention, to an unusual extent, on the time that has already passed prior to the diegesis, and ends with "the dread of a future war" (P 275). Although many (including Lorraine Fletcher) have noted that "time is pervasive" in *Persuasion*, given that a longstanding erotic attachment is shown, in the end, to be still feasible, such readings focus especially on the outcome of the marriage plot.¹⁴ In such an interpretation, it

would seem that Anne gradually learns to shake off the influence of meddling family members and to pursue the man that she has always wanted. Although such an account of *Persuasion* highlights the effects of time and repetition in the novel, it neglects to consider how time, moving multiply between the subjective and objective registers of the novel, crosses through and cuts across Anne and Wentworth, even, at times, canceling them out. As we see it, only once they factor in this lack can the marriage plot find its culmination, and Anne escape from economic precariousness and social humiliation.

Austen critics have, in recent years, begun to think about *Persuasion* in terms of theory of mind. In such a reading, the novel's unique textures arise through characters thinking about other characters thinking about them.¹⁵ "Logical Time" works from a similar premise but complicates the situation by adding the element of time: whereas cognitive approaches can tend to focus on the imaginary aspect of the situation—that is, the way that characters evaluate themselves in the presumed thoughts of others—Lacan's essay teaches us to consider how symbolic structures, such as time, constantly intersect with and work against such identifications. Lacan outlines a range of temporalities that begin to come into play, seemingly autonomously, as the prisoners take stock of themselves in the other prisoners' eyes. First, we have "the instant of the glance," when the prisoners look at their counterparts' disks and take note of the color. Second, we have "the time of comprehending," as the successful prisoner processes the implications of the other characters' disks for his own. This phase continues through the next two phases: there is a delay between "the time of meditation," in which each prisoner considers that the others are not moving, and "the assertion about oneself," in which he begins to realize, through the others' inaction, that his own disk must be white, too. Next comes "the time of lagging behind the other," a second pause appearing as the prisoner realizes that the other characters have similarly deduced the whiteness of their disks—a time that "lags behind the other" in the prisoner's subjective experience but not in any objective way. This double delay is what finally confirms the whiteness of the disk; it gives way, then, to "the moment of concluding."¹⁶ Even a relatively simple inter-subjective triangle such as this, precisely because it depends upon theory of mind, quickly becomes vulnerable to a range of competing temporalities that can sometimes be measured with a stopwatch but cannot be reconciled with clock time. Lacan tracks a process by which these temporalities begin to fit inside of one another: it is even possible, he suggests, for "the time for comprehending" to be nearly simultaneous with "the moment of concluding," so that the entire drama can be compressed into "the instant of the glance."¹⁷

Lacan wonders: would the time of "Logical Time" be objective, like a clock, or subjective, like the feeling of time passing? Remarkably, it undoes this distinction. At the moment of the prisoners' doubt, objective time reappears as a limit to the time of comprehending. This is what Lacan dubs the "force of doubt." Through it, at the instant of the glance, the time for comprehending is objectified: "One must know that one is white when the others have hesitated twice in leaving," he

explains. That is, a prisoner can determine his own disk's color only because the other has hesitated twice, such that the assertion of certainty is "desubjectified to the utmost." Yet its basis is "the *subjective* evidence of lag-time." Confronting this enigma, Lacan takes pains to explain the solution in two ways, subjectively and objectively, knowing that the solution can be grasped only if one has both explanations together.¹⁸

