Jane Austen and Civility: A Distant Reading

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There is no history without dates. To be convinced of this it is sufficient to consider how a pupil succeeds in learning history: he reduces it to an emaciated body, the skeleton of which is formed by dates.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*

In a characteristically animated letter to her sister Cassandra of 24 December 1798, after sharing the news that their brother Frank may soon be promoted to the rank of Commander in the Royal Navy, Jane Austen asserts, "But I will not torment myself with Conjectures & suppositions; Facts shall satisfy me." The word "fact" appears frequently in Austen's prose—often as part of a transitional phrase or an aside, but sometimes at very crucial points in her narratives, such as in *Persuasion*, when Mrs. Smith offers to acquaint Anne Elliot with her cousin's "'real character'": "'Facts shall speak,'" she promises (199). Given my subject's attachment to facts, I begin by stating one of my own: manners matter to Jane Austen—to both the writer herself and our understanding of her work. This truth is by now so "universally acknowledged" that it is possible not only to read myriad scholarly examinations of Austen's interest in proper behavior but also to purchase manuals such as *Jane Austen's Guide to Good Manners*. In what follows, I build on this familiar fact: first, with a few less well-known facts about both manners and Austen's work; and second, with some related "conjectures and suppositions" that I hope will

enlighten rather than torment. In the first section, I consider Austen's fiction by way of a broad historical context and an approach Franco Moretti calls "distant reading," where distance, he claims, "is not an obstacle, but *a specific form of knowledge*" (1). While I initially offer more information than interpretation, I turn, in the second section, to Austen's first and last published novels in order to look more closely at what this distance allows us to see.

<div align="center">MANNERS FROM A DISTANCE</div>

Although we now tend to group social behavior marked by observation of and consideration for other people under the homogenizing designation "manners," there are, in fact, important distinctions to be made between the various codes referring to proper conduct: courtesy, civility, etiquette, and so on. For example, while "courtesy" and "civility" now signify roughly the same things, they emerged and became dominant behavioral terms in English at different times, and they reflect distinct historical publics (courtly-aristocratic and nascent-bourgeois, respectively). Manners, then, are the set of practices that are given shape by—and give shape to—historically specific phases of communal life. One of the problems with recent books that perpetuate the view of Austen as moral tutor, a sort of Miss Manners for the ages, is that they understand manners as monolithic—as near-universal and timeless behavioral ideals or, worse still, a set of rules to be followed. It is crucial, however, to distinguish between different sorts of behavior, to resist lumping the generic "manners" together with more linguistically and historically precise designations, not least because Austen herself distinguishes. Indeed, if we examine the various behavioral terms Austen employs to denote good behavior, another significant fact emerges: "civility" is her word of choice (see Figure 1).[1] This fact may not seem particularly surprising or illuminating. As we know from the preeminent sociologist of manners, Norbert Elias, "civility" was the preferred term for designating polite behavior in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Further, "civility" does not merit inclusion in R. W. Chapman's appendix on "Miss Austen's English," as it is neither "actually obsolete" nor used by Austen "in *senses* now definitely obsolete" (*SS* 388). Nevertheless, the more we know about the history of civility, the more interesting Austen's choice becomes.

In the first place, what civility means to us—politeness—is quite different from what it *has* meant. Rather than referring to an individual's actions or habits, it fundamentally describes a way of life. "Civility" first appears in English toward the end of the fourteenth century, as a translation of the French *civilité* (from the Latin term for community, *civilitas*), and continues to
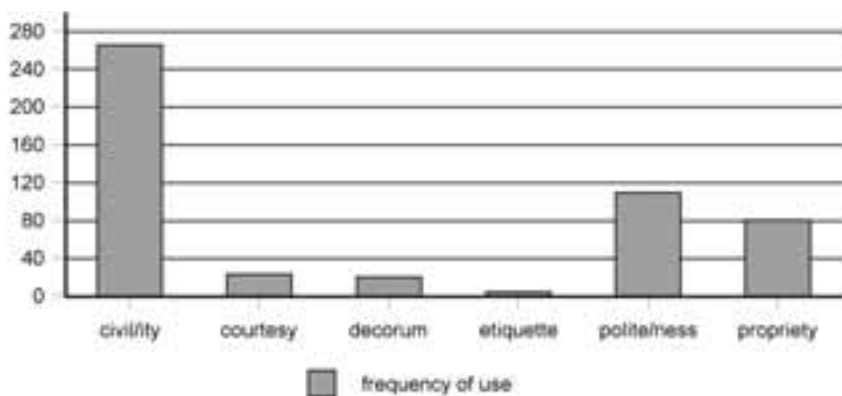
Figure 1

