The figure of Scheherazade and Jane Austen's changing senses of an ending

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Margaret Tudeau-Clayton

This essay brings together the 200th anniversary of the death of Jane Austen and the 50th anniversary of the publication of Frank Kermode's seminal study of narrative fiction, *The Sense of An Ending,* in a comparative analysis of the endings of the three novels with which Austen was occupied in the period during which she was also struggling to make sense of what would turn out to be a fatal illness, most strikingly in letters penned from January to May 1817. The changing senses of an ending in accounts of her health are linked to the contrasting, if similarly self conscious endings of the two novels that sat together on her mental desk and that would be published together posthumously as *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. Of key importance is an intertextual reference to the figure of the female story teller Scheherazade, added by Austen in revisions to the ending of *Persuasion,* which is thus associated not only with disclosure of the truth but also with death. In this context the description of two portraits of the dead with which Austen ends the unfinished novel (later called *Sanditon*) that she began in January 1817 and stopped at a date between two (contrasting) letters to her niece Fanny in March, acquires a poignant charge as a metonymy for the only form of survival for which she could now hope from readers to whom she delegates the project of Scheherazade to thwart her premature death by a cultural afterlife for her stories, her characters and herself.

Keywords: Scheherazade, senses of an ending, Austen's letters, *Persuasion*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sanditon*

The Challenge of Change. SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 36. Ed. Margaret Tudeau-Clayton and Martin Hilpert. Tübingen: Narr, 2018. 161-178.

This year (2017) sees the 200th anniversary of the death of Jane Austen and the 50th anniversary of the publication of Frank Kermode's seminal study of narrative fiction, *The Sense of An Ending* (1967). I want to bring together these two anniversaries in order to take a fresh look at the endings of the three novels with which Austen was occupied in the period during which she was also struggling to make sense of what would turn out to be a fatal illness, most strikingly in letters penned from January to May 1817. Of central importance is an intertextual reference which has received little attention despite its prominence at the beginning of the chapter added in the revisions made in the summer of 1816 to the end of her last completed novel that would be called (though not by Austen) *Persuasion*. The reference is to Scheherazade, figure of a female story teller who thwarts the project of a figure of male tyranny, prejudice and violence as well as the unjust, premature death of women with which he is associated (Austen, *Persuasion* 249). The reference bears on the contents of the revised chapter which follows it as well as on the deferral of the end of the narrative it announces, which is explicitly assimilated not only to disclosure of the truth but also to death – for Kermode the end which is often, if not always, immanent in imagined endings (7).

This deferral of closure is in telling contrast to the equally self conscious acceleration of closure in *Catherine* as Austen called the novel that sat beside *Persuasion* on her mental desk and that would be published posthumously with it as *Northanger Abbey*.[1] In what follows I want to draw a parallel between these contrasting endings and contrasting accounts of her health and their different senses of (her) ending, especially in two letters written to her niece Fanny Knight in March 1817. I will also suggest a connection between these contrasting senses of an ending in the novels and the letters and the end of the novel that she began in January 1817 and stopped at a date between the two letters to Fanny (March 18). For this unfinished and unnamed novel that would later be called *Sanditon* stops on a (deliciously ironic) description of the portraits of two dead husbands. Like earlier examples of visual portraits of fictional characters, these portraits are, I propose, a metonymy for cultural afterlife, which was for Austen perhaps the only, or at least only imaginable afterlife. Summoning this afterlife in "a deliberate . . . signing-off" (Todd and Bree lxxxiii), Austen, I suggest, delegates to her readers the

[1] As we will see, Austen's preferred title for *Persuasion* was similarly a name – that of the Elliot family. The later choice of other titles illustrates how Austen's writing was appropriated and reframed by men (notably her brother Henry) after her death, as Anne-Claire Michoux discusses in her essay in this volume. For this reason I will throughout refer to *Northanger Abbey* as *Catherine*.

project of Scheherazade to thwart her (premature) death by "*spin*ning out" her "story" "to an endless length," as Diana Parker (in *Sanditon*) puts it (Austen, *Later Manuscripts* 188 [my emphasis]) – another figure of the female story teller, who is an invalid *spin*ster as productive of fake news as she is of fake illnesses.[2]