Persuasion, like "Logical Time," suggests that subjective and objective knowledge are mutually constituted and destabilizing. When, at the end of the novel, the narrator utters an unexpected "I" by saying: "This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth," the narrator asserts its subjectivity just as it finally articulates a supposedly objective "truth" (P 270). Similarly, when Mrs. Smith warns Anne about Mr. Elliot, she offers the information in the name of objectivity: "Facts shall speak" (P 216). Although "facts," speaking for themselves, would seem to enforce something objective, they arise from something emphatically intimate: Mr. Elliot was, Anne is told, "the intimate friend of my dear husband," and so Mrs. Smith, as someone married to Mr. Elliot's "intimate friend," knew him "intimately" herself, and from that perspective "found them most intimate friends" (P 214–216). As Mrs. Smith's "intimate" knowledge of an "intimate" friendship becomes desubjectivized as autonomous "facts," Anne reacts with a pause, which in turn leads Mrs. Smith also to pause in response to the force of Anne's doubt, and through this play of pauses the conversation traverses the objective and subjective registers, producing asynchronous temporalities. "Anne's astonished air, and exclamation of wonder, made [Mrs. Smith] pause," we are told, and Anne begins to realize that there is something in Mr. Elliot "which I could never quite reconcile with present times" (P 215–216). We have, here, the entire apparatus of Lacan's "Logical Time" essay: characters measuring one another's pauses and responding with pauses of their own, as a way of learning about their marriageability; the play of time that moves across and between these pauses, and these characters, to undo any distinction between the realms of intimacy and fact. The scene is crucial, somehow, to the plot of the novel, and yet it adds nothing: Anne disliked Mr. Elliot before she heard Mrs. Smith's report, given his imperceptiveness at the concert; the information from Mrs. Smith merely helps her decide that she still does not like him. Repetition, as a structure, is so thoroughly built into the plot of *Persuasion* that its most crucial scenes can add nothing to the plot—a plot that, not coincidentally, tells the story of a woman getting back together with her former suitor.

The first of our repeating scenes comes as the Musgroves care for their son Charles, who has fallen ill. Although it seems to concern sympathy and care, it quickly becomes a disquisition about gender roles; although it seems to be a rare case of Austen thinking about married life rather than courtship, the scene is also, as Christopher Nagle has shown, crucial to *Persuasion's* marriage plot.¹⁹ When little Charles falls ill, his parents jostle for the chance to leave the sick-room to meet Captain Wentworth. Charles Musgrove Sr., Mary Musgrove, and Anne

Elliot become, in effect, three prisoners trying to outwit one another for the chance to leave the room. Anne is not yet adept at this game, but she watches the others play it masterfully, which will help her later when the scene recurs in more complicated form at the concert hall in Bath, during an episode that Alan Palmer has called “an attribution manual in its analysis of the behavioral clues on which theory of mind rests.”²⁰ In little Charles’s sick-room, Charles and Mary relay arguments through Anne to establish themselves as male or female—a binary system for thinking about gender that can function like the black and white disks of Lacan’s scenario. The key to the situation is the direction of its reasoning: it is not that Charles Musgrove, knowing that he is a man, claims the prerogative to come and go as he pleases; rather, he seems to argue, in relation to the other two who are marked “W,” that he can therefore leave. This is the simplest version of Lacan’s scenario: it is as if, knowing that only two W disks can be in play, Charles Musgrove can logically deduce that his disk is marked M. After all, his son

was to be kept in bed, and amused as quietly as possible; but what was there for a father to do? This was quite a female case, and it would be highly absurd in him, who could be of no use at home, to shut himself up.

(P 59)

That is, he argues that *because he is useless here*—as there is only enough work for two—*he must be a man*. Mary, like the second prisoner in Lacan’s game, sees Charles making that calculation and so makes a similar calculation of her own, arguing: “to be sure I may just as well go as not, for I am of no use at home—am I? and it only harasses me” (P 59). It would seem that, in order to leave the room, Mary and Charles will have to be able to justify their exit “upon logical and not simply probabilistic grounds,” and that those grounds pertain to a discovery of *who I am* as a gendered subject.²¹ If Charles Musgrove has earned the right to leave, it is because he is useless here, and thus a man; his being authorized to leave the room is what retroactively certifies that he has been a man all along.

In response, Mary begins to make the case for her own uselessness, which inaugurates a second round of negotiation. When Anne tries to correct her sister in these suppositions, based on the presumption of what she sees as natural gender roles, Mary begins to assert that she “[has] not nerves for the sort of thing” (P 61). That is, temporarily cut off from any “natural” claim to uselessness, she relies on the presumption of women’s weakness as her ticket with which to escape the room, which introduces a second pause that now has to be evaluated. Anne, outmaneuvered by the others, can respond to their arguments only as they move toward the door.

A similarly triangulated scene arises later, as Mr. Elliot makes his entrance to the novel. Here, Wentworth begins to feel the stirrings of desire—all despite knowing that his desire is really someone else’s. That is, emptied of desire himself, he learns, through the act of looking at Mr. Elliot looking at Anne, how to

assume that desire as his own—a structure that will be repeated during the pivotal concert scene in the novel's second half. The narrator emphasizes the way that Wentworth watches Anne being watched, and again, as in the scene of Charles's illness, it is the meaning of manliness that is being established through logical deduction:

It was evident that the gentleman, (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked around at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance,—a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, “That man is struck with you,—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again.”