explicitly designate features of communal—even *political*—existence for the first four centuries of its usage. The adoption of a new word "at the expense of . . . established concepts," notes Jorge Arditi, gives "expression to an entirely new way of being in the world: to new patterns of behavior, new relations of power, new institutional arrangements, new emotional and psychological boundaries between people, a new texture of social relationships. Each concept reflects a specific mentality, a particular way of engaging in social intercourse, of perceiving people" (4).

But while "courtesy," the behavioral term predominant during the Renaissance, describes the prevailing conditions of life at court, "civility," as its etymology reveals, is rooted in the city. According to Charles Richardson, "city" is, in fact, civility's primary meaning; his 1839 work jointly defines a family of terms including civic, civilian, civilization, and civility as

> Of, or belonging, or pertaining to a *city*, or state; to the policy or government of a *city* or state; having the habits, or manners, or dispositions acquired by living together in the same *city* or state. Urbane, polished or polite; humane, gentle, complying; politick; grave, serious. Opposed to those who live in a state of natural wildness and rudeness; also opposed to military; to ecclesiastical; and, in law, to criminal. (1.321)

City life, increasingly filled with impersonal rather than intimate interactions, produces—and "civility" suggests—a growing awareness of the presence and needs of diverse others and of the various modes of representing and orienting the self. Ultimately, as Anna Bryson explains, good manners come to

bear not only on the self-other relation but also on the relation between the individual and the community of which he or she is a part: "the word 'civility,' with its associations of citizenship and conduct moulded by consciousness of membership [in] an extensive community, underpins formulations of manners which relate individual [conduct] to an awareness of a whole social world, larger than the household, which is sustained by that conduct" (71). Describing the new way of being in the world that corresponds with the emergence of "civility" is a complicated task, but I am willing to make a few general observations: it is a social world that, in addition to becoming urbanized, is increasingly bourgeois, democratic, and secular; imagined through print media; and marked by political, psychological, and symbolic fealty to the nation-state rather than a sovereign. Likewise, it is a world in which concern for—and sophisticated discourse about—manners is a "significant cultural fact" (Bryson 279).

In the second place, the narrative of civility is one of limitation or decline. It is possible, with the help of Arditi and Bryson, to chart in detail the downward trajectory of civility, from a word that denoted, well into the eighteenth century, aspects of good polity (including the art of civil government, principles of social order, and acts of good citizenship) to one that now merely betokens compliance with social norms: the opposite of rudeness. But even without this important scholarship, we are able to observe the transformation of the term by looking at the various senses identified by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (in the order that they developed) and noting how few of them remain in use. As late as 1830, Coleridge uses the term in one of its original senses—"By civility, I mean all the qualities essential to a citizen" (54)—but the fact that he needs to draw the reader's attention to *his* working definition of the term is telling.

