

## Folks That Go A Pleasuring

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“Comfort must not be expected by folks that go a pleasuring,” wrote Lord Byron in 1809 in a letter describing his travel experiences in Portugal (24). He was completely unaware that the truth of his statement had been and would continue to be demonstrated in the works of one of his contemporaries, Jane Austen, an as-yet-unpublished writer living in obscurity in Hampshire. Jane Austen had relatively little direct contact with the exotic and remote adventures described in Byron’s letters and poetry, yet she sends her characters on travels during which they experience joys and discomforts of a far more enduring nature, which affect not only their physical, but also their emotional well-being. The negative factors, common to her time and ours, are the same ones she describes in her letters—unpredictable weather, illness, unpleasant traveling companions, solitude, crowded conditions, restricted mobility and, perhaps most frustrating, dependence on others for transportation and travel opportunities. Yet her letters, although sometimes quite candid, are never bitter or complaining. She finds much to enjoy in her personal travels, for, when she cannot find pleasure, she can often find humor. And, as A. C. Bradley points out, “the Jane Austen who wrote the novels” is in her letters (83).

Although her life span encompassed the great age of coach travel, Jane Austen’s own journeys were restricted for the most part to a few counties in southern England. Nevertheless, her travel experiences, as an examination of her letters corroborates, furnished her with a rich source of raw materials for her writing. As she comments in a letter in 1801, “There is something interesting in the bustle of going away” (103). She clearly experienced much of this bustle in her life, for her letters are full of numerous comings and goings, not only of herself but also of acquaintances and of her large family. And in all of her works, from her earliest juvenile burlesques to her final, unfinished novel *Sanditon*, we find innumerable journeys, often undertaken under deceptive or unpleasant conditions and full of both physical and psychological discomforts. The emphasis is on those characters who best adapt to the circumstances they encounter in the course of their journeys and who are capable of profiting from such experiences—the heroines of the novels. That Jane Austen herself recognized the link between her fictive world and her literal travels is proved by an observation she made to her sister Cassandra in 1814 about a coach trip to London, which “put me in mind of my own Coach between Edinburgh & Sterling” (397). This reference is to the journey in the early novel *Love and Friendship*, during which the heroine Laura is crowded into a dark coach with unknown companions, silent except for “the loud & repeated snores of one of the Party” (VI, 103).

Certainly traveling companions can make a vital contribution to the pains or pleasures of a journey. In 1801, writing of her own trip to Bath, Jane Austen states: “Our journey here was perfectly free from accident or event.

. . . We had charming weather, hardly any Dust, & were exceedingly agreeable, as we did not speak above once in three miles" (Chapman 122, Modert F-91). Many of her heroines are not so fortunate. Instead, they are often trapped in the close confines of carriages with talkative or ill-natured companions. Elizabeth Bennet on her trip to Hunsford with Sir William Lucas and his younger daughter listens to their conversation "with about as much delight as the rattle of the chaise" (II, 152), and Emma "trapped" into receiving a marriage proposal in a short "tête-à-tête drive" (IV, 129) with the amorous Mr. Elton.

Another of Jane Austen's letters describes even more uncomfortable conditions: "We were rather crowded yesterday, through it does not become me to say so, as I and my boa were of the party, and it is not to be supposed but that a child of three years of age was fidgety" (189). Jane Austen does spare her heroines some of this inconvenience. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood have to travel to Cleveland with the garrulous Mrs. Jennings and her silly daughter Charlotte; Elizabeth and Jane Bennet are crammed into their father's carriage with Lydia and Kitty and all their foolish purchases; and Fanny Price must watch in dismay the jealous maneuvers of Julia and Maria Bertram to occupy the barouche-box next to Henry Crawford on the Sotherton journey, but not one of her heroines has to travel any distance with a fidgety child of three.

As uncomfortable as traveling companions might make a trip, we find no suggestion that solitude is more agreeable. Jane Austen explains that she is not accompanying her brother Charles to his ship because of the "unpleasantness of returning by myself" (54). Rarely do her heroines travel any distance alone. Emma does not even like to take neighborhood walks alone, hence her incongruous friendship with Harriet Smith. And when Catherine Morland is forced to travel alone from Northanger Abbey, General Tilney's subjecting her to such indignity firmly establishes his villainy.