(*P* 112)

Wentworth is learning to see Anne being seen: his aspect “shewed his noticing of” it. The subjective work of the scene transpires in the space of the dash between “you” and “even I, at this moment.” We see Wentworth traverse the distance between Mr. Elliot and himself (figured temporally, as a “moment”) by interpreting glances: as Lacan warns, in “the instant of the glance,” “the time for comprehending” is compressed into “the moment of concluding,” enabling Wentworth to react “instantly” to Mr. Elliot's sexual provocations. It is as if the dash separating Wentworth from Mr. Elliot begins to yoke them, such that Wentworth, too, given his recourse to Mr. Elliot's glances, can be “completely a gentleman” at “this moment.” The novel thus extends the logic of Charles's sick-room into the negative yet visible space of a marked absence: the dash. Later, as we shall see in the concert scene, Austen will begin describing this sort of absence as an “interval”; here, this dash, giving body to the interval at the textual level but invisible except as silence in the discourse, produces similar anxieties as it begins to organize desire around its parameters. A dash, as Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda remind us, attests to “a pause in thought, a pause for thought, but also to a kind of short-circuiting or cancellation of thought,” one that “induces a moment of essential uncertainty in reading.”²² With Austen, the novel has no sooner started to produce “gentlemen” than it measures them for completeness, and thus deficiency; that unspeakable deficiency acquires a mark of its own (i.e.,—), which immediately inaugurates a chain of meaningless repetitions (e.g., “a momentary glance,—a glance of brightness”) that, at the macro-level, includes the scene itself in its gentleman-making powers, given the logical time of Charles's sick-room. But then the negation itself immediately repeats, to mark the distance between “you” and “even I.” Thus, a dash, being a repetition of a repetition of an absence, generates eroticism from the looks exchanged at “this moment.” The novel has begun to exploit its recurring anxious intervals; as these continue to recur, the novel's marriage plot will take shape.

All the while, there remains a gap between Mr. Elliot and Captain Wentworth. As Kay Young has suggested, when Wentworth “sees the stranger admire

[Anne], his own seeing shifts from seeing her 'altered beyond his knowledge' to altered to his knowledge."²³ Put in Lacanian terms, Wentworth is internalizing Mr. Elliot's desire for Anne as his own, and experiencing it subjectively. Becoming "himself" once he is arrested by the scopic drive of the other, he arrives into the formation of phallic enjoyment (the "glance of brightness") that authorizes his own desire for Anne. Put in Freudian terms, he is moving from ego-libido to object-libido, per the demands of civilization. Yet successful courtship will depend on his learning to give up this position: later in the novel, as Garofalo suggests, he will learn to become "not-all" a "gentleman," as it were, and radically to accept his own loss of phallic subjectivity.²⁴

Even here, there is a wound at the basis of this chain of repetitions: this scene, which accomplishes the restoration of Wentworth's desire (albeit as Mr. Elliot's desire), carries with it echoes of the Musgroves' arguments from the scene of little Charles's illness. This constitutive or "inaugural" wound will then become the basis of a further iteration at the concert in Bath, where Anne will deduce, from observing herself being observed by Wentworth, that Wentworth feels jealous of her interactions with Mr. Elliot.²⁵ As the characters assemble before the concert, the Octagon Room takes on the ambience of a Lacanian prison: once again, we have characters trapped together in a room, scrutinizing one another, waiting and watching, and trying to learn about themselves in the process. This time, however—as in Lacan's example—all of the "disks" are "white," and so the scenario reaches its maximum complexity. The narrator introduces the characters individually, suggesting that each person is closely observing every other, and uses a discourse of time, waiting, and delay quite emphatically:

Sir Walter, his two daughters, and Mrs. Clay, were the earliest of all their party, at the rooms in the evening; and as Lady Dalrymple must be *waited for*, they took their station by one of the fires in the octagon room ... Captain Wentworth walked in alone. Anne was the nearest to him, ... she *instantly* spoke ... [Her father and sister] being in the back ground was a support to Anne; she *knew nothing of their looks*.