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, there is a gradual shift toward the sense to which we are most accustomed, one describing individual conduct of a particular kind: "behaviour proper to the intercourse of civilized people" (*OED* 12). The first use of the word to convey this sense is dated at 1561, confirming, as Elias and others have argued, that the publication of Erasmus's treatise *De civilitate morum puerilium* (translated into English in 1532) marks a turning point for civility. Erasmus's text, Arditi notes, "spread the idea that propriety of behavior meant something important for the conduct of civil life—of life, that is, within the spheres of the body politic" (2). The semantic bridge between the two senses is in the notion of a civilized—as opposed to barbaric or disorderly—state (*OED* 6 and 10). As Raymond Williams eluci-
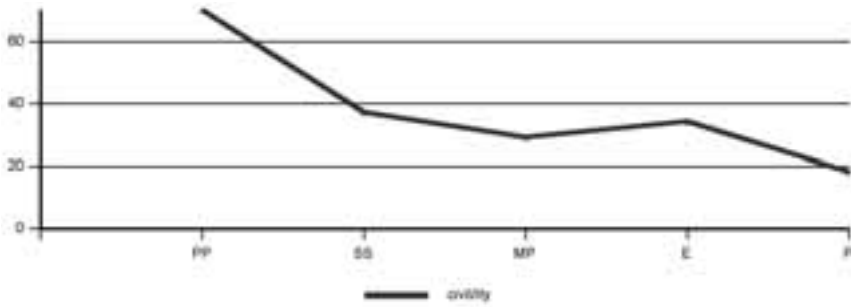
Figure 2

dates, "civility" was often used through the mid-nineteenth century "where we would now expect *civilization*" (for example, in references to "the era from which we date our civility"); in fact, Samuel Johnson refused, despite James Boswell's intervention, to substitute "civilization" for "civility" in the 1773 edition of his dictionary (58). Johnson's and Coleridge's commitments notwithstanding, the lofty ethical and political denotations of the term were by this point mostly resonances: the current, more generic sense of civility—the only one that persists—grows out of eighteenth-century usage.

The metamorphosis of civility from a quality of public and political significance to a private virtue, from a mark of good citizenship to a sign of good breeding took place slowly, over more than a century. My first contention relates directly to the protracted nature of this change: that is, we benefit significantly from observing Austen's work not closely but from a considerable (temporal) distance, since only then can we understand it as part of a much larger discourse on civil society. Though Austen does not use "civility" in a sense "now definitely obsolete" (per Chapman's rationale), in her day the term likely carried the residual connotations of the earlier senses. In other words, with a sense of the history of civility as a language of social action—action ultimately directed toward the public sphere and, more specifically, toward negotiating the inevitable tension between the One and the Many—we are better equipped to understand why there was so much at stake in her exploration of characters' manners. Still, we would be remiss if we only took civility's *longue durée* into account when considering Austen's work. In addition to putting Austen "in context," as I have attempted to do here, we should also, as William Galperin urges, "appreciat[e] the degree to which the novels are just as much a context *in themselves*" (1). While Austen uses "civility" far more often than any other behavioral term, she is not equally committed to it over

the course of her career (see Figure 2).[2] My second contention follows: to grasp fully the significance of civility for Austen, we must attend to her lexicon of manners across time (i.e., throughout her oeuvre), rather than examining only specific moments or texts.

AUSTEN'S LEXICON OF MANNERS

> Though art may sometimes prolong [words'] duration, it will rarely give them perpetuity; and their changes will be almost always informing us, that language is the work of man, of a being from whom permanence and stability cannot be derived.
> —Samuel Johnson, *The Plan of an English Dictionary*

Many critics have examined Austen's fascination with language, from her use of certain "keywords" to her emphasis on polite speech, from characters who misspeak themselves or abuse language to those who are silent, from the importance of good conversation to the difficulty of true communication.[3] In turning to examine Austen's use of "civility," I am intent on considering how her complex and variable lexicon functions as a document (and possibly an agent) of cultural change. Comprehending civility allows us to see manners as a particular orientation to the public, but what *kind* of orientation we can only grasp by looking at the fiction itself, specifically at *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*. Austen deploys "civility" most often in her first two novels and least in her last; further, though in *Sense and Sensibility* the term names the ethos of Elinor Dashwood, one of three Austen heroines "who is Right" (Butler 183), in *Persuasion* it is linked to Mr. William Elliot, the most thoroughly sinister character in the Austen corpus.[4] "Civility" is undergoing an extended process of transformation, the tail end of which Austen's shift dramatically illustrates: from a word pinpointing a nexus of related ethico-political virtues—acts of good citizenship and social solidarity as well as conduct governed by consideration for others—to one whose range of signification is limited to polite, but not necessarily ethically grounded, behavior. Looking more closely at Elinor Dashwood and William Elliot will help us understand this transformation as well as speculate about Austen's role in it.