Jane Austen also includes the more impersonal discomforts of travel—luggage, equipage, weather, and health—in the letters and novels. Misplaced or lost luggage, although a commonplace misfortune, is, however, given only cursory attention in either. In 1798, on a trip from Kent to Steventon, she reports that, on the first day "my writing and dressing boxes had been by accident put into a chaise which was just packing off as we came in, and were driven away towards Gravesend in their way to the West Indies" (21). These boxes were soon recovered, however, without any Gothic complications, and the next day she writes: "We met with no adventures at all in our journey yesterday, except that our Trunk had once nearly slipt off, and we were obliged to stop at Hartley to have our wheels greazed" (Chapman 23, Modert F-16). During her departure from Bath, Catherine Morland also has problems with writing equipage when General Tilney, in excessive and hypocritical concern for her comfort, almost throws her new writing desk into the street. This thoughtless haste in attempting to discard her personal possessions foreshadows his later ease in ejecting Catherine from his house.

The means of conveyance and the seating arrangements are also significant components of a trip, as Jane Austen is well aware. In an account of a

family journey from Chawton to Godmersham in 1813, she describes the distribution of the group in a veritable summary of the popular modes of transportation of her time: "My Br, Fanny, Lizzy, Marianne & I composed this division of the Family, & filled his Carriage, inside & out.—Two post-chaises under the escort of George conveyed eight more across the Country, the Chair brought two, two others came on horseback & the rest by the Coach—& so by one means or another we all are removed" (337). This catalogue recalls her comic inventory of Mr. Clifford's carriages in the *Juvenilia*: "... of which I do not recollect half. I can only remember that he had a Coach, a Chariot, a Chaise, a Landeau, a Landeaulet, a Phaeton, a Gig, a Whisky, an italian Chair, a Buggy, a Curricle & a wheelbarrow" (VI, 43).

The passage in the letter also reminds us that Jane Austen's placement of her characters on their journeys has considerable impact on their pleasure. Anne Elliot, for example, thoroughly enjoys the trip to Lyme even in the unpropitious November weather because she is riding with the other ladies in Mr. Musgrove's large, comfortable family carriage while Captain Wentworth, whose presence always tantalizes her with reminders of her lost happiness, is in her brother-in-law Charles's curricle. Catherine Morland, on the other hand, is much happier on the drive to Northanger Abbey when she is transferred from the Tilneys' carriage to the curricle driven by the charming Henry Tilney.

Jane Austen evidently shared her heroine's delight in riding in an elegant vehicle. Writing from Bath in 1811, she tells Cassandra, "I am just returned from my airing in the very bewitching Phaeton & four" (137). Even a one-horse gig can please Jane Austen. Of Cassandra's projected journey to London with their brother Henry, she says: "He travels in his Gig—& should the weather be tolerable, I think you must have a delightful Journey" (288).

"Tolerable weather" is always a concern on a trip. Jane Austen's letters are full of reports of the heat, the wet, the cold. Her comments, however, are often witty or ironic. And, in her novels, she uses such weather conditions for plot development or character revelation, often employing the same type of irony seen in her letters. In 1796, she remarks that she had traveled in August "... without suffering so much from the heat as I had hoped to do" (7). Yet, Fanny Price, her heroine in *Mansfield Park*, does suffer from severe headaches when sent out on various errands in the hot sun. After her cousin Edmund's renewed attentions to Fanny, however, we learn that "the pain of her mind had been much beyond that in her head" (III, 74), and we wonder if Jane Austen is not being more ironic here than we realize at first. Is it walking in the heat or jealousy over Edmund's interest in Mary Crawford which causes Fanny's discomfort?

