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Jane Austen, domestic travel and the carriage as an (anti-)sociable space

Mascha Hansen

PLAN

Dangerous sociability: young women and travel
The carriage as a sociable space

TEXTE

> "Two ladies were waiting for their carriage, and
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> one of them was giving the other an account of the
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> intended match, in a voice so little attempting conceal-
>
> ment, that it was impossible for me not to hear all."
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> (*Sense and Sensibility*, p. 226) [1]

1 The fictional journeys of Austen's heroines stand for some of the typical excursions that women of the gentry undertook at the time – a rare scenic trip to the Lakes in company with an aunt or a cousin, a fair amount of visiting among relatives, perhaps a journey to London for the season if one was lucky, or to Bath or Bristol for one's health: all of these were trips undertaken by young women, and all of these were trips of a sociable kind. While Austen outlined the joys of touristic travelling in Elizabeth's trip with the Gardiners in *Pride and Prejudice*, or Marianne's delight in the picturesque sights on the road from Devon to London in *Sense and Sensibility*, her works are often concerned with more mundane travels – going to a ball in the next town, or on a daytrip to a beauty spot in the area, or to a dinner at a neighbour's place. Many of these trips require a vehicle, and all are concerned with aspects of sociability: be it a question of social etiquette – such as whether Fanny Price is entitled to Sir Thomas's

carriage when going to a dinner at the Grants' in *Mansfield Park* (p. 285) – or of allotting seats, as in the trip to Sotherton (p. 91), of polite small talk with one's fellow travellers due to the forced intimacy of a close carriage, or a matter of finding an inconspicuous opportunity for intimate conversations, in public sight but out of public earshot in an open carriage [2].

2 In Austen's novels, the type of carriage moreover conveys social hierarchies as well as personal character [3]. Austen uses the carriage both to indicate social status – in *The Watsons*, for instance, "the Edwards were people of fortune who lived in the town and kept their coach; the Watsons inhabited a village about three miles distant, were poor and had no close carriage" (p. 79) – as well as social identity: Whereas Henry Crawford owns an expensive barouche and uses it to impress the Misses Bertram, Edward Dashwood declines to aspire to one, even if it is his mother's fondest wish to see him parade their wealth by driving one [4].In *Sense and Sensibility*, headstrong Willoughby races ahead in his fashionable curricle, leaving the rest of the party no chance to catch up with him (p. 78), while sparkish John Thorpe can only pretend that his second-hand gig looks like a curricle in *Northanger Abbey* (p. 41). "Austen's carriages reveal nuances of her characterizations and propel her plot lines", Deborah Paquin asserts [5]."Carriage and marriage" are also closely connected in Austen's novels, as Jennifer Ewing and Kirstin Olsen have discussed, since marriage was an occasion to buy a carriage for the newlyweds, and thus often the only means for an Austen heroine finally to gain her own carriage [6].This is the case of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, for instance, who, on marrying Captain Wentworth, becomes the owner of a landaulette, an expensive vehicle that a woman could drive by herself (*Persuasion*, p. 272). Nonetheless, the idea of a happy marriage, in that novel, is encapsulated in the image of the Crofts driving together in their (inexpensive) gig: though Admiral Croft is the one to drive them, his wife, "by coolly giving the reins a better direction herself" steers them away from dangerous posts or dung-carts in a manner that, to Anne, is "no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs" (p. 99).

3 Building on previous research concerning Austen's carriages, Austen's journeys, and Austen's sociability, I will consider the carriage in Austen's novels with a focus on their importance for Austen's

portraits of contemporary sociability. As Gillian Russell points out, "Jane Austen's fiction represents one of the most sophisticated analyses we have of the elusive 'character or quality' of sociable human interaction" (Russell, 176). Domestic travels and local mobility bring about experiences of sociability, and the carriage itself serves as a sociable space, taking Austen's characters into close encounters, and out to various sociable excursions[7] .Carriages thus signal social interaction in Austen's novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the late arrival of the carriage makes the Bennets the last family to leave the Netherfield ball, Mrs Bennet being convinced that her manoeuvring will soon bring about "new carriages and wedding clothes" (p. 115). In *Sanditon*, the familiar plot device of an overturned coach brings visitors to the Heywood family in the very first chapter, and ultimately the heroine, Charlotte Heywood, to up-and-coming Sanditon. Balls begin with a "string of carriages", as in *Sense and Sensibility* (p. 199), or the sound of carriages arriving, as in the *The Watsons* (p. 95). In *Northanger Abbey*, they invite even the more travel-wise readers to sympathise with those stuck at home: "the chaise of a traveller being a rare sight in Fullerton, the whole family were immediately at the window; and to have it stop at the sweep–gate was a pleasure to brighten every eye and occupy every fancy" (p. 241).