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, John Locke identifies two things required to avoid what he calls "ill breeding":

> first, a disposition of the mind not to offend others; and, secondly, the most acceptable and agreeable way of expressing that disposition. From the one, men are called *civil*; from the other *well-fashioned*. The latter of these is that decency and gracefulness of looks,

voice, words, motions, gestures, and of all the whole outward demeanor which takes in company and makes those with whom we converse easy and well pleased. This is, as it were, the language whereby that internal civility of the mind is expressed. . . . The other part, which lies deeper than the outside, is that general good will and regard for all people which makes anyone have a care not to show in his carriage any contempt, disrespect, or neglect of them. . . . (107)

Sense and Sensibility gives us a portrait of unified civility as delineated here: in Elinor Dashwood a particular "disposition of the mind" is coupled with an embodied "language" that conveys her "internal civility" into the social sphere. Civility as a public demeanor is not a mere reflection of Elinor's innate moral character—not, in the words of Lawrence Klein, a "simple window on the inner self" (92); it is instead an intentional posture, part of a larger context that includes the legacy of Enlightenment philosophy as well as the social and political conditions of Austen's own day. Elinor and her mode of living may not go unchallenged in or by the novel, but she is nevertheless repeatedly singled out for the rightness of her conduct, not least by Austen's decision to make hers the novel's central consciousness.

Indeed, the opening description of Miss Dashwood tells us exactly how highly to think of her:

Elinor . . . possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart;—her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught. (6)

We are to admire in Elinor not only the balance she achieves between her head and her heart but also her control of the latter. As the plot develops, we learn that Elinor disciplines her emotions in private as well as in public; that is, she is cautious not just about acting upon and expressing emotions but about feeling them in the first place. We might associate a number of traits with Elinor—for instance, prudence, grace, or "fortitude" (Emsley 58); however, Austen most often chooses to identify Elinor with civility. Not only is the word used by the narrator to describe Elinor's behavior on numerous

occasions, but Elinor herself uses the term correctly (as many other characters do not), and others use it when speaking of her: it is *the* word that epitomizes her worldview, her answer to the question of how to live.

Civility, as a way of being in the world, is something to which Elinor constantly tries to convert Marianne, whether by modeling proper behavior herself, intervening on her behalf in social situations, or proselytizing outright. Marianne, believer in openness that she is, does not simply neglect civility but, in fact, rejects it. Early in the acquaintance with Willoughby, Elinor ventures "to suggest the propriety of some self-command" to her sister (53); but Marianne can no more hide what she is feeling than she can pretend to feel what she is not, as is clear from her interaction with the Misses Steele. Marianne refuses civility because she regards it as dishonest—for example, when expected to concur with Lucy's appraisal of Lady Middleton as a "'sweet woman'": "Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell. She did her best when thus called on, by speaking of Lady Middleton with more warmth than she felt" (122). While Elinor, too, finds Lucy unbearable, and all the more so once the latter reveals her secret engagement to Edward Ferrars, she is nevertheless determined to treat her civilly, both to maintain social harmony and preserve her own privacy. "Telling lies" is a particularly pejorative way of describing Elinor's actions here—one inflected by Elinor's self-consciousness around Marianne, the great champion of sincerity in the novel. But Elinor's convictions reveal themselves in the rest of the passage: such behavior is a "task," a social responsibility she feels "called on" to perform.