The central insight of Kermode's seminal study is that humans need a sense of an ending to give meaning and coherence to their individual and collective lives, even if the confrontation with reality – "a reality check" as it is called today – requires constant revision (or what Kermode calls "adjustments") to the imagined endings of their projected narratives – whether historical, scientific, fictional or theological, as in his exemplary case of apocalyptic narratives. The sense of an ending in narrative fictions was subsequently given a poststructuralist turn by D. A. Miller who argues that the classic novel, exemplified by Austen, is constructed on the contradictory tension between the aspiration to closure and the aspiration to defer it. Following Michel Foucault, Miller assimilates closure to "the sovereign act of nomination" (45) – an act that, as we shall see, is significant for closure in Austen's accounts of her health as well as in her novels. More recently, Deidre Shauna Lynch has given a further twist to the sense of an ending in the novels by pointing out the presence of embryonic plots, such as that of Fanny Price's sister Susan in *Mansfield Park*, which counter the effect of closure by soliciting sequels – new stories – such as have proliferated in the 200 years since Austen's death (166-67), precisely, that is, the cultural afterlife summoned, I have suggested, by the "end" of *Sanditon.*

Within this framework of critical ideas then fresh perspectives open up not only on the ending, which is not one, of *Sanditon*, but also on the endings of the two other novels with which Austen was occupied during the period of her struggle with the uncertainties of what Park Honan has described as a "fickle illness" (385), as if it were one of the elusive male figures in the novels the knowledge of whose character and desire is a crucial object – end – of the female protagonist's quest, which is coterminous with the narrative. Indeed, Austen suffered not from one of the "infectious diseases" to which, as Thomas Laqueur observes, most of "our ancestors" rapidly "succumbed," but rather from a slow "hidden" illness such as many in the West experience today with uncertain symptoms that summon speculation – is it something or nothing? and, if something, what? (Laqueur 13). Her hidden – inscrutable – ill-

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[2] Compare the discussion by Michoux and Rupp of "a concept of female authorship . . . defined by wielding the shuttle rather than the pen."

ness was then as productive of "news" – narratives as well as speculation – in her letters as the secrets – what is hidden about past events as well as about characters and their desires – are productive of "news" in the novels. Moreover, like what is hidden in the novels, this elusive illness has continued to generate "news" insofar as critics and biographers have continued to speculate, even as they have sought closure, by naming it – whether Addison's disease, cancer or both (Honan 391-92).

Austen herself sought closure through the naming of her condition in a letter to a friend Alethea Bigg dated 24 January 1817:

> I think I understand my own case now so much better than I did, as to be able by care to keep off any serious return of illness. I am more & more convinced that *Bile* is at the bottom of all I have suffered, which makes it easy to know how to treat myself. (Austen, *Letters* 326-27)

Getting to "the bottom of all" – finding the proper name – is the end to which, as Miller argues, the classic novel, exemplified by Austen, aspires. Indeed, there is a clarity of achieved understanding here such as the protagonists – and readers – enjoy at the end of the novels, and an attendant sense of ease in the felt ability to prevent "a return of illness." The empowering effect of this sense of an ending is indicated by the fact that three days later she begins a new novel in which her investment – of confidence as well as money – is signalled by the three booklets of increasing size that she prepared for it (Todd and Bree lxxxi, lxxxiii). 27 January is the first date on the MS of this novel, which is peopled notably by a family of two brothers and two sisters three of whom enjoy imaginary illnesses – illnesses, that is, without ground, or bottom, which are consequently infinitely productive of "news."[3] Especially striking in this respect is the figure of Diana Parker, a spinster (whose ironic telling name recalls the maiden goddess) and pseudo-invalid whose account of an "attack" of her "old grievance, spasmodic bile" which left her "hardly able to crawl from . . . bed to the sofa" (163) and her "habit of self-doctoring" (165) recall her creator's self diagnosis of "Bile" as the "bottom" of her condition as well as a later description of herself (in May) as confined to her bed "with only removals to a Sopha" (22 May) (cf. Todd and Bree lxxxiv). Empowered by the desirable end of getting to the bottom of her own condition – naming it – Austen "moves on," as the current idiom has it, to write a new story, Scheherazade-like

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[3] Michael Caines has recently made the interesting suggestion that Austen's experience at Cheltenham spa in May 1816 may have fed into this novel. My thanks to the author for this reference.

thwarting death, and even producing a self caricature in the figure of Diana Parker, another female story teller whose remark that she is "*spin*ning out her story to an endless length" (Austen, *Later Manuscripts* 188), reflects less on her "linguistic hypochondria," as Miller suggests (35), than on the productivity of the *spin*ster's false – bottomless – illnesses which, in this respect, resemble the real, if elusive illness suffered by her spinster-creator until the liberating and empowering "closural act of nomination" (Miller 53) recorded in the letter to Alethea Biggs.