4 Traveller's chaises differed in size and importance: A private coach could demonstrate its owner's wealth or nobility, but coaches were generally considered "stolid family vehicles", transporting larger families such as Austen's Bennets to various locations on various occasions (Olsen, I: 117). The open carriage was made for people to see and be seen, the trend being towards high-bodied carriages despite the dangers involved: "top-heavy" vehicles were more likely to overturn (Olsen, I:53). The inside of a coach, and the side-by-side seating arrangement of a curricle, provide intimate spaces for conversations, unless the travelling noise caused by the pavement, or pitching, of the road prevented all talk by "its jumbling and noise", as in *The Watsons*[8] (p. 87). Intimate social spaces are generally considered to belong to the domestic sphere, but the carriage is a space in-between: it is neither public nor private, leading from one to the other, linking both; its character depending on the type of vehicle and the people using it, as well as the purpose for which the carriage is required. The social space of the carriage is, paradoxically, a fixed

space of transition, embodying the freedom of movement even while the confinement it imposes requires particular emphasis on habitual politeness to keep all passengers at ease, and, at least in novels, young women safe.

Dangerous sociability: young women and travel

5 Austen declines to have her heroines abducted by a sinister villain, forced to endure his sexual advances in the cramped space of a coach – a staple of the eighteenth-century novel, used in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), as well as in Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778). Emma is the only one of Austen's heroines trapped in a coach alone with a man, Mr Elton, who eagerly seizes the occasion to protest his love, much to her dismay, but does not resort to any kind of violence (pp. 140-42). And yet, an open carriage is often presented as an even more dangerous social space in her novels, precisely because it was a relatively new social situation for young women to find themselves in, tempting them to go beyond the boundaries of acceptable sociability only to find that they were misled. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is both shocked and relieved to hear that Mr Allen disapproves of "[y]oung men and women driving about the country in open carriages!" (p. 105). Shocked, because her friend Isabella as well as her brother pretended that it was nothing out of the ordinary for young women to be forced to listen to the likes of John Thorpe while being driven about in his gig, and relieved because she now finds that she has a right to decline such a drive if she wants to (a little later, however, she prefers not to decline a seat in a curricle next to a young man when the driver is Henry Tilney[9]). Despite her cautionary take on the open carriage, Austen picks up the arguably inflated claims of contemporary moralists such as Hannah More on the dangers awaiting young women who dare to go out and about only to puncture them one by one[10] .Her focus is on the more mundane difficulties that await young female travellers, the dangers of not knowing how to behave, of thwarting decorum, and of having no guidance when it comes to deciding on the question whether it is proper to accept or decline a seat in a young man's curricle.

6 For unmarried young women, travel without parental guidance or chaperones had to be legitimated by some form of necessity: a girl was needed by her relatives, or in search of health. Austen's heroines frequently deplore the fact that they cannot travel as much as they would like to. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot's mental as well as physical health suffer because she feels stuck "at home, quiet, confined" (*Persuasion*, p. 253). As Melissa Sodeman notes, "Austen recommends travel for its own sake; both pleasurable and instructive, travel frees women from psychologically damaging confinement." (p. 807). By travelling, her female characters acquire knowledge of the world along with confidence as members of society: Catherine Morland's famous journey back home to Fullerton convinces her mother that she must have had her wits about her after all, to be able to change coaches; ultimately, Mrs Moreland is relieved to see that her daughter can "shift very well for herself" (*Northanger Abbey*, p. 246). Unlike the male characters of Austen's novels, who are free to come and go on horseback or in their own gigs and curricles, the women, at least the unmarried ones, usually have to wait for the offer of a seat in a carriage that belongs to someone else, and although they are keen to move about and to travel, they rarely get a say concerning the destination. Even those who know how to ride, like Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* or Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, do not themselves own a horse but have to rely on their wealthier relatives to supply them with a horse from their stables. In Marianne's case, she is tempted to accept the gift of a horse from the wrong kind of man, and it may be the attraction of the freedom granted by a horse as much as her love for Willoughby that makes her accept the expensive gift with such alacrity (pp. 69-70).

7 Jane Austen herself "enjoyed a certain amount of travel, visits to Kent, Bath, London and Ibthorpe", according to her biographer Claire Tomalin [11] (p. 175). The Austens liked to take their daughters on trips to the south of England, usually visiting relatives, for instance at Great Bookham (of Burney fame [12]). Mrs Austen even suggested that one or both of her daughters should go to Ilchester and stay with their aunt, Mrs Jane Leigh-Perrot. Literary history might have taken a very different turn if the offer had been taken up, since Mrs Leigh-Perrot had been committed to Ilchester gaol for – allegedly – stealing a valuable card of white lace in a shop at Bath [13] .Due to her "social

standing and income" (Tomalin, 151), she was allowed to reside with the prison keeper, a Mr Scadding, until her trial seven months later (that trial was no mean affair: she might have been sentenced to death for this crime, but was acquitted [14]). Apart from prisons, visits to relatives could be a means for young girls to gain entrance to 'better' society: Jane Austen's brother Edward, who had been adopted by the wealthy Knights, married a baronet's daughter and often invited his brothers and sisters to stay with them and their growing family at Godmersham, the Knights' family seat, which he inherited. In a frequently quoted letter, Edward's daughter Fanny Knight declared that both Cassandra and Jane owed a lot to the fine society to be found at Godmersham:

> [The Austens] were not rich & the people around with whom they chiefly mixed, were not at all high bred, or in short anything more than *mediocre* & *they* of course tho' superior in *mental powers* & *cultivation* were on the same level as far as *refinement* goes ... Both the Aunts were brought up in the most complete ignorance of the World & its ways (I mean as to fashion &c) & if it had not been for papa's marriage which brought them into Kent ... they would have been, tho' not less clever & agreeable in themselves, very much below par as to good Society & its ways [15].