(P 197; *emphasis added*)

The narrator highlights the extent to which Anne is registering the facial expressions and body language of those around her, and to which Anne is pausing once she registers this information: "She was *just in time by a side glance* to see a slight curtesy from Elizabeth herself," we are told (P 197; *emphasis added*). The time of moments, of pauses, is seemingly adjunct to these anxious glances. We see Anne move from a time of comprehending to a time of meditation, as she thinks about the way that she is being seen by those around her, and as she measures the duration of their pauses as a way of seeing herself beheld. Anne is relieved to know, for instance, that Wentworth "*seemed in no hurry to leave her*"; watching Wentworth talk to her father, she surmises and then "*comprehend[s]* that her father

had judged so well” (P 197–198; emphasis added). When she speaks to Wentworth, she is more interested in his pauses than in the content of the conversation, which stays at the level of awkward small-talk: “He stopped. A sudden recollection seemed to occur,” she notes (P 198). The pauses seem to inaugurate Anne’s time for comprehending, which, in turn, allows her to meditate for a moment (and so “her spirits improved”). She can then think about her own position in relation to the desire of these others: she was “struck, gratified, confused, and beginning to breathe very quick, and feel an hundred things in a moment” (P 199). Yet only when Wentworth delays a second time can Anne complete her “moment of concluding”: “She was *just in time* to see him turn into the concert room. He was gone—he had disappeared: she felt a *moment’s* regret ... he would find her out ... *She was in need of a little interval for recollection*” (P 201; emphasis added). In its exploitation of these successive temporalities, in its willingness to draw conclusions from moments that emerge out of pauses and their affective aftermaths, the scene in the Octagon Room plays out exactly as does the prisoners’ game in “Logical Time.” Anne learns about Wentworth’s feelings not by engaging with him directly, but by deducing them through her relations, and his relations, to third parties such as Mr. Elliot or Wentworth’s brother. The discourse becomes one of retrospection and probability: “Anne could think of no one so likely to have spoken with partiality of her many years ago, as ... Captain Wentworth’s brother,” the narrator explains (P 204). Time becomes subjectively measured and multiple, and so it is meted out oxymoronically, in a pace “reserved yet hurried” (P 207).

Lacan explains that logical time operates through “two suspensive scansions”: only when the other prisoners pause for a second time, having once started toward the door, can a prisoner finally conclude, once and for all, that his disk is white.²⁶ To be successful at this, a prisoner would need to “integrate” the pause into his reasoning. That is the key to the game: the two pauses are part of the problem, not outside of it. But they are also outside of it, because it works retroactively: one has to have already completed the game to experience the pause as meaningful. Hence these pauses are “intrinsic to logical ambiguity”: they are the result of the reasoning process, yet retroactively become the object of the reasoning process. Hence “two scansions are necessary”—that is the only way to verify the proper interpretation—and so what we see is “the subjective unfolding of a temporal instance” through the very “slipping away of the subject.”²⁷ Paradoxically, the subject disappears as the experience of time becomes subjective; that is why Lacan has to explain the outcome twice—subjectively and objectively—letting each analysis produce the other.²⁸

Anne’s inner confidence that “he would find her out” encapsulates the deep irony unfolding in this chapter, which unfolds across a similar paradox: Anne, learning to see herself through Wentworth’s jealousy, begins to identify herself as the object of his desire, until his acts of “finding her out” can be internalized as her own epiphany. Austen begins to play with the word “interval”: given the

setting at a concert, the “interval” that Anne “was in need of” is furnished by the “interval” in the evening’s musical program. These levels comically collapse when the narrator claims that “the anxious interval wore away unproductively” (P 205). It is as if the interval of the musical performance, which is timed, has become subject to the subjective time of anxiety and productivity; it is as if the interval were the main performance, and hence a time of possible productivity, and the concert were the break in the action (of courtship). Put another way, Anne is now measuring time in “intervals” that do not precisely align with the interval of the concert, making the event’s interval seem “anxious” and “unproductive.” That is, the interval has been subjectivized, to the extent that Anne begins to embody the “interval” itself.