This act turned out, however, not to be the end of the story, but rather a "pseudoclosure" as Miller describes the false or inadequate explanations given by unreliable characters (53), including Diana Parker whose story about the family she has persuaded to come to Sanditon turns out to be "a mistake" (Austen, *Later Manuscripts* 201). Lived experience – "reality" – requires what, as I have indicated, Kermode calls adjustments, or revisions, as characters in the novels, especially the female protagonists, learn more and less painfully, and as Austen has to learn (again).[4] Uncontained by the attempt at closure her condition continues to elude her and the sense of an ending in explanatory naming yields in her letters to less precise ends, often of "recovery," but also, as I take up below, the end of "blooming." The possible imminence of the end of death is admitted in the extant correspondence only in May (though she writes a will on 27 April [Honan 394; Todd and Bree lxxxvi]), and then in a roundabout way, when she speculates in a letter to another friend, Anna Sharp: "if I live to be an old Woman I must expect to wish I had died now," "blessed in the tenderness of such a Family" and the "kindness" of friends (22 May; Austen, *Letters* 341). Recalling perhaps Othello's "If it were now to die / 'Twere now to be most happy" (Shakespeare 2.1.187-88), Austen at once admits the reality, even the desirability of death "now" even as she defers it to a future moment. There is, in short, just such a contradictory tension between a desire for closure and a desire to defer it which Miller finds in the novels and which is illustrated with particular intensity in the novel she had revised in the summer of 1816, deferring closure as she self consciously acknowledges through reference to the figure of Scheherazade. As I take up below, this explicitly conflates the end of naming/explanation, or getting to the bottom of things – the end for which desire is heightened by deferral – with the end of death – the desired deferral of which is

[4] The ironic discrepancy between human projections and reality is a recurring topic in earlier letters to her sister, though of amused rather than pained reflection, as when she writes on 24 May 1813: "whatever I may write or you may imagine, we know it will be something different" (Austen, *Letters* 214).

achieved by the figure of the female story teller shadowed by the author, a figure who, thanks to her ability, like Diana Parker, to tell a new story, "must live another day" (Austen, *Persuasion* 249).

It is of *Persuasion* that Austen writes to her much loved niece Fanny Knight in two letters dated respectively 13 March and 23-25 March. In both, accounts of the novel are immediately followed by accounts of her health, which are infiltrated by the novel's narrative structure and images. The first letter is upbeat, opening on a joke about how Austen would not be able to make an adequate reply to Fanny's letter were she to "labour at it all the rest of [her] Life & live to the age of Methusalah" (Austen, *Letters* 331-32). The mood is expansive and the end of life is perceived as neither imminent nor immanent, but at a distance, even slightly unreal. She is indeed optimistic when she writes about her health: she has "got tolerably well again," is up to "walking about & enjoying the Air," and has a "scheme" "for accomplishing more, as the weather grows springlike" (333). Her state of health is here conceived as a return – "well again" – associated with the return of spring. This association with the cyclical time of the seasons – "the time of eternal return" as Baudrillard puts it (Clarke and Doel 31) – recalls her most recently completed novel in which the heroine, Anne Elliot, is "blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty" (Austen, *Persuasion* 134). That she is thinking of her novel is suggested by the immediately preceding announcement that she has "something ready for Publication, which may perhaps appear about a twelvemonth hence" (Austen, *Letters* 333). The return of spring is here again evoked (if perhaps less consciously) in association with the publication of her next book, which she clearly expects she will be alive to see. There is indeed a cyclical dimension to the (regular) production of her novels – each of which, as Ruta Baublyte Kaufmann has shown, itself reproduces, if more and less explicitly, the cyclical time of the seasons as well as a linear plot of desire and marriage, intricately woven into it.[5] Like the daily renewed project of Scheherazade, that is, the production of her novels belongs to the time of eternal return, hence perhaps their force, like the return of spring, to counteract the sense of a definitive end – what Baudrillard calls "the time of no return" (Clarke and Doel 31) – rather as, in *Persuasion,* the seasonally linked work cycle of the farmer "meaning to have spring again" has the effect of "counteracting" the absolute dejection of "poetical despondence," "the image of youth and hope, and spring all gone

[5] My thanks to Ruta for enlightening me on this aspect of the novels as well as for the reference to Baudrillard.

together" that comes to Anne Elliot on the November walk when she believes she has lost Wentworth for ever (Austen, *Persuasion* 91).