8 Jane Austen may not have seen the value of this kind of refinement in quite the same light as Fanny Knight: in *Mansfield Park*, Susan Price's fear of the elegant napkins and finger glasses in use at Sir Thomas's seat quickly gives way to habituation, and a few pages suffice to see her established as a favourite, despite her formative years having been spent in the Prices' humble home at Portsmouth [16] (p. 517). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy discuss the importance of one's social surroundings, and the advantages or disadvantages of travelling to meet one's friends and family. When Mr Darcy asserts that Mrs Collins must be happy to see herself settled so near her family and friends, Elizabeth immediately objects: "It is nearly fifty miles" (p. 201). He considers that to be "little more than half a day's journey", and considering that a post-chaise would have covered approximately 10 miles per hour, he may have been right. And yet, Mr and Mrs Collins are not rich enough to afford either their own carriage or frequent travels, as Elizabeth points out. (As she will

soon accompany Charlotte's sister Maria Lucas to visit her friend at Hunsford Parsonage, however, the novel seems to support Darcy's view.) Yet Darcy's reply shows that he has followed his own thoughts rather than her arguments: "*You* cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. *You* cannot have been always at Longbourn" (p. 201). Elizabeth is too surprised to answer, and he changes the subject to the safer ground of her general impressions of Kent. Yet Darcy's emphatic statement seems to imply that, firstly, a girl's being confined to a village such as Longbourn cannot fail to result in mental stagnation, or at least a limited horizon, and, secondly, that he considers Elizabeth to be different form the rest of Longbourn's inhabitants, noticeably and agreeably so: she must have been in better company, she must have experienced other forms of sociability. At the beginning of the novel, Darcy had already voiced his opinion that "in a country neighbourhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society" (p. 47), offending Mrs Bennet who quickly picks up on the implied insult, while Elizabeth at that point sides with him. His associations of villages with mental confinement imply that it is not so much the freedom of movement involved in travelling that he has in mind but the more varied, and more refined, society to be found elsewhere.

9 Even though Elizabeth emphasizes the physical distance created by her Charlotte's marriage, she considers her friend's situation to be more deplorable with regard to the distance separating Charlotte's understanding from that of her husband. Yet Darcy is wrong to assume that Elizabeth cannot have been always at Longbourn. She is overjoyed to be taken on a scenic trip by the Gardeners because she does not seem to have had many opportunities of travelling before. Nonetheless, Elizabeth is confident enough not to fear journeys such as the one to Hunsford Parsonage, possibly because she has long been used to being out and about, if only in the neighbourhood. Austen implies that it is one of Darcy's prejudices to assume that someone who has grown up in a small town cannot be as refined, as agile, as mentally mobile as Elizabeth. His opinion may well coincide with Fanny Knight's concerning the "*mediocre*" society the young Austens moved in, as noted above, and whatever the compliment he may have meant to pay Elizabeth, she would, at this point in the novel, have been struck by the impoliteness of his voicing such an

illiberal assumption of the superiority on the part of those who have not been kept out of the fashionable world.

10 Whereas Elizabeth Bohls contends that it is ultimately only a "spatially restricted knowledge" (Bohls, p. 211) which Austen allows to her heroine, it is possible to see the experience of travelling as akin to that of reading: Elizabeth's comments on travellers might equally apply to both tourists and readers. "Hours of transport" (p. 174) will get you far out of any mental restrictions, while the actual distance covered may account for very little. As far as the restricted knowledge granted to the reader in *Pride and Prejudice* will permit one to judge, Austen did not think of domesticity or the neighbourhood offered to those living in the country as either spatially or mentally restrictive. In this novel, at least, she maintains that reading and conversations with other readers equally broaden the mind, and that mental agility does not rely on an influx of new people with new ideas, or foreign travel.

11 By contrast, in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a change of society is mandatory to broaden the heroine's mind, but the journey alone is not sufficient: Catherine Morland is invited by her more affluent neighbours on a medicinal trip to Bath to cure Mr Allen's "gouty constitution" (p. 9), but under Mrs Allen's guidance, she does not do much more than listen to vacuous talk about the latest fashions[17]. Catherine has grown up so far away from polite circles that she cannot differentiate between a "rattle" and good conversation (p. 62), and the socially superior Allens turn out to have little to contribute to either Catherine's refinement or her knowledge of the world. Clearly, this heroine needs to experience the ways of the world, and to acquire a habit of thinking for herself, to be gained along with a certain distance from home and its associates (p. 63). Further travel experiences, and a different society, are needed for her to acquire self-assurance. A trip abroad is out of the question, but at least, we are told, Catherine reads novels to gain some idea of other countries, and can imagine the South of France on a tour of the environs of Bath (p. 107).

