The Making of Jane Austen

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Austen's First English Illustrator

Ferdinand Pickering's Victorian Sensationalism

Fifteen years after Jane Austen's death, in 1832, publisher Richard Bentley (1794–1871) purchased the copyrights to all six of her novels. Bentley's foresight changed the course of Austen history, as he secured a decades-long firm control on her print and visual legacy in Britain. He successfully negotiated with Austen's family executors—her siblings Henry and Cassandra—for every title except *Pride and Prejudice*, which he had to purchase from its copyright-holding first publisher, Thomas Egerton. Bentley paid the Austen family £210 and Edgerton's executors £40, an amount that at first might have seemed large for six outmoded novels that had never been runaway best sellers.[1] Bentley set about publishing each Austen title, one at a time, in his series called The Standard Novels. He also commissioned illustrations for all of them. These illustrations, too, changed Austen history, providing the first mass-produced visualizations of her novels. They would be encountered by decades of her readers in England and beyond.

It wasn't that Bentley thought about Austen's novels differently from other works of fiction. Every Standard Novel title was illustrated in precisely the same manner. Each featured a steel-engraved frontispiece and a title-page vignette, with captions using quotations from the novel to accompany their chosen scenes. The first Austen title to appear, in December 1832, was *Sense and Sensibility*. The other Austen novels came out in rapid succession in the months thereafter.[2] Then Bentley made an important decision. In October 1833, he reissued Austen's Standard Novels as a collected edition apart from the full range of Standard Novels—obviously envisioning a market for them. It was the first time her novels came out in a uniform edition from a single publishing house, making them attractive collectibles for those few who could afford them. The publication of Bentley's five Austen volumes

(*Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* shared one volume) meant that a total of ten illustrations were now in print, all of them produced by the same artist.

That artist and those illustrations had an oversized but little-described impact on Austen's growing reputation. As we'll see, they encouraged readers to imagine her fiction as Victorian. They promoted a sense that her novels were best understood as familial, female focused, and sensational. For decades, these illustrations would have served to steer readers away from the conclusion that Austen's fiction ought to be understood as social, comic, or didactic. Of course, we can't *prove* that the Bentley Austen illustrations alone set these outcomes. (It's difficult to know what that proof would even look like, a notorious problem in reception studies.) We can, however, surmise that a majority of readers would have approached these illustrations not as highly skeptical art critics but as avid consumers of text and image, prepared and hoping to be entertained. They would have turned to Bentley's illustrations in all of the Standard Novels as a kind of visual guide to reading, as an advertisement, preview, or a taste of the novel to come. Readers' sense of the novel would have been influenced by looking at an artist's designs. And in Austen's case, for decades of readers in Britain, there were pretty much just these ten images to go by.

These ten illustrations circulated widely. Bentley's custom was to print six thousand copies for a Standard Novels title. It ended up taking him about four years to deplete his Austen stock, making some critics wonder whether Bentley may initially have been disappointed in his investment.[3] However, Bentley couldn't possibly have felt anything like regret over the long term. Bentley's Austen titles were republished in 1836, 1837, 1841, 1846, 1847, 1848, 1851, and 1854. The collected edition was republished twice, in 1856 and 1866.[4] With Bentley's firm hold on Austen's copyright, with regular reprinting, and with her slow if steady growth in readership over the course of the nineteenth century, these illustrations enjoyed a virtual visual monopoly for nearly four decades, at a time when there was not yet a known portrait of Austen herself. These illustrations *were* Austen visualized.

We've long known that these illustrations were designed, as signed, by "Pickering" and engraved by "Greatbatch."[5] William Greatbatch (1802–72) was an active, respected engraver, doing frequent work for the keepsake book or gift book market, in annuals such as *The Cabinet* (1828) and *The Literary Souvenir* (1828). Although now largely forgotten, Greatbatch is referred to in a nineteenth-century source as "eminent."[6] One reviewer described Greatbatch's name alone as "sufficient guarantee for all that is perfect in that dif-

ficult style of art," engraving.[7] Greatbatch did a number of engraving commissions for Bentley, from portraits by Joshua Reynolds and George Romney to illustrations for the Bentley Walpole Correspondence; Greatbatch was even trusted with the engraving of Richard Bentley Sr.'s portrait. In choosing Greatbatch to engrave his Austen designs, Bentley was giving the task to a trusted craftsperson.