Elinor's manners should not, then, be taken as merely performance (because they are strategic) or lies (because they do not convey her "true" feelings), but rather as acts underwritten by a commitment to civility writ large. On the necessity of the social forms that Elinor engages in and Marianne refuses, Tony Tanner astutely comments:

> No one knew better than Jane Austen that people who were as remote foreigners to each other mentally might very well be close neighbors physically. And while she saw with unsparing clarity just how much cruelty, repression and malice the social forms made possible, how much misery they generated, 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. . . . (84–85)

That the social codes Elinor obeys and promotes are restrictive is a circumstance that the novel carefully explores; but that they are essential is a conclusion that it forcefully reiterates.

When Elinor is not simply setting an example for her sister to follow, she is intervening in order to save her from embarrassment or from her own neglect of convention. After dinner at the Middletons', for example: "Lady Middleton proposed a rubber of Casino to the others. No one made any objection but Marianne, who, with her usual inattention to the forms of general civility, exclaimed, 'Your ladyship will have the goodness to excuse *me*—you know I detest cards. I shall go to the piano-forté'" (144). Elinor must work quickly to repair the damage, "to smooth away the offence": "'Marianne can never keep long from that instrument . . . , and I do not much wonder at it; for it is the very best toned piano-forté I ever heard'" (145). Marianne's refusal to play cards is an affront in word (i.e., her dramatic use of "detest") as well as in deed; however, more than the thoughtless expression, the *act* typifies Marianne's temperament and her rejection of civilized sociability. Cards are not merely a diversion but also a social activity in that most public of private spaces, the drawing-room. Balls, morning calls, walks, parlor games—these are some of the very few opportunities Austen's characters have to pursue interpersonal relationships and forge social bonds, and because they take place in semi-public places, the rules of civility apply. Marianne, in declining the invitation to cards, has not just offended her hostess but has rejected one of her set's primary forms of sociability; indeed, no less an authority than Samuel Johnson once confessed, "I am sorry I have not learnt to play at cards. It is very useful in life: it generates kindness and consolidates society" (Rogers 317). That she does so in order to play the piano—in her case, not a performance but instead a very solitary activity ("Marianne, wrapt up in her own music and her own thoughts, had by this time forgotten that anybody was in the room besides herself" [145])—makes her noncompliance all the more marked.

That Elinor must continue to intercede on her sister's behalf is evidence that her attempts to convert Marianne to civility have thus far failed. This undertaking may seem like a lost cause for most of the novel; convinced there is none better, however, Elinor continues to pursue it. Though most frequently hoping her example will rub off on Marianne, Elinor occasionally lobbies her sister more directly, even explaining the rationale behind her forms:

> "But I thought it was right, Elinor," said Marianne, "to be
> guided wholly by the opinion of other people. . . . This has always
> been your doctrine, I am sure."

"No, Marianne, never. My *doctrine* has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour. You must not confound my meaning. I am guilty, I confess, of having often wished you to treat our acquaintance in general with greater attention; but when have I advised you to adopt their sentiments or conform to their judgment in serious matters?"

"You have not been able then to bring your sister over to your plan of *general* civility," said Edward to Elinor. "Do you *gain no ground*?"

"Quite the contrary," replied Elinor, looking expressively at Marianne. (93-94, my emphasis)

Like subsequent passages, this scene illustrates that civility is a principled position Elinor has taken up self-consciously, with more at stake than compensating for her sister's negligence. The description of Elinor's reaction to another of Marianne's transgressions also makes it clear that, far from solitary acts, these are efforts necessitated by her chosen calling: "To atone for this conduct therefore, Elinor took immediate possession of the *post of civility which she had assigned herself*, behaved with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings, talked with her, laughed with her, and listened to her whenever she could" (160, my emphasis). The figurative language with which she is described—including, as above, militaristic metaphors—suggests that, for Elinor, civility is a duty, if not a literal vocation.