12 Whether it is indeed possible to gain knowledge of the world by means of reading novels, or "travels", is a central topic of *Northanger Abbey* as well as of the novels praised in it, Burney's

Camilla (1796) and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801). Austen's *Sanditon*, too, explicitly mentions Burney's *Camilla* to point out that its heroine, Charlotte, at twenty-two is not too young to travel on her own, and that unlike Camilla, she will avoid financial distress even at this (not quite) fashionable watering place. In contrast to Catherine, or Camilla, Austen's Charlotte Heywood is "a very sober-minded young lady, sufficiently well-read in novels to supply her imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them" (p. 167). Her parents do not travel at all, if they can avoid it, to save money, but insist that their children get out and about to gain knowledge of the world: "*They* staid at home, that their children *might* get out; – and while making that home extremely comfortable, welcomed every change from it which could give useful connections or respectable acquaintance to sons or daughters." (p. 149). Being stationary is a fate that many of Austen's heroines share at the beginning of their stories, but it is not a state they want to be in, or intend to remain in. Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth seem to be in accordance when pointing out that in order to be made to think for oneself, travelling and visiting (not for short polite calls but for long stays) are excellent means to the purpose, and visits to friends and relatives a generally safe option for young women.

13 Nonetheless, contemporary notions of femininity denied young women the freedom to travel by themselves, with conduct-book writers making the most of the manifold risks an unaccompanied woman might run. As Robin Jarvis explains, "[c]onservative disapproval of female travel was increased by a belief in the loosening of sexual virtue that took place 'on the road'."[18] Hannah More extended her disapproval even to women's hopes to participate in the general enlightenment of their age. In her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), she warns:

> The same allurement has been held out to the women of our country, which was employed by the first philosophist to the first sinner – Knowledge. Listen to the precepts of the new German enlighteners, and you need no longer remain in that situation in which Providence has placed you! Follow their examples, and you shall be permitted to indulge in all those gratifications which custom, not religion, has tolerated in the male sex![19]

14 The facilitation of public transport ultimately gave women that very kind of practical knowledge which More deplored, and Austen made the most of More's involuntary advertisement of the possibilities that opened up to women to discover the world. Knowledge, however, in her novels is not gained without enterprise, or without enterprising parents who are happy to send off their daughters with people they barely know, as in *Sanditon*. Austen made fun of the association of female independence with licentiousness both in her novels and her letters. Thus, she jokingly reports to Cassandra from London: "Here I am once more in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, and I begin already to find my Morals corrupted."[20] To her, a little change of scenery, or better still, of society, served to finish a young woman's education, and gave them a sense of what was happening in the world. From a novelist's point of view, playing down the dangers of a young woman's travelling by herself does come with a drawback: not much enlightenment can occur during an unadventurous trip, only the satisfaction of having accomplished a difficult task may be advantageously presented. Nonetheless, Austen usually refuses to follow those female characters who do go to London or Brighton to have their morals corrupted, such as Lydia Bennet or Maria Bertram, and indicates that their morals may well have been faulty before they even set out. However much conduct-book writers disapproved of women's desire to range the wide common of the world, tourism had set in by the late eighteenth century, as Austen shows in *Sanditon*, providing intrepid female travellers with new options for leaving home.

The carriage as a sociable space

15 Catherine Morland, the only one of Austen's heroines forced to travel by herself in a public stage coach, does not seem to speak to her fellow travellers there, at least Austen chooses not to let us in on any of her conversations[21]. "A heroine in a hack post-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand," Austen's narrator complains in mock-seriousness (*Northanger Abbey*, pp. 240). Despite her mockery, the only other female character to use a hackney coach is Lydia Bennet, and in her case, this is a sign of her moral fall (Olsen, I: 112-13). Austen rarely even uses the close carriage – a private coach, a post-chaise, or the stage-coach – to show her characters in sociable occupations

during their travels. These carriages rarely provide the intimate space necessary for meaningful conversations. And yet, Colonel Brandon's willingness to fetch Mrs Dashwood to her sick daughter reveals the importance of the sociable space and time that the carriage provided: "He opened his whole heart to me yesterday", Mrs Dashwood tells Elinor. His love for Marianne "came out quite unawares, quite undesignedly" (p. 238), simply because they were travelling together, confined for hours in the interior of the coach and united in their fears for Marianne's life [22]. By contrast, Mr Elton's brief attempt to profit from the intimacy of the coach to engage Emma in an exchange of vows miserably ends with each sitting out the ride in determined silence (p. 143). Emma is similarly silent after the Box Hill jaunt when she grapples with self-censure and Mr Knightly's reproof in a close carriage, though accompanied by her best friend Harriet, who is equally preoccupied with her own thoughts (p. 409).