Hence the narrator tells of a nothingness contained “within” Anne that begins to function as her inner truth: “Anne saw nothing, thought nothing ... Her happiness was from within. Her eyes were bright, ... but she knew nothing about it” (P 201). Rather than being cut off from her enjoyment, as she had been at the start of the novel, here she begins to *be* the cut, directly: “at present, perhaps, it was as well to be asunder,” she catches herself thinking (P 201). This is her “assertion about herself” that follows her “time of meditation.” Although we are told that Anne’s “happiness” stems “from within” herself, we get only indicators that challenge this view. Anne, for instance, deduces that Wentworth “must love her” from the way that he looks at Louisa Musgrove and Captain Benwick: “She could not contemplate the change as implying less” (P 202). It is a matter of logical deduction based on the pauses observed in the others. “Anne’s eyes had caught the right direction, and distinguished Captain Wentworth,” the narrator tells us: “As her eyes fell on him, his seemed to be withdrawn from her” (P 205). In these sentences, her eyes take on a life of their own, becoming the subject of the sentence in their own right. This is also a telling use of the passive voice: it is not that Wentworth, a subject, has withdrawn from her, but that he *had been* withdrawn; the crossfire of their gazes seems to have desubjectivized them both. Anne, accordingly, sees herself not being seen, and, registering that asymmetry, pauses accordingly: “It seemed as if she had been one moment too late; and as long as she dared observe, he did not look again” (P 205). This is what Lacan would call “the time of lagging behind the other”—the crucial second pause in the intersubjective schema. Indeed, her pause sets up a whole new round of interpreted glances and pauses: “When she could give another glance, he had moved away.” “She was so surrounded and shut in,” says the narrator, implicitly likening the scene to a prison or siege, “but she would rather have caught his eye” (P 205). Then, adjusting her seat like a hunter the better to see herself being seen, Anne begins to register herself as the object of Wentworth’s gaze: “Captain Wentworth was again in sight. She saw him not far off. He saw her too; yet he looked grave, and seemed irresolute” (P 206). Note that “irresolute” is a subjective term used to interpret someone’s pause. Yet when Wentworth suddenly leaves the concert, Anne can finally conclude that he desires the nothingness that

she “is”: “there is nothing worth my staying for,” he says dismissively, but which she reads as his positive affirmation of the valuable “nothing” that she is—what Lacan would call the *objet petit a*—a constitutive absence in her more than her, rather than a repudiation of what is present (P 207). It is not simply that the seat beside her at the concert is vacant; it is that she has “a vacant space at hand, when Captain Wentworth was again in sight” (P 206). When he abruptly leaves the concert, Anne has identified the color of her disk, so to speak: “Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! it was the only intelligible motive” (P 207). It is a logical deduction based on her ability to interpret his pauses retroactively, now that they have both been desubjectivized. In this sense, courtship in *Persuasion* is not a matter of fantasy “making up for lack,” as Garofalo has shown of *Emma*, but rather a matter of becoming lack directly.²⁹

By living without subjectivity, Anne, like her father, carries on what Freud would call a “twofold existence”: her innermost thoughts are other people’s opinions, while her “own” desire is experienced as an alien parasite. Rather than having her triumphantly overcome this condition, *Persuasion* shows us how to better inhabit it. Such a subject, Freud concludes, is “like the inheritor of an entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him,” by which he means that there is a misalignment between the ego and the body.³⁰ Kellynch Hall is thus the perfect setting in which to introduce this novel’s characters; Austen, we might say, uses as a symbol what Freud would refashion as a simile. Austen, like Freud, perceives identification as a question of property and entailment—an understanding that Lacan deems crucial. The theory of identification proposed in Freud’s “On Narcissism,” Lacan explains, “has served as a basis for political forms of personal status,” which is why the courtship of Anne and Wentworth is meaningful beyond their personal happiness and why the “entailed property” symbol/simile works so well. Politics, such as the letting of one’s ancestral estate or flirtation with a sailor, requires a theory of identification, Lacan suggests, because questions of status play out intersubjectively, through and between subjects, rather than through reality testing. This, he posits, is how psychoanalytic theory may ultimately find its “social impact.”³¹ It is also what makes Lacan an important, though long-neglected, resource for Austen scholarship.