While concern with proper behavior is a hallmark of Austen's oeuvre, none of her novels is as explicitly engaged in contemplating the question of how to live, identifying or embracing some answers and eliminating others, as is *Sense and Sensibility*. In fact, the word "behaviour" itself appears more times in this novel than in any of her subsequently published work: there are sixty-four uses in it versus four in *Persuasion*. And though other behavioral keywords (such as propriety, virtue, and decorum) are subjects of Austen's inquiry, not to mention standard components of her lexicon, none occupies the privileged position in *Sense and Sensibility* that "civility" does. True civility is simultaneously easiest to identify—look for Elinor and you've found it—and most difficult to define. If "common" civility designates local acts and impulses (what Marianne calls "'the lesser duties of life'" [347]), "true" civility is more extensive in tendency as well as reach. For this reason, Edward refers to Elinor's "'plan of general civility'" and asks, "'Do you gain no ground?'" as if he perceives that her immediate undertaking (influencing Marianne's social behavior) is part of a larger campaign (94). Both Edward's

comment and Austen's emphasis on manners as a means rather than an end belie Elinor's claim that "'[a]ll [she has] ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour.'" Thus, what I will underscore in more detail below are less the local skirmishes over behavior than the larger implications of these battles.

The outlook on manners, generally, and civility, specifically, that *Sense and Sensibility* offers is very much in line with eighteenth-century British philosophical thought from Shaftesbury, who "accepted as a truism that manners were the foundations of civic politics" (Klein 145-46), to Edmund Burke, who claimed in his "Letters on a Regicide Peace" that "[m]anners are of more importance than laws" (520). Given the philosophical resonance of "civility" in *Sense and Sensibility*, what are we to make of *Persuasion*, where Austen not only includes the term fewer times than in any other novel but also frequently uses its diminutive form (e.g., "common civilities" [99]) or heavily ironizes it? Consider, for example, the haggling that follows Lady Dalrymple's offer to take two of the Elliot party home in her barouche:

> There could be no doubt as to Miss Elliot. Whoever suffered inconvenience, she must suffer none, but it occupied a little time to settle the point of civility between the other two. The rain was a mere trifle, and Anne was most sincere in preferring a walk with Mr. Elliot. But the rain was also a mere trifle to Mrs. Clay; she would hardly allow it even to drop at all, and her boots were so thick! much thicker than Miss Anne's; and, in short, her civility rendered her quite as anxious to be left to walk with Mr. Elliot, as Anne could be, and it was discussed between them with a generosity so polite and so determined, that the others were obliged to settle it for them; Miss Elliot maintaining that Mrs. Clay had a little cold already, and Mr. Elliot deciding on appeal, that his cousin Anne's boots were rather the thickest. (174-75)

This politeness is all form, with no genuine concern for others behind it: though Anne "sincerely" prefers to walk, she enjoys the company of neither Lady Dalrymple nor her sister; and while Mrs. Clay adheres to established codes of conduct, she is motivated by her desire to protect her own precarious social position. Politeness always has a performative aspect, but whereas the civility embodied by Elinor Dashwood is "a refined sociability, bringing aesthetic concerns into close contiguity with ethical ones," the civility in this scene and elsewhere in *Persuasion* is quite limited in dimension and sometimes even "hostile to true sociability" (Klein 4).

Superficially correct manners abound in Austen: Robert Ferrars, Mr.

Collins, Miss Bingley, and Sir Walter Elliot and his eldest daughter come to mind as particularly egregious examples. *Persuasion*, however, explores new —and troubling—territory with Mr. William Elliot, whose civility is neither obsequious nor sneering, neither facile nor misguided. Rather, it is inconsequential (that is, without ethical substance or intent) at best, and deceitful at worst. Both because he isn't deficient in native understanding and because his "'gentlemanlike, agreeable'" (196) public demeanor is an artful cover for malevolence, Mr. Elliot is guilty of a greater violation of the social contract than are the other Austen characters whose behavior follows the letter, if not the spirit, of the law. According to Mrs. Smith,

> "Mr. Elliot is a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. . . . He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black!" (199)