16 In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and Maria Lucas travel back from Hunsford Parsonage towards Longbourn, and are met at an Inn on the road, where they are to change into the Bennet carriage, by Kitty and Lydia, who first regale them to a repast (at their older sister's expense) and then drive back with them, "nicely [...] crammed" inside the coach, all the while trying to be amusing but failing utterly in their choice of topics: Elizabeth "listened as little as she could" (pp. 244-45). To her aunt Gardiner, Elizabeth relates her own intentions to bring back better topics for conversations from their planned tour (p. 175), but during the actual journey, though she admires the beauties of Pemberley, her mind is "too full for conversation" (p. 271). Fanny Price has a very comfortable trip to Portsmouth in the company of her brother, Sir Thomas having paid for the hire of a post chaise (a much more comfortable way of travelling that did not require that they share the space with strangers). "Of pleasant talk between the brother and sister, there was no end" (p. 433), the narrator claims, even though Fanny does not want to touch on the topic her own mind is full of, Crawford's proposal. Charlotte Heywood, in *Sanditon*, is shown in conversation in a close carriage: along with the readers, she is made acquainted with the characters of note she will subsequently encounter in the novel, the narrator summarizing a conversation taking place in the coach that conveys Charlotte to the soon-to-be-famous seaside resort. She is made to

listen to the Parkers' modern preference of a view over comfort in their choice of a new house immediately after this introduction to the principal cast of the novel (pp. 155-56). More importantly, this coach ride also provides Austen's readers with the beginning of a disagreement between husband and wife, which is quickly smoothed over by tokens of habitual agreement on both sides (pp. 156-57).

17 "The confinement of a carriage" (*Sense and Sensibility*, p. 182) frequently requires unusual politeness in Austen's novels. The coach was a sociable space difficult to navigate, one from which there was, once the journey was decided on, little escape and which therefore put questions of politeness at the forefront of the experience of travelling. To Elinor's distress, Marianne shows little inclination to be civil: during the entire three days they are travelling towards London in Mrs Jennings's coach – a journey spent in close confinement with a woman they barely know (p. 181) – she remains "wrapt in her own meditations", exclusively addressing her sister if she sees anything worth noting. By contrast, "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[23]" (p. 182) .Travelling by coach could be, as the Dashwoods had already experienced on leaving Norland, "tedious and unpleasant" (*Sense and Sensibility*, p. 33).The close carriage can thus be seen as an emblem of the difficulties of sociability: of having to be polite at all times to keep the wheels of superficial conversation running smoothly, of having to choose not just between sense and sensibility, but also between a polite lie and an unsociable silence: "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" (p. 141).

18 Austen seems to have doubted that the promises Joseph Addison and others had seen in the new sociable spaces of London had been fulfilled: by then, the allure of "the ideology of sociability", to borrow Gillian Russell's words (p. 176), had somewhat faded. This sceptical view is underlined in *Sense and Sensibility*: the sisters' journey to London is undertaken in the hopes of sociable balls and a good deal of sightseeing, but that promise is never fulfilled. London is presented as a site of little amusement to either sister, with not much sight-

seeing going on, as Gillian Russell points out, despite the availability of a carriage (p. 180). Instead, most evenings are given over to card-playing with Mrs Jennings's friends[24] .Such private evening parties are considered mere "elegant stupidity" in *Persuasion* (p. 195).

19 Open carriages are initially presented as pleasurable sociable spaces in Austen's novels. Parties are formed to enjoy a day out, and even the prospect of rain does not deter those determined to have a great time: "They were all in high spirits and good humour, eager to be happy, and determined to submit to the greatest inconveniences and hardships rather than be otherwise" (*Sense and Sensibility*, p. 74). However, many of these outings turn out to be antisociable failures, for one reason or another. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the excursion to Whitwell has to be cancelled altogether; in *Emma*, the day trip to Box Hill turns out to be a bitter mistake, not only for the heroine herself but for everyone concerned (see Russell, p. 189). In *Persuasion*, a novel in which the carriage is generally portrayed more favourably than in *Emma* (Jones, pp. 95-96), the spontaneous trip to Lyme has dire consequences, but ultimately leads to a favourable outcome for all, and Anne can look back to it with pleasure, subtracting the painful last moments from the sum of happiness she experienced: "I have travelled so little, that every place would be interesting to me – but there is real beauty at Lyme" (*Persuasion*, p. 200). Anne can be happy making a third in the Crofts' modest gig, and she is the only heroine to enjoy the inside of a coach, even while moving through an area of Bath that seems to have been littered with the pungent remains of too many horses[25] (*Persuasion*, p. 208).