Without a name, without, that is, the sovereign sign of closure and of no return, which is still deferred, as I take up below,[6] this "something ready for Publication" is set alongside the named – thus presumably in Austen's eyes, finished novel – "Miss Catherine" which, she writes to Fanny, "is put upon the Shelve for the present, and I do not know that she will ever come out" (Austen, *Letters* 333). This is surely a glance at her own socially anomalous condition of unmarried and unmarriageable woman, complete in herself, but stuck "on the shelf," in a social limbo, publicly invisible, like an unpublished book, without the sense of ending bestowed by the marriage plot, which is reproduced in *Catherine*, as in the other novels, but explicitly undercut by irony, as we will see.[7] That these two novels sat together on her mental desk is underscored when she writes of the "something ready for Publication," that it is "short, about the length of Catherine." Indeed, they share much more than this formal likeness. As others have observed, Bath is revisited as is the topic of books and their influence on the minds and manners of men and women.[8] What has not been observed is how – unlike any of the other completed novels – their respective ends are marked by what Adela Pinch has called, in relation to the revisions done to the end of *Persuasion*, "authorial rustlings" (113), which are still louder at the end of *Catherine*. If, however, they are alike in their self-conscious reflections on closure – and in their engagement through this reflection with injustice towards women, as we will see – the strategies adopted in each are diametrically opposed and suggest very different perspectives on the sense of an ending. For while in *Catherine*, there is a self-conscious acceleration of closure, in *Persuasion* the movement to closure, is, on the contrary, as I have indicated, deferred. This difference, I want to suggest, is linked to the immanence of death summoned through the reference to Scheherazade in *Persuasion,* which is entirely absent from *Catherine.*

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[6] Compare the Cambridge editors' comment: "Jane Austen had begun 'Sanditon' before the final touches had been put to *Persuasion* – if they ever were" (Todd and Bree, lxxxix).

[7] The first example in the *OED* of the phrase, as used specifically of women past their marriageable date, is 1839, but it is included by J. O. Halliwell in his dictionary of archaic idioms (first published 1847), which suggests that it was in circulation well before 1839. Halliwell's gloss reads: "SHELF. *On the shelf*, said of ladies when too old to get married" (Halliwell, vol. 2, 730).

[8] The Cambridge editors point out that the topic "of fiction permeating life is to the fore" in *Sanditon* too, which has consequently been linked to *Northanger Abbey* (Todd and Bree xcv).

In what Deidre Shauna Lynch describes as a "breezy postmodern idiom" (166), the narrator in *Catherine* steps outside her story to advertise the contrast between her protagonists and their "anxiety" as to the "final event" and "my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 259). Dripping with irony this advertised acceleration of closure highlights the fictional character of this (any) ending, which is exposed as egregious an illusion as the absolute state of "perfect felicity" – here or hereafter – with which it is associated. The irony carries the critical thrust of a "reality check," the confrontation of the imagined sense of an ending with lived experience, which, as Kermode argues, calls for adjustments/revisions, as we saw earlier. Indeed, the conventional ending of the marriage plot is exposed as unreal as the fantasies peddled by the gothic romances to which Catherine had been earlier addicted. A collective "awakening," like that of the heroine, is thus implicitly called for which would recognise alternative narrative trajectories for women such as Austen who do not submit to the imperative of the marriage plot and its attendant illusion of "perfect felicity" and who consequently suffer the public invisibility of being "on the shelf." With its sceptical critical thrust this ironic treatment of the sense of an ending is entirely without a sense of death as immanent or imminent. On the contrary, it points up the continuity of life. In this respect it is like the first letter to Fanny in which, as we have seen, death is viewed as remote, even slightly unreal.