Rainy weather is also utilized effectively in the novels. Although Jane Austen advises her niece Anna in 1814 that "Susan ought not to be walking out so soon after Heavy rains, taking long walks in the dirt," she has had Elizabeth Bennet do exactly that in *Pride and Prejudice* (401). The walk to Netherfield establishes Elizabeth's indifference to both weather conditions and false standards of decorum when her motives are justified, an independence we see throughout the novel. And the various reactions of the party ...

are Netherfield when she arrives “with weary ancles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise” is a foreshadowing of their future behavior (II, 32).

Jane Austen recognizes, however, that rain can spoil the pleasure of a journey. In 1809, speaking of her young nieces, she wishes “the poor little girls had better weather for their Journey; they must amuse themselves with watching the raindrops down the Windows” (259). We think of Catherine Morland watching the raindrops at a window in Bath and wondering if the uncertain weather will prevent her walk with the Tilneys. The unstable weather reflects Catherine’s own confusion as, against her better judgment, she succumbs to John Thorpe’s lies and her curiosity to see a genuine castle and embarks on one of the most uncomfortable drives in Jane Austen’s novels.

Perhaps Jane Austen’s most ironic use of rain is the description of the effect of rainy weather on the sense of place in *Persuasion*. During Anne Elliot’s reluctant approach to Bath, she has “the first dim view of the extensive buildings, smoking in the rain, without any wish of seeing them better” (V, 135). Her melancholy impression echoes Jane Austen’s reaction to Bath in 1799: “. . . it has rained almost all the way, & our first view of Bath has been just as gloomy as it was last November twelvemonth” (Chapman 59, Modert F-31). Jane Austen’s opinion of Bath seems not to have changed, for she writes on the family’s final removal in 1808: “. . . we left Bath . . . with what happy feelings of Escape!” (208). She arranges a better fate for Anne Elliot. It is in the crowded, bustling streets of Bath and among those extensive buildings that Anne—perhaps the most sensitive of all Jane Austen’s heroines to the beauties of nature—achieves her final happiness. We cannot help but imagine, however, that Anne Elliot shared with her creator those feelings of escape on leaving Bath, especially since Anne had first regarded her stay there as the “imprisonment of many months” (V, 137).

Travel in the winter may have created even more possibilities for future narratives. A paradoxical report during a visit at Deane in January 1801 that “a sudden fall of snow rendered the roads impassable, and made my journey home in the little carriage much more easy and agreeable than my journey down” (117) could be the basis for the false alarms raised at the Westons’ Christmas Eve party in *Emma*, which precipitate Emma’s miserable carriage journey alone with Mr. Elton. Jane Austen’s unusual juxtaposition of the “impassable” and the “easy and agreeable” in her letter reminds us that this same snow storm in *Emma* provides a rationale for the rejected Mr. Elton’s discontinuing his customary visits to Hartfield. Significantly, the same conditions present no problem at all for Mr. Knightley, “whom no weather could keep entirely from them” any more than Emma’s faults or irresponsible behavior can discourage his love (IV, 139). “Ah! Mr. Knightley, why do not you stay at home like poor Mr. Elton?” asks Mr. Woodhouse (IV, 139). We know the answer.

Mr. Woodhouse is often concerned about the health of himself and his loved ones, especially if they must journey any distance. And travel-related illness can certainly create discomfort. Jane Austen’s mother, in fact, suf-



ferred from “the exercise & fatigue of travelling so far” during a family trip in 1798 (22). Jane Austen’s energetic heroines, however, rarely have such problems. Fanny Price, like Mrs. Austen, does suffer from fatigue, even from walking short distances. In her cousin Edmund’s words, “Every sort of exercise fatigues her so soon” (95). Nevertheless, throughout the novel, she is continually being forced to exercise and is sent on errands and journeys. Her passive spirit and reluctant participation, however, is so different from the usual responses of Jane Austen’s other heroines that we too become fatigued – by her. We turn our attention to the more lively Mary Crawford, who declares, “I must move . . . resting fatigues me” (96).