20 An open carriage signified a sociable outing, at least in fine weather. However, is also provides intimate social space in Austen's novels, especially a two-seater like a phaeton or a curricle. This is used as a plot device in the novels: while women generally had to be, or preferred to be, chaperoned when using the stage coach or the post chaise, it was permissible to sit next to a young man in an open carriage, so long as other people, or other carriages, were close by, as in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. In *Mansfield Park*, the Bertrams and Crawfords take a trip to Sotherton in Henry Crawford's expensive barouche, which could seat four, plus two on the driver's seat. Crawford drives the vehicle himself, choosing Julia over Maria as his companion on the box. While Julia is heard to laugh most of the

way, the narrative voice reveals only those snippets of the conversation that those sitting inside the barouche overhear, the attention of both Fanny and Mary Crawford being taken up with the single rider, Edmund Bertram (p. 95). Marianne Dashwood, too, gets to sit next to the dashing hero in his curricle, experiencing the intimate sociability of an open carriage: open and above board enough to be inconspicuous while at the same time private enough to allow for intimate chat. Austen's narrator refuses to satisfy our curiosity – only the outcome of the ride, the visit to Allenham, is related but not the conversation the two must have engaged in throughout the day. Sitting next to a young man if there were no other carriages or people nearby, was a faux pas, however, and involved the woman in unpleasant rumours, as Marianne learns in *Sense and Sensibility*. Confronted by Elinor, Marianne defends herself by claiming that as they went in an open carriage, a two-seater, it was impossible to take a third person (p. 80). The fault, however, is not in the carriage, it is in their separation from the rest of the party and the social misconduct of entering the house of Willoughby's aunt without being acquainted with her.

21 In *The Watsons*, the heroine, another Emma, is distressed to be told that her sister has arranged for her to be taken home in the curricle of the "very vain, very conceited" (p. 133) Tom Musgrave: she does not want to be alone with him, as it might imply "be[ing] on terms of intimacy with the proposer" (p. 130). However, neither does she dare ask her hostess, Mrs Edwards, for her assistance. Mrs Edwards, in her turn, waits to see what Emma's "inclinations" are, but on being told that Emma is "afraid of the sort of carriage", she finally offers her own (not a fashionable, fast, and expensive curricle, but a family coach), and her offer is gratefully accepted. The scene reveals the difficulty a young woman encountered when it came to the use of the carriage as a sociable space: while her sisters are glad to be on terms of such intimacy with Tom Musgrave, each hoping that his carriage will lead to their marriage, Emma, like Mr Allen in *Northanger Abbey*, considers it improper for a woman to be driven about by a young man who is not related to her[26]. The availability, or unavailability, of a carriage thus often serves to throw the heroines into some kind of predicament, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Elizabeth has to walk for miles to visit Jane at Netherfield because her father's horses are needed at

the farm (p. 34). Indeed, Austen's heroines usually walk if they want to get somewhere, and these walks, too, provide sociable occasions: the Bennet sisters love to walk to Meryton to visit their neighbours and meet acquaintances on the road. In Bath, Anne Elliot even refuses to have a chair called since she hopes to encounter Captain Wentworth on her way home (*Persuasion*, p. 259), while in *Emma*, Jane Fairfax, craving a long solitary walk home, refuses Emma's offer of her carriage, though we later hear that she, too, met her young man while out walking (pp. 394-95).

22 Women rarely drive by themselves in Austen's novels, the exception being Miss De Bourgh, who owns an elegant phaeton in which she drives around the park in solitary grandeur[27] .And yet, instances of women holding the reins are to be found in Austen's letters as well as in her unpublished novels: Austen's (future) sister in law Mary, for one, did not hesitate to drive Jane from Steventon to nearby Basingstoke[28] .In *The Watsons*, we find the two principal heroines introduced to the reader by means of a snug journey the two take together: the novel begins with the eldest Miss Watson "cheerfully undertaking to drive" her younger sister Emma to a neighbouring family for a ball (p. 79). Not only does Miss Watson, another Elizabeth, literally hold the reins, she also instructs her inexperienced sister, who has resided with an aunt for the last ten years, on the habits and customs of the neighbourhood, with dubious success: the more perceptive Emma must cull from her sister's descriptions of the neighbourhood what lessons she can. Gillian Russell suggests that "The journey of the Watson sisters is a literal as well as symbolic crossing of gradations of civility, as they rock along the unpaved 'dirty' lanes, through the turnpike gate, that epitome of Georgian modernity, before they enter the 'pitching of the town'" (p. 185). That very pitching eventually makes conversation impossible, as it creates so much noise that the sisters prefer not to speak at all.

23 The inside of a coach, in Austen's novels, is often a very silent, even an anti-sociable space, preceding or following other, more successful sociable encounters. Meaningful conversations are more likely to occur outside, in a busy street that leaves the characters free to voice their thoughts without being overheard. Michèle Cohen suggests that "by the closing years of the century, when politeness was declining as a dominant cultural form, attitudes to conversation changed as well.

Taciturnity, mocked by Addison early in the century, displaced the conversational fluency [29]". The basic law of sociable conversation is no longer based on the desire to make oneself agreeable (Mee, 6). Sociability, in Jane Austen's novels, is in transition: her middle-class characters casually enjoy the comparatively new trend of visiting tourist attractions, of travelling to Lyme on the spur of the moment, of spending a few weeks at the sea merely because they enjoy its beauty, not because it has been prescribed for their health. The eighteenth-century clubs and coffee-houses are absent, perhaps gone, in Austen's works, while inns are frequented even by ladies travelling together. Both men and women in her novels are socially mobile by making use of many opportunities for travelling, a post-chaise taking them to Rosings and the environs of a wealthy lady whose nephew is in search of a wife, or to London and to dinner with an Admiral who may later promote them. However, there is "polite sociability in the world beyond London", too, and from London, Austen invariably moves her characters back to the provinces, using the "innovations in transport and print culture – 'roads and newspapers' – that had made the polite leisure economy possible in the first place" (Russell, p. 184). Women may not travel as much as men do in Austen's novels, but all of her characters make good use of the carriage. Even though roads are bumpy, streets are noisy, and some of the new highways still end rather abruptly, overturning unwary travellers, every road eventually leads to some kind of sociable encounter in Austen's novels.