The second letter to Fanny, written some ten days later on 23-25 March, is as much a contrast to the first letter as the self-consciously deferred ending of the "something ready for Publication" is to the self-consciously accelerated ending of *Catherine*. Indeed, there is no mention of *Catherine* in this second letter, only, again, "another ready for publication," which, Austen opines, without giving any reason, Fanny "will not like," though she "may *perhaps* like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me" (Austen, *Letters* 335). This is immediately followed by a very different account of her health. Without the optimism of the earlier letter, which appears to have been forgotten, she writes of not being well "for many weeks" and of being "very poorly" "about a week ago." Though she asserts that she is now "considerably better," she writes only of "recovering" her "[l]ooks a little" and of having to accept that she "must not depend upon being ever very blooming again" (335-36). As others have observed, "bloom" is a word that recurs in *Persuasion*, most often in relation to the heroine Anne Elliot whose "bloom" "had vanished early" (Austen, *Persuasion* 6), "destroyed" together with her

"youth" (65), "an early loss of bloom" (30) that is, however, counteracted when "the bloom and freshness of youth" are "restored" (112) in the "second spring of youth and beauty" with which she is "blessed" (134). If in the first letter Austen imagines for herself a return of health/spring that rhymes with that of her heroine, here she recognises (though for herself only – Fanny has not seen the book) that hers will be a different story, a story rather of a time of no return: "not . . . ever very blooming again." Hence perhaps the rejection projected on to Fanny ("You will not like it") and her own turn away from the heroine, which the Cambridge editors describe as "curious" (Todd and Blank lxi), but which we might take as an (understandable) expression of resentment towards Anne not so much for being "too good" for Austen but rather for being too lucky.

Indeed, there is to be not only no more blooming, but also no more writing of novels – the cultural (re)production preferred by Austen, who sometimes referred to her novels as her children,[9] over the biological reproduction implied in the word "bloom," as Amy King has shown, to which the majority of her sex (including her heroines) were destined.[10] This is signalled by the date written immediately below the last line in the MS of the novel that she had begun in January: March 18 (for the Cambridge editors a "deliberate . . . signing-off" [Todd and Bree, lxxxiii]). For this corresponds to the moment a "week ago" when, as she recalls in the second letter, she was "very poorly." Physically very unwell she may too have suffered a deep dejection at having to face the ineluctable – that she would not only not complete this novel, but also never write again, that, in short, there would be no return of spring for her. Tellingly – and I think deliberately – she stops with a description of the dead, although, as I have indicated, the dead as they are remembered in portraits, a metonymy for cultural afterlife, which is now the only return for which she can hope. She thus implicitly delegates to readers the project of Scheherazade to thwart her (premature) death by continuing not only this story, but all her stories – "spinning" them out "to endless length." It is a task poignantly highlighted by the blank page under the final date in the MS and by the many blank pages that follow. For, as the Cam-

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[9] Most famously when she writes of *Pride and Prejudice* to her sister in January 1813: "I have got my own darling Child from London" (Austen, *Letters* 201).

[10] In relation specifically to Anne's loss of bloom King comments: "Simply put, the lack of bloom is a lack of a marriage plot" and her recovery of bloom signals "sexual attractiveness and readiness" as well as "marital eligibility" (5). The sense of the word is not so restricted when it is used in the letter by Austen, who is well aware she is "on the shelf," no longer eligible for marriage (see above).

bridge editors point out, only half of the eighty pages of the third booklet prepared for this novel were used (Todd and Bree lxxxiii).

The visual portraits which mark the "end" of this unfinished novel are not of course the first to feature in her novels, although they tend to be neglected in discussions of the many references to, or descriptions of portraits scattered through the completed novels.[11] The most well known – and most pertinent – prior instance is the gallery of portraits of dead ancestors through which Elizabeth Bennett passes before being "arrested" by the portrait of the current living occupant of Pemberley (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 277). Though important primarily for the development of the heroine's knowledge of (and desire for) Mr. Darcy, the place of his portrait at the end of a gallery highlights the social as well as familial continuity carried by this cultural form. It is, moreover, by means of this form that Austen imagines a life after the end of the marriage plot for the two principal female figures – Elisabeth and Jane Bennett – when she writes to Cassandra how, on a visit to an exhibition in London in 1813, she found "a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her" – a portrait she describes in some detail – and how she was disappointed not to have found one of Mrs. Darcy (Austen, *Letters* 212). Though scholars and critics have felt compelled to describe as light hearted and ironic what might otherwise seem like girlish naiveté, there is a serious point to such fantasies, namely the evocation of a life after the end – here of the marriage plot – with its implicit invitation to readers to imagine what happens next. Undoing the sense of an ending, specifically of the marriage plot, which is undercut in *Catherine* by caustic irony, as we have seen, such projections summon a cultural afterlife such as Deidre Shauna Lynch has argued is solicited too by the embryonic plots of new stories scattered throughout the novels.