Both the letters and the novels attest to the fact that Jane Austen usually shared this attitude. She clearly sees the therapeutic value of travel, telling Cassandra in 1811, “We are come back, after a good dose of Walking & Coaching” (271). As her health declined, we find that she frequently associates her ability to exercise with her physical condition. In January 1817, she writes her niece Caroline, “I feel myself getting stronger than I was half a year ago, & can so perfectly well walk to Alton, *or* back again, without the slightest fatigue that I hope to be able to do both when Summer comes” (473). These hopes were disappointed, as we see in her letter to Fanny Knight on March 13: “. . . by sitting down & resting a good while between my Walks, I get exercise enough. I have a scheme however for accomplish-

ing more, as the weather grows springlike. I mean to take to riding the Donkey" (484-85). By March 23, she is looking forward to the completion of her saddle, telling Fanny, ". . . air & exercise is what I want" (487). And, although she was terminally ill during her stay in Winchester, she optimistically reports: "I have been out once in a sedan-chair, and am to repeat it, and be promoted to a wheel-chair as the weather serves" (497).

The health of her heroines too is often revealed by their attitude toward exercise. Emma Woodhouse, whom Mrs. Weston describes as "the complete picture of grown-up health" (IV, 39), has unlimited energy. Although her activities are restricted to the neighborhood of Highbury, the novel is full of her walks and drives. Her first response on hearing of Jane Fairfax's illness is to attempt to take her for a drive, unaware that for the jealous Jane Fairfax, "an airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack" (IV, 403). We know Marianne Dashwood, whose illness was brought on by her romantic, solitary walks in the long, damp grass at Cleveland, is recovering both her physical and emotional health when she is "authorised to walk as long as she could without fatigue, in the lane before the house" (I, 344) where she is told of Willoughby's visit to Cleveland. We also can speculate that Diana, Susan, and Arthur Parker in *Sanditon* are hypochondriacs whose complaints result from "eager Minds in want of employment" (VI, 412). Diana has written that "Sea Air wd probably in her present state, be the death of her" (VI, 412), but arrives at the seaside resort bustling with energetic and officious plans. She tells Charlotte Heywood, ". . . I am convinced that the Body is the better, for the refreshment the Mind receives in doing its' Duty. - While I have been travelling with this object in view, I have been perfectly well" (VI, 410). Although Jane Austen may mock this character in the novel, she certainly would agree with these views.

Illness is not the only threat to well-being on a journey. Accidents of various types are another real danger of which Jane Austen is clearly aware in her letters, but of which she makes little use in her novels. In a letter to Cassandra in 1799, she playfully predicts of a projected expedition to Bath by some relatives that "perhaps they may be overturned in their way down, & all laid up for the Summer" (Chapman 49, Modert F-29.1). Only in her last incomplete novel *Sanditon* does she include such an event, and there it is an integral part of the novel. Narratively, the Parkers' carriage accident is the generating event, for, although Mr. Parker's injured leg does not lay him up for the summer, it does require two weeks' recuperation with the Heywoods, which leads to Charlotte Heywood's visit to Sanditon with the Parkers.

The overturned carriage also reveals important facets of Mr. Parker's character. His optimistic, but impulsive, nature causes him to misunderstand directions and leave the safety of the main road for a rough lane in his ill-planned search for a doctor for his health resort. Such traits also lead him to overturn the lives of his family and all who join him in his business ventures. The carriage accident suggests that, in the unwritten chapters, these business ventures too will also meet with disaster. The relatively minor damage that results from the accident implies that these future misfortunes will not be insurmountable or long-lasting.

But far more important than physical discomfort in both Jane Austen's letters and her novels is the psychological suffering both she and her heroines experience in their journeys because of what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe as "their total dependency on the whim of wealthier family or friends" (122). We see this dependency in Jane Austen's own life handled with a light comic touch when she writes of her plans to attend a ball: "On wednesday morning it was settled that Mrs. Harwood, Mary & I should go together, and shortly afterwards a very civil note of invitation for me came from Mrs. Bramston . . . I might likewise have gone with Mrs. Lefroy, & therefore with three methods of going, I must have been more at the Ball than anybody else" (79). And she created Cinderella heroines like Jane Fairfax and Fanny Price, whose attendance at balls and dinner wholly depends on the charity of others. Even the apparently independent Emma Woodhouse has unlimited use of a carriage only because of her skill in manipulating her father.