Pickering, the artist who created Bentley's Austen designs, has been the greater cypher of the two. He's previously been referenced either as an unknown Mr. Pickering or as "probably George Pickering ca. 1794–1857."[8] George Pickering is the only artist of the period with that surname who appears in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* which may be what led Austen scholar David Gilson to provide that provisional attribution. Gilson's tentativeness accords with the flimsy evidence. George Pickering was a landscape painter whose only other known frontispieces were for geographical works.[9] Unfortunately, Gilson's "probably" George Pickering has slid, in many scholarly sources—including his own bibliography's index, recent essays on Austen and illustration, and most library catalogue records—into a definitive attribution.[10] That attribution, however provisional, is in error.[11]

Little-known nineteenth-century biographical sources and other signed engravings indicate that the right Pickering—the one who served as the first English illustrator of Jane Austen—was Ferdinand Pickering (1810–89).[12] The attribution has been hiding in plain sight. He illustrated many other titles for Bentley's Standard Novels.[13] Sometimes identified on illustrations as "F. Pickering," he is listed simply as "Pickering" in the Standard Novels' Austen engravings. The images themselves indicate that the same hand is at work in both "Pickering" and "F. Pickering," collaborating frequently with Greatbatch as engraver.

The identification of Ferdinand Pickering as Austen's first illustrator rewrites her reception history in several important ways.[14] First, it allows us to move beyond speculation about and into concrete analysis of the artist responsible for images in an edition that was "frequently reprinted, in different binding styles and at various dates until 1869"; Bentley's Austen editions "led the field" for nearly as long as Victoria's reign.[15] It's crucial, therefore, that we get the Pickering attribution right, to properly study him and his body of work as each informs his Austen images. Second, the attribution allows us to see how the illustrations led to Austen's books being marketed and understood as early Victorian novels. Pickering's illustrations place Austen's novels among the more sensational, post-gothic, and fashionable fiction of the

1830s, not only in their costumes but in their intimate, female-focused, melodramatic situations. This mattered. It may even have slowed down the realization that Austen's novels were in any way different from (or better than) Victorian potboiler best sellers. After all, she was packaged and sold alongside some of them, and her illustrations certainly made her seem as if she were one of their kind.

It's unlikely that Ferdinand Pickering was given the Bentley commission as a result of any special insight into Austen. Bentley had hired Pickering as an unknown artist in his early twenties to complete a significant number of illustrations for novels that have little in common thematically. The Standard Novels series began in 1831 and would eventually number 127 English, American, and Continental titles, published uniform and sold for six shillings.[16] Pickering was responsible for a large share of the series' illustrations, at least twenty-two volumes, or nearly a fifth of the titles published over the course of the 1830s. Bentley paid Pickering a modest amount for his artwork. The publishers' records indicate that the sum going to "design" for each volume was usually five pounds, with thirty to forty pounds going toward steel engraving.[17]

Pickering provided images for Bentley editions of fiction by William Beckford, James Fenimore Cooper, and Jane Porter, as well as for bestseller *Paul Clifford* (1830), by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, famous for its first line, "It was a dark and stormy night." Pickering's images perfectly suited such an ethos; they depict not only storms but executioners, seafarers, and damsels in distress. His work lingers over classical folds in clothing and draperies, waves and clouds, tree branches and trunks, and he has a penchant for depicting human figures with gracefully pointed, delicate feet. The effect is theatrical, studied, and serious. Pickering's domestic scenes may recall Joseph Highmore's paintings for Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* from a century earlier. The outdoor adventure scenes, by contrast, suggest the influence of Napoleonic-era history painters, such as novelist Jane Porter's brother, Robert Ker Porter. Pickering was working in a variety of artistic and literary registers in his many designs.