In addition to the summoning of a cultural afterlife the description of the two portraits with which she ends her unfinished novel is, like the end of *Catherine*, pervaded by an irony which carries a critical thrust. For the two dead husbands remembered in the portraits are not given equal standing by the woman who has buried them both: the seriously rich first husband, Mr. Hollis, is now "[p]oor Mr. Hollis," remembered as he is by "one among many miniatures" placed in a "little conspicuous" "part of the room" – the main sitting room of his own house – while "placed" very conspicuously "over the mantelpiece" is "the whole-length portrait of a stately gentleman," Sir Harry Denham, the second –

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[11] These portraits have been shown to serve various (narrative) purposes as well as illustrating Austen's understanding of different painting styles. For a helpful overview see Nigro.

titled – husband that his widow acquired thanks to her first husband's wealth (Austen, *Later Manuscripts* 209).[12] This deliciously ironic description – a remarkable achievement given Austen's physical weakness – suggests how a cultural afterlife may perpetuate the injustices of this life, specifically, how it is likely to perpetuate the privileging of rank over wealth.

That Austen should choose to end her writing career on this image of cultural afterlife bestows a neat, if entirely unnoticed pertinence on the decision in 2017 to remember her by means of a portrait on the new £10 note, all the more so as this has been perceived as a corrective to the cultural injustice towards women – the privileging of men over women – perpetuated by the Bank of England (Morris). For, though Austen would doubtless have made comic capital of the form that this remembrance takes – and in particular its prettification of her portrait – she would surely have appreciated the corrective justice done towards women as cultural and economic agents. For justice towards women is a recurring, if not always explicit, concern, notably in the two complete novels with which she was preoccupied at this time and which have so much in common, as I indicated earlier. Most importantly here, it is at the heart of the crucial conversation between Anne Elliot and her friend Captain Harville in the chapter which Austen added when she made her revisions to the end of *Persuasion* and which she introduced by reference to the figure of Scheherazade. Indeed, as I shall now show by way of conclusion, the story of Scheherazade itself illustrates not only how the figure of the female story teller thwarts the project of the male tyrant to inflict unjust (and premature) death on women, but also how she counters the prejudiced view of women that such men propagate.

The frequently cited conversation between Anne Elliot and Captain Harville turns on the question of male/female constancy/inconstancy. Regretting what he regards as inconstancy towards his (dead) sister Fanny on the part of Captain Benwick (who is now to marry Louisa Musgrove), Captain Harville (rather inconsistently) proceeds to argue the case for male constancy and female inconstancy, evoking "all histories . . . all stories, . . . [s]ongs and proverbs" which testify to "woman's inconstancy," although conceding possible prejudice as "these were all written by men" (Austen, *Persuasion* 254). This is taken up by Anne who, rehearsing a repeated complaint, as Deidre Shauna Lynch has noted

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[12] It is worth noting two changes made to the MS by Austen: "stately" has replaced "portly" to highlight the distinguished social status of Denham rather than his (ungainly) physical size, while "represented" has replaced "was" in "was Mr. Hollis" to highlight that the miniature portrait is a construct – art, not life.

(Introduction and notes 248),[13] points out how men "have had every advantage of us in telling their own story" "the pen has been in their hands" and books consequently do not "prove any thing" (255). Indeed, the question does not admit of proof one way or the other, she argues, even as she seizes on the occasion to communicate her own constancy to Wentworth who, in his eagerness to listen to the conversation, has dropped his pen.