Gilbert and Gubar also point out that none of Jane Austen's heroines "has the power to produce her own itinerary" (122). A series of letters written by Jane Austen in 1796 during a visit to her brother Edward in Kent centers on this type of dependence. Early in the visit she tells Cassandra that, because of their brother Henry's plans, "my absence seems likely to be lengthened still farther. I am sorry for it, but what can I do? . . . if you cannot do without me, I could return, I suppose, with Frank if he ever comes back" (8). In the same letter, she compares Henry's departure to his taking "away the ladder by which I came here, or at least by which I intended to get away, and here I must stay till his return" (9).

Several days later, she writes: "As to the mode of our travelling to Town, I want to go in a Stage Coach, but Frank will not let me" (16). Although the young Jane Austen may have fancied this public transportation, she yields to the dictates of propriety in her novels. No heroine travels in this manner except Laura in *Love and Friendship*, the early farce. There travel by coach shows the economic level to which Laura has sunk. Even Catherine Morland, when she is unexpectedly expelled from Northanger Abbey, is able to hire a post chaise, thanks to the generosity of Eleanor Tilney.

Jane Austen's uncertain itinerary for her return home from Godmersham continues to concern her throughout the remainder of the visit. She informs Cassandra that Frank has received his naval appointment earlier than expected and "will therefore be obliged to be in Town on wednesday - & tho' I have every Disposition in the world to accompany him on that day, I cannot go on the Uncertainty of the Pearsons being at Home; as I should not have a place to go to, in case they were from Home." With obvious discomfort, she continues that if the Pearsons do not respond by Wednesday, noting that Frank is remaining until that day "merely to accomodate me," Edward "has been so good as to promise to take me to Greenwich on the Monday following which was the day before fixed on, if that suits them better." But she must wait to hear from Mary Pearson, whom she has invited to Steventon, for "It will not quite do, to go home and say no more about it -" (17).

Her frustration with all these plans is plain when she confides, "I am very glad that the idea of returning with Frank occurred to me, for as to Henry's coming into Kent again, the time of its taking place is so very uncertain, that I should be waiting for *Dead-men's Shoes*" (Chapman 18, Modert F-11). All these vicissitudes do not, however, destroy the sense of the ridiculous which she rarely displays outside the juvenile burlesques: "My Father will be so good as to fetch home his prodigal Daughter from Town, I hope, unless he wishes me to walk the Hospitals, Enter at the Temple, or mount Guard at St. James. It will hardly be in Frank's power to take me home; nay, it certainly will not. . . . I had once determined to go with Frank to-morrow & take my chance &c.; but they dissuaded me from so rash a step – as I really think on consideration it would have been; for if the Pearsons were not at home, I should inevitably fall a Sacrifice to the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with Small Beer. –" (Chapman 17-18, Modert F-11).

The unusual amount of space and emotional intensity she devotes to this dilemma exposes a very vulnerable side of Jane Austen, a disclosure she herself evidently regretted even before she had concluded the letter. She ends with the disclaimer – "How ill I have written. I begin to hate myself" (18). Yet, she certainly does not write ill when she utilizes such frustrations in her novels, where they often create much sympathy for her heroines. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood's enforced postponement of her escape from the agonies of the fiasco of the Willoughby affair to the comfort of home and her sympathetic mother mitigates our condemnation of her youthful indiscretions. The plight of Fanny Price brought to Mansfield Park at the whim of one aunt and only able to return there from the noise, close confines, and bad air of Portsmouth at the whim of the other, does much to justify her passivity and gain our support.