Lacan’s “Logical Time” can account for the complex way in which Austen’s characters layer interiority into exteriority, and help us recognize the temporal implications of that layering. By showing us how and why “this reference of the ‘I’ to others as such must . . . be temporalized,” Lacan enables us to rethink the complex problem of theory of mind in Austen’s work (which has been the focus of much recent attention in Austen circles) in a way that does not depend upon a rational, self-authorizing subject in command of her choices, of the sort aspired to in Warhol’s or Chwe’s work. It is hardly a reach: Captain Wentworth’s frigate is even named the *Laconia*! For fictional worlds filled with characters seeking to justify their escape from either closed rooms or stymying ideological apparatuses,

Lacan's "Logical Time" may have broad applicability. Zak Watson, one of the few scholars to use the essay in a sustained manner for literary analysis, commends it for the way it "provides a way out of the problems of closure" that have afflicted Romantic studies for some time.³² Such problems, we hasten to add, have been especially damaging within Austen studies, in which a scholarly zeal for narrative closure has often manifested itself as an unfortunate critical "commitment to disciplining young women," as Michael Kramp laments.³³ We think that "Logical Time," on its own and as an aspect of Lacan's thought generally, has enormous potential for application to Austen's work, given the insularity of Austen's world and way in which that world functions, effectively, as a prison.

Notes

- 1 This research was supported by an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (Agency reference number: 435-2017-0037).
- 2 Michael Kramp, "The Potency of Jane, or the Disciplinary Function of Austen in America," *Studies in Popular Culture* 22, no. 2 (1999), 19–32.
- 3 For Lacanian studies of Austen, see: Emily Rohrbach, "Austen's Later Subjects," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 44, no. 4 (2004), 737–752; David Sigler, *Sexual Enjoyment in British Romanticism: Gender and Psychoanalysis, 1753–1835* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2015), 57–91; Daniela Garofalo, "Doating on Faults in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *European Romantic Review* 28, no. 2 (2017), 227–240; Christien Garcia, "Left Hanging: Silence, Suspension, and Desire in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*," *The Eighteenth Century* 59, no. 1 (2018), 85–103; Daniela Garofalo, "Abandoned by Providence: Loss in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*," in *Lacan and Romanticism*, ed. Daniela Garofalo and David Sigler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 61–80.
- 4 Garofalo, "Abandoned," 61.
- 5 Emily Rohrbach, *Modernity's Mist: British Romanticism and the Poetics of Anticipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 116, 110.
- 6 Robyn Warhol, "The Look, the Body, and the Heroine of *Persuasion*: A Feminist-Narratological View of Jane Austen," in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 23.
- 7 For the best interpretation of that silence and an overview of the debates over its meaning, see Garcia.
- 8 Jacques Lacan, "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 161–175.
- 9 Derek Hook, "Towards a Lacanian Group Psychology: The Prisoner's Dilemma and the Trans-subjective," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 43, no. 2 (2013), 128.
- 10 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank, Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30, 6. All subsequent references to this source will be noted parenthetically in the text.
- 11 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 14: 94.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 14: 90.
- 13 Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
- 14 Loraine Fletcher, "Time and Mourning in *Persuasion*," *Women's Writing* 5, no. 1 (1998), 82.

- 15 Lisa Zunshine, "Why Jane Austen Was Different, and Why We May Need Cognitive Science to See It," *Style* 41, no. 3 (2007), 275–299; Alan Palmer, "Social Minds in *Persuasion*," in *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, ed. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 157–175; Patrick Colm Hogan, "*Persuasion*: Lessons in Sociocognitive Understanding," in *Jane Austen and Sciences of the Mind*, ed. Beth Lau (New York: Routledge, 2018), 180–199.
- 16 Lacan, "Logical Time," 168–169.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 173.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 170–172 (original emphasis).
- 19 Christopher C. Nagle, *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 105.
- 20 Palmer, 172.
- 21 Lacan, "Logical Time," 161.
- 22 Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 7.
- 23 Kay Young, "Feeling Embodied: Consciousness, Persuasion, and Jane Austen," *Narrative* 11, no. 1 (2003), 87.
- 24 Garofalo, "Abandoned."
- 25 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), 167; Robert Lougy, *Inaugural Wounds: The Shaping of Desire in Five Nineteenth-Century English Narratives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).
- 26 Lacan, "Logical Time," 165.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 163–166.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 29 Garofalo, "Doating on Faults," 228.
- 30 Freud, 14: 78.
- 31 Jacques Lacan, "On My Antecedents," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 54.
- 32 Zak Watson, "Logical Time and the Romantic Sublime," in *Lacan and Romanticism*, ed. Daniela Garofalo and David Sigler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 88.
- 33 Michael Kramp, "The Austen Concept, or Becoming Jane—Again and Again," *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 33 (2017), www.rhizomes.net/issue33/intro.html.

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