It is precisely the inconstancy – or "disloyalty," as the title page of the 1792 edition puts it – of his first wife, who exemplifies "the treachery of women" (vol. 1, 5), that leads the Sultan to take his revenge on the sex by vowing "to marry a Lady every Day" and "have her put to Death the next Morning" (title page). It is this vow, which propagates as it is motivated by a view of women as unfaithful/inconstant, that Scheherazade manages to "divert" (title page) by telling stories which summon erotic as well as intellectual desire in the Sultan who finally decides "to renounce a vow so unworthy of him" and the sacrifice of women to his "resentment," which he recognises as "unjust" (vol. 4, 239-40). Such a yielding of prejudice/resentment – and power – is signalled too in Wentworth's dropping of his pen the significance of which is generalised by Anne's use of the trope of "the pen" in the comment which follows about the propagation of male prejudice against women.[14] Wentworth as lover-listener is indeed as captivated by Anne's words as the Sultan is by the words of Scheherazade, who succeeds not merely in diverting his purpose but in changing his mind. Whether or not Austen was conscious of it (as I think she was), the scene of the conversation that she adds in the new chapter is clearly infiltrated by the story of the figure to whom she refers in the opening lines – a story which illustrates not only the point emphasised by Anne that stories have tended to spread male prejudice against women, especially their capacity for fidelity, but also the ability of the female story teller to counter such prejudice. If it is Anne who is in the position of Scheherazade here, as Kuldip Kuwahara has observed, she clearly speaks for the authorial narrator whose own story counters the prejudice Anne denounces. The self-consciously announced deferral of the end opens then a space for Aus-

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[13] Particularly pertinent, given the essay by Anne-Claire Michoux and Katrin Rupp, is Lynch's comment that "Anne sounds like the Wife of Bath."

[14] Anne-Claire Michoux too sees in this scene "a reversal of power" in the essay in this volume.

ten to engage explicitly with injustices towards women as she engages, if more implicitly, in *Catherine*, through the similarly self conscious, if contrasting, acceleration of the end. As I argued above, this tends to expose as illusion the "perfect felicity" of the end of the marriage plot – an "end" which she also undermines, as we have seen, by imagining afterlives for her heroines.

If the two endings engage with injustice towards women, the stakes of the end of *Persuasion* are raised by the intertextual reference to Scheherazade, which, in its overt reflection on closure, anticipates the theoretical discussions of Miller as well as Kermode. For the deferred end is explicitly associated with explanation as well as with death:

> One day only had passed since Anne's conversation with Mrs. Smith; but a keener interest had succeeded, and she was now so little touched by Mr. Elliot's conduct, except by its effects in one quarter, that it became a matter of course the next morning, *still to defer her explanatory visit* in Rivers-street. She had promised to be with the Musgroves from breakfast to dinner. Her faith was plighted, and *Mr. Elliot's character, like the Sultaness Scheherazade's head, must live another day.* (Austen, *Persuasion* 249 [emphasis mine])

"To defer her explanatory visit": explanation and its deferral precisely sum up Miller's analysis of the contradictory tension in the classic novel exemplified by Austen. On the one hand, there is the movement towards, and desire for explanation and clarity, "the right names on feeling and conduct" (Miller 45), and, on the other, in contradictory tension with this desire, there is the desire to defer the dissolving of the conditions of narratability – the indeterminate or unknown – whether the character and desire of male figures (Mr. Darcy, Mr. Elliot or Captain Wentworth), or the character of Diana Parker's, or Jane Austen's, illness(es). This dissolving of the narratable – no more to tell – is, in addition, associated in the passage quoted above, with death, which, as I have mentioned, is for Kermode often immanent in imagined endings, while its deferral – something more to tell – is associated with the thwarting of death: "liv[ing] another day." Though there is a spark of irony in the incongruous joining of a man's "character" with a woman's "head," as I take up below, the comparison introduces an added charge to the emotional intensity generated by the revisions, which readers and critics have often observed. With consummate skill Austen holds off the desired end through obstacles which heighten the desire for it even as she underlines its precarious contingency: changes of plan and chance conversations in crowded places briefly open possibilities for the expression of desire, which are then closed. The screw is turned and

turned so that we are, in the appropriate phrase, dying for it – longing for the final (re)union of Anne and Frederick Wentworth and the attendant mutual explanations.