Jane Austen also uses such dependency to develop the character of her heroines and to foreshadow subtly and sometimes ironically their futures. Elizabeth Bennet's long-anticipated visit to the Lakes is canceled because her uncle's business interests demand a less extensive and distant excursion. Yet Jane Austen uses the substitution of the Derbyshire tour for both narrative and character development. She is able to send Elizabeth to Darcy's home county without the appearance of deliberate coincidence and can also demonstrate her heroine's ability to cope with disappointment. We are told "it was her business to be satisfied – and certainly her temper to be happy" (II, 239). Elizabeth's readiness to compromise gracefully bodes well for her future happiness with Darcy. Anne Elliot's plans to remain in Lyme and nurse the injured Louisa Musgrove are negated by her sister Mary's selfish jealousy. Anne, instead, must make the hurried journey to take the news of the accident to Uppercross. This uncomfortable trip in the company of the hysterical Henrietta Musgrove and the distant Captain Wentworth, whom she believes is full of "surprise and vexation" at this change in passengers, convinces Anne that "she was valued only as she could be useful to Louisa" (V, 115, 116). Yet, she is to learn later in Bath, where she also reluctantly travels, that her sensible actions on the Lyme expedition have

rekindled Wentworth's love for her and that the anger she sensed on the Uppercross trip is directed at himself and others, not at her.

Unlike her heroines, Jane Austen continued to experience the frustrations, and perhaps embarrassment, of such dependence throughout her life. These emotions are plainly seen in letters in 1808, telling of the plans for her return from Godmersham: "I shall at any rate be glad not to be obliged to be an incumbrance on those who have brought me here, for, as James has no horse, I must feel in their carriage that I am taking his place. . . . but till I have a travelling purse of my own, I must submit to such things" (188, 189, 203). However, in her description to her nephew of what was to be her final journey, interest in her own dependent status is supplanted by a concern for the discomforts of others: "Thanks to the kindness of your Father & Mother in sending me their Carriage, my Journey hither on Saturday was performed with very little fatigue, & had it been a fine day I think I shd have felt none, but it distressed me to see Uncle Henry & Wm. K – who kindly attended us on horseback, riding in rain almost all the way" (Chapman 496, Modert F-453-54). As Charles Murrah comments, "Jane Austen lived in a time when mobility, especially for ladies, involved real difficulties. . . . It is not surprising she dreamed up stories of young women who married well and came into possession of elegant phaetons – just that she did it so well" (51).

Yet, in spite of the many possible discomforts, Jane Austen is well aware of the advantages to be gained from travel. As she writes Cassandra in 1805, evidently responding to her sister's account of improved health and looks: "Could travelling fifty miles produce such an immediate change? . . . Is there a charm in an hack postchaise?" (150). The answer we know is yes. Emma goes seven miles to Box Hill and learns a painful and transforming lesson about herself and her role in life. Catherine Morland demonstrates her newly acquired maturity on her miserable return to Fullerton in a hired hack and earns her place as the wife of Henry Tilney. Indeed, there is charm in a hack postchaise.

Jane Austen's letters and novels are proof that the physical limitations of her world did not limit her study of human nature. Her novels vibrate with movement, and the experiences she describes, uncomfortable as they often may be, are common to all countries and climes. Of a visit to Canterbury in 1808, she writes, ". . . the pleasures of my visit concluded with a delightful drive home" (201). Rarely do her heroines experience such pleasure in the course of a novel. Yet, their travel experiences are powerful examples of Jane Austen's mastery of ironic reversal. Those journeys most dreaded or unpleasant or those which turn out quite differently from what had been planned or anticipated by the participants frequently produce the most satisfactory results. We think of Elizabeth Bennet's hasty and unhappy return from Derbyshire, Emma's bitter drives from Randalls and Box Hill, Anne Elliot's pessimistic move to Bath. These uncomfortable journeys prepare the heroines for futures which no doubt contain many delightful drives – Elizabeth's around Pemberley with Mrs. Gardiner, Anne Elliot's in her elegant laundulet, Emma's honeymoon trip to the sea. In *The Mind of the Traveler*, Eric J. Leed points out that the derivation of the word *Travel* is the

verb *travail*, which means to suffer. Jane Austen's heroines clearly profit from their discomforts and secure the kind of mobility their author could only dream of—and write about. Perhaps comfort should not be expected on a journey, but, as Jane Austen clearly realized, unexpected good fortune can ensue when folks go a pleasuring.

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