This dramatic denunciation of Mr. Elliot marks the beginning of the novel's dénouement. It also provides the reader with a most powerful—if indirect— articulation of the assumptions that warrant true civility. For a more explicit statement of these tenets, we can do no better than to turn to Burke:

> As to the right of men to act anywhere according to their pleasure, without any moral tie, no such right exists. Men are never in a state of *total* independence of each other. It is not the condition of our nature: nor is it conceivable how any man can pursue a considerable course of action without its having some effect upon others; or, of course, without producing some degree of responsibility for his conduct. The *situations* in which men relatively stand produce the rules and principles of that responsibility, and afford directions to prudence in exacting it. (527)

Mrs. Smith's revelatory narrative leaves Anne shuddering at her cousin's "cold civility" (209): "It was a dreadful picture of ingratitude and inhumanity; and Anne felt at some moments, that no flagrant open crime could have been worse" (210). By failing to heed what Burke calls "the law of civil vicinity," Mr. Elliot has, in fact, committed a crime, even if it is one for which he will not be prosecuted (528).

In "History and Dialectic," the essay from which I take my epigraph, Lévi-Strauss writes, "Dates may not be the whole of history, but they are its

sine qua non, for history's entire originality and its distinctive nature lie in apprehending the relation between *before* and *after*, which would perforce dissolve if its terms could not, at least in principle, be dated" (258). When dealing with the history of language or of a writer's development, however, precise dates can be hard to come by. On what date, for instance, did the last but one of civility's senses become obsolete, so that a term that once signified good society could no longer be counted on to suggest anything other than good form? Was there a particular day on which—or a specific reason why—Austen's attitude toward "civility" changed? Does the decline in her usage merely *mark* a cultural shift, or might we credit her with "making history" as well (Chandler xvi)?

Though these are questions we will likely never answer, there is one thing we know for certain: Austen never embraced "etiquette," the word that rose to prominence within the lexicon of manners following the devaluation of civility, using it a mere four times in her work. This fact speaks quite clearly: it tells us that Austen saw good form divorced from ethical content as a social danger, as the case of Mr. Elliot, whose manners are "exceedingly good" and "so exactly what they ought to be," establishes (104, 143). It is for this reason that Austen turns in *Persuasion* to emphasize social behavior that, while it may lack polish, unequivocally demonstrates an attention to the common good, as we see in an early scene where Anne is convinced to remain at Uppercross: "To be claimed as a good, though in an improper style, is at least better than being rejected as no good at all" (33). Austen's focus on the navy, a profession which even Sir Walter admits "'has its utility,'" is yet another indication of this shift (19); indeed, the novel ends by emphasizing the social significance of Anne's employment as well as of Captain Wentworth's line of work: "She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but 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" (252). It is worth noting one final sign (albeit numerical rather than linguistic) that *Persuasion* represents a new way of being in the world: namely, it is the only one of Austen's novels "the action of which," in Chapman's words, is "definitely dated" (302). Perhaps, then, I might end with the following conjecture: on or about June 1814, civility—and thus Austen's oeuvre—changed.

1. The rise of the electronic text has made it easier to add quantitative data to the types of evidence to which our arguments have recourse. My statistics about Austen's usage come from searches of the University of Virginia's Modern English Collection (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu).

2. Figure 2 places Austen's novels in order of their composition, excluding *Northanger Abbey* because of its complicated publication history.

3. Indeed, so much has been written on the subject that Joseph Wiesenfarth opens a 2004 article by joking, "Anyone who writes about Jane Austen's words . . . may need psychological counseling" (71)! See, for example, Tave and Stokes.

4. Wiesenfarth and Emsley have considered the role of civility in *Pride and Prejudice*, where it occurs with great frequency; but only Wiesenfarth (1994) uses the term in the historically specific sense I emphasize here. Emsley, on the other hand, considers civility the "outward manifestation" of amiability, which she ties to the virtues of charity and justice (90).

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