Indeed, Anne not only gets her man and her second "blooming" spring, but also a new name. In this, of course, she is like the heroines in the other novels, whose renaming is, for Miller, "only the most obvious thematization of closure as an act of nomination" (45). The act is, however, specifically telling in the case of Anne, especially given Austen's putatively preferred title, *The Elliots* (Todd and Blank lxxxiii). For, in a telling play on her name/the indefinite article, An(ne) Elliot – the indeterminate familial member ("only Anne" [6]) – is renamed Anne Wentworth, a new name that bestows a distinct sense of self, in contrast to the "anonymous mass" of "Elliot wives," as Austen's opening reference to "all the Marys and Elizabeths" mentioned in the Baronetage is glossed by Michoux and Rupp (Austen, *Persuasion* 4). In the separation from her family (name), that is, Anne finds herself.

Tellingly, however, this act of (re)nomination is not always thus positively viewed by Austen, notably with respect to her beloved Fanny to whom she writes in February 1817: "the loss of a Fanny Knight will be never made up to me; My "affec: Neice F. C. Wildman" will be but a poor Substitute" (Austen, *Letters* 329). Indeed, the aunt both wants and does not want the end of the marriage plot for her niece, oscillating between desire for this end and the desire to defer it, as she will do in relation to the end of death in the letter of May quoted earlier: "I only do not like you shd marry anybody. And yet I do wish you to marry very much. . .". The rupture of the familial bond marked by the woman's new name is, moreover, a loss not only for the aunt, but also for the niece, who is so "agreeable" in her "single state" and whose "delicious play of Mind" will on marriage be "all settled down into conjugal & maternal affections." This may remind us less of the sober, sensible Anne than of the lively Emma whose "play of Mind," as Miller observes, epitomises as it carries the indeterminacy of the novel's condition of narratability (13). To be settled down in marriage is to lose the indeterminacy of play (and/or flirtation, as Miller suggests [20-27]), which is the condition of narratability. The end of the marriage plot is, in short, a kind of death.

The association of marriage and death may be a subtext in the reference to Scheherazade who, through her story telling, thwarts the premature death of women. For, as Austen may hint in her use of the word "head," their execution – the loss of their head – follows the loss of their maidenhead in the consummation of their marriage to the Sultan.

If this suggests the sexual violence attendant on the marriage plot, this is suppressed in what follows the intertextual reference. For, as I have pointed out, the end of the marriage plot brings Anne a new distinct sense of self in the rupture with the original family bond marked by her new name. Would this rupture, one wonders, even allow her to relax into the "play of mind" that she so conspicuously lacks as an(ne) Elliot?

Indeed, if the heroine is (re)named, the novel is, as I have discussed, not named by Austen who, as we have seen, describes it to Fanny as "something ready for Publication" and "another for publication." There is, that is, something still to tell, the definitive act of closure in nomination suspended in an indeterminate "play" as if to ward off the end which is death (and, as noted above, the Cambridge editors suggest Austen may have had further revisions in mind [see note 6]). Death is indeed evoked as immanent in this ending as it is not in the ending of *Catherine* in which the end of the marriage plot is not shadowed by death, but exposed as an illusion. Immanent in the revised ending of the something for publication, death is also prominent in the ending, which is not one, of the new novel that Austen began in January and stopped in March 1817 when she understood that there would be no more blooming – and no more writing – for her. The figures of the dead are, however, as I have discussed, described as they are "represented" in visual portraits, a metonymy I have suggested for the only form of survival for which Austen could now hope from readers to whom she thus delegates the project of Scheherazade to thwart her premature and unjust death by a cultural afterlife for her stories, her characters and herself.

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Austen could not, of course, have imagined the extent and diversity of the afterlife that she has enjoyed, including the portrait on the new £10 note issued in 2017 (discussed above). The figure of Scheherazade too has enjoyed a vigorous, if not so extensive and varied afterlife. In a pertinent recent instance, her story (and stories) have been taken as an allegory of the ongoing collective project of modern scientific research to ensure the continued survival of the human species by constructing constantly renewed and changing narratives (Vetterli). Vetterli's emphasis on the imperative to change finds echo in Kermode's key point that narrative constructs – whether fictions or non-fictions – must change if they are to accommodate the exigencies of "inhuman reality" and "hu-

man justice" (64). In Austen's changing senses of an ending we register an aspiration to justice for women as well as cultural survival in the face of human injustice towards women and the inhuman reality of her premature death.

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