NOTES

1 All references to Austen's novels are to *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006).

2 For an introduction to the concept of politeness in the long eighteenth century, see Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century", *The Historical Journal* (vol. 45/4, 2002), pp. 869-898, and "Politeness", *The Digital Encyclopedia of British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century* [online], ISSN 2803-2845, accessed on 19 January 2025, URL: https://www.digitens.org/en/notices/politeness.html.

3 The different types of carriages are explained in Kirstin Olsen, *All Things Austen: An Encyclopedia of Austen's World*. 2 vols (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2005). Volume 1 contains the entries 'barouche', 'carriage and coach' as well as 'chaise'. Olsen moreover shows how rare the ownership of a carriage actually was in the eighteenth century (1: 128). For a contemporary discussion of carriages, see William Felton, A *Treatise on Carriages*. London, 1794. Sandy Lerner moreover provides a video about Austen's carriages on the JASNA website: https://jasna.org/austen/up-close/carriages/, accessed on 10 January 2025.

4 Kirstin Olsen points out that the barouche is "a fair-weather conveyance, and [Henry Crawford] turns out to be a fair-weather gentleman, unable to bear real hardship or frustration" (Olsen, I: 53).

5 Deborah Paquin, "Carriages in Jane Austen". *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal OnLine*; 2023 Winter; 44(1) [no pagination]. https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/volume-44-no-1/paquin/, accessed on 10 January 2025.

6 See Jennifer S. Ewing, "As the Wheel Turns: Horse-Drawn Vehicles in Jane Austen's Novels." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line* (2019) 40(1) [no pagination], https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/volume-40-no-1/ewing/, [n. p.] and Olsen, I: 128-29.

7 For sociable spaces in the eighteenth century, see e.g. *La Sociabilité en France et en Grande-Bretagne au Siècle des Lumières, Tome III : Les Espaces the Sociabilité*, eds Valérie Capdeville and Eric Francalanza. Paris : Transversales, 2014.

8 On different types of conversation, a crucial aspect of sociability, see Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), here especially p. 8, p. 112, p. 183. Mee does not include the carriage as either a domestic or public space for intimate conversation. Markman Ellis's discussion of the tea-table (Ellis, "The Tea-Table, Women and Gossip in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain", *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, eds Valérie Capdeville and Alain Kerhervé [Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019], pp. 69-87) suggests further means of communication that also occurred inside a carriage: "chatter, gossip, and scandal" (p. 80) – all of them vital forms of social bonding. "In gossip, social behaviour is examined in public, and the boundaries of what is acceptable to the group are clarified" (Ellis, p. 83).

9 For a discussion of Henry Tilney's curricle and Catherine's journey in it, see also Hazel Jones, *Jane Austen's Journeys* (London: Robert Hale, 2014, pp. 84-85).

10 Hannah More, *Strictures on Female Education* (Oxford and New York, 1995), II, 23.

11 These trips included visits to the theatre and concerts offered at the more fashionable places, especially after the Austens' move to Bath (Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, [London: Vintage Books, 1999], p. 177).

12 See Tomalin, p. 125, and *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: OUP, 3rd rev. edition, 1995), L 4, p. 6, 1 September 1796.

13 A collection of letters by and to Mrs Leigh-Perrot concerning her imprisonment and her visitors is included in Richard A. Austen-Leigh, *Austen Papers 1704-1856* (Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995); for Mrs Austen's offer, see p. 197.

14 Mr Scadding's two daughters even provided some musical entertainment of an evening, but in her misery, Mrs Leigh-Perrot failed to appreciate their courtesy, and saw only "Vulgarity, Dirt, Noise from Morning till Night" (Austen papers, pp. 188; 191 Tomalin, p. 151).

15 Quoted in Tomalin, *Austen*, pp. 136-37.

16 The introduction of the elegant finger glasses in Susan's visions of Mansfield Park stand in stark contrast to the "broken egg-shells" and "cold pork bones" actually left on the breakfast table there after Henry Crawford's and William Price's early start for London (p. 327).

17 For the fashionable diseases connected with Bath, see Annick Cossic-Péricarpin,"Fashionable Diseases in Georgian Bath: Fiction and the Emergence of A British Model of Spa Sociability," *Fashion and Illness in Eighteenth-Century and Romantic Literature and Culture*, eds Anita O'Connell and Clark Lawlor, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (vol. 40/4, 2017), pp. 542-543; Annick Cossic, "Bath (and the reinvention of spa sociability)", *The Digital Encyclopedia of British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century* [online], ISSN 2803-2845, https://www.digitens.org/en/notices/bath-and-reinvention-spa-sociability.html, accessed on 21 January 2025.

18 Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p. 159. Jarvis mentions that Dorothy Wordsworth had to defend her solitary walks against the fears as well as fearsome strictures of

some of her female relatives (p. 163.). Elizabeth is similarly criticized by Miss Bingley (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 39).

19 More, *Strictures*, I, 44. See also Sodemann for a discussion of Austen's reaction to More's overly strict ideas concerning female travellers (p. 787).

20 *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Le Faye, 23 August 1796, L 3, p. 5.

21 Catherine seems to begin her journey in General Tilney's carriage, but from then on, she relies on post-chaises or the public stage coach. For the last part to Fullerton, she seems to have taken a hackney coach (*Northanger Abbey*, p. 237, p. 240).

22 While Elinor does not doubt the truth of the statement, she immediately suspects that her mother heard more than was said – perhaps an attempt to explain away the oddness of the situation we are to imagine: in desperate fears of the life of her daughter *then*, Mrs Dashwood would hardly have engaged in cosy chat with a man who is in fact as much of a stranger to her as Mrs Jennings is to Elinor.

23 Curiously, for the modern reader, the Dashwood girls are both too well-bred to choose their own dinner at an inn, even declining to specify whether they prefer cod or salmon (p. 182). Presumably, then, the scene is meant to express the strain that Mrs Jennings' solicitousness put on the girls, since her pressing them for an answer must be considered impolite here. The scene provides another indication that notions of sociable politeness were in transition at the time.

24 The sociable practice of the card table seems to have no impact on the sisters whatsoever, not a single conversation is worth recording – presumably, Marianne does not even take part, as she refuses to learn how to play (p. 165). Worse still, the only notable social event – a private ball – only "represents the failure of the romance of sociability" (Russell, p. 180).

25 Whether Anne is walking or being driven to Mrs Smith is not mentioned at this point, but we glean from Anne that Lady Russell generally takes her to see Mrs Smith at Westgate-buildings in her coach, and from Sir Walter Elliot's answer that the shabby "Westgate-buildings must have been rather surprised by the appearance of a carriage" (p. 171).

26 Nonetheless, both the money required to buy a curricle, and the skills required for driving one, often recommend the driver as a husband in both Austen and Burney. Lord Orville, Henry Tilney, and Mr Darcy are all excellent as well as polite drivers.

27 The phaeton, especially, "a lightweight, low, and steady vehicle" was considered a vehicle suitable for female drivers (Ewing, n. p.).

28 *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Le Faye, L 25, 8-9 November 1800, p. 56.

29 Michèle Cohen, "Conversation", *The Digital Encyclopedia of British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century* [online], www.digitens.org/en/notices/conversation.html, accessed on 19 January 2025.

RÉSUMÉS

English

Domestic travel, in the eighteenth century, usually implied the use of a carriage, be it a post chaise, the stage coach, a gig or a curricle. In in any novel, the arrival of a carriage indicates action, and especially for the female protagonists, a carriage generally suggests either an impending sociable event, or moral danger, or both. In Austen's novels, all kinds of vehicles appear, and usually take the protagonists towards a ball or on a neighbourly visit, away from families and friends, and into sociable spaces such as Bath or London. Carriages, as scholars have shown, indicate character in her works, and move the story forward along with the protagonists. Moreover, the carriage itself is a sociable space where lively conversations take place, intimacy grows – or silence spreads an unsociable blanket over the passengers. Ultimately, the carriage in Austen's novels has something to say about the transition of sociability itself: from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, from London to the country side and at the same time from local travel to domestic tourism, from sociable clubs to large assemblies, and from the semi-public drawing room to the intimate seclusion of the private vehicle.

Français

Au XVIII^{e} siècle, les déplacements à l'intérieur du pays impliquaient généralement l'utilisation d'une voiture, qu'il s'agisse d'une calèche postale, d'une diligence, d'un gig ou d'un curricle. Dans n'importe quel roman, l'arrivée d'une voiture annonce de l'action, et surtout pour les héroïnes, elle laisse généralement présager soit un événement mondain imminent, soit un danger moral, soit les deux. Dans les romans d'Austen, toutes sortes de véhicules apparaissent et emmènent généralement les protagonistes à un bal ou chez des voisins, loin de leurs familles et amis, vers des lieux de vie sociale tels que Bath ou Londres. Comme l'ont montré les spécialistes, les voitures révèlent le caractère des personnages dans ses œuvres et font avancer l'intrigue au rythme des protagonistes. De plus, la calèche elle-même est un espace social où se déroulent des conversations animées, où l'intimité se développe – ou bien où le silence étend une couverture de soli-

tude sur les passagers. En fin de compte, la calèche dans les romans d'Austen en dit long sur la transition de la sociabilité elle-même : du XVIII^{e} au XIX^{e} siècle, de Londres à la campagne et, en même temps, des déplacements locaux au tourisme intérieur, des clubs mondains aux grandes assemblées, et du salon semi-public à l'intimité isolée du véhicule privé.

INDEX

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