His Austen images have not been widely admired, called "artistically conservative," "rather dark," and "unsuitably ponderous" (Carroll and Wiltshire 65). Critics remark on their "Gothic romantic gloom" and "wasp-waisted heroines" (Cohn 219). It seems probable that Pickering's designs for Austen's fiction were heavily influenced by his other commissions from Bentley, for what were primarily melodramatic, historical, and adventure novels. It may further

explain why Pickering's Austen images emphasize the novels' most sensational moments, considering the literary company they kept in the Standard Novels series. Nevertheless, previous critics seem to have missed the ways in which several of Pickering's images do attempt to visually capture Austen's dry humor, as we'll see shortly.

Pickering (or whoever chose the scenes that would be depicted) knew Austen's novels well enough to illustrate decisive dramatic moments. These scenes tend to be foreboding or foreshadowing ones, featured midway through the novels, most involving an inauspicious event or a looming crisis. Pickering's work for Bentley represents significant, climactic scenes, especially of shock and terror, either showing nature's sublimity (if outdoors) or moments when secrets are being revealed in private spaces, such as bedrooms. Moments of terror are depicted through his subjects' eyes, in a way that may today seem so broadly done as to be almost comic but which were unlikely to have been designed to provoke laughter then. Pickering's women have a delicate quality and remarkably even features. Most wear their hair up, dark curls framing their faces. All of his figures have exaggeratedly small and elegantly placed feet.

When studied together, the images indicate a preference for representing Austen's heroines with other women, rarely in direct contact with heroes, emphasizing moments of pain, illness, shame, or emotional distress. The *Sense and Sensibility* images, for example, focus entirely on female characters and their difficulties. First, the frontispiece represents the moment in which Lucy Steele reveals her hidden miniature portrait of Edward to Elinor, as the two women emerge from a path in the wood, with a large Georgian estate in the background. Lucy's words are highlighted in the captioned quotation, "Then taking a miniature from her pocket, she added, 'To prevent the possibility of a mistake, be so good as to look at this face.'" It is one of the novel's moments of greatest surprise and horror for Elinor. The quotation invites viewers into Elinor's position, listening to these words. So, too, does the image. The face that viewers look directly into is Lucy's calm, triumphant one.

Another moment of pain and terror is represented on the title-page vignette, which shows Marianne feverishly ill. She is in bed, bedclothes and cap draped as carefully as the curtains and counterpane, a visually controlled image for a scene that is otherwise so beyond control. The focal point is Marianne's raving, wide eyes, with her one hand wildly outstretched. Elinor is draped over her sister's shoulder, lovingly restraining her, with one hand

Figure 1.1. Frontispiece, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (Bentley's Standard Novels, 1833), William Greatbatch, after Ferdinand Pickering. RB426640. The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

around her back and the other resting to the side of her sister's breast. Elinor's face is obscured and angled, drawing our eye to her cheek, her long neck, and her partially exposed back and shoulder. The caption is, "Marianne, suddenly awakened by some accidental noise in the house, started hastily up and with feverish wildness, cried out, 'Is mamma coming?'" It's an illustration

Figure 1.2. Title page vignette, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (Bentley's Standard Novels, 1833), by William Greatbatch, after Ferdinand Pickering. RB426640. The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

that wouldn't be out of place in a gothic novel, in a scene in which a character had just seen a ghost.

The *Pride and Prejudice* frontispiece also features a familial scene: Elizabeth plaintively speaking to her father, Mr. Bennet. The caption reads, "She then told him what Mr. Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydia. He heard her with astonishment." Pickering doesn't show Mr. Bennet's astonishment through his eyes, in a departure from his other Austen images. His second *Pride and Prejudice* illustration, the title-page vignette, returns to his pattern in *Sense and Sensibility*. It depicts two women, Elizabeth Bennet and Lady

Catherine de Bourgh, emerging from a wood. Lady Catherine grabs one of Elizabeth's wrists and points a finger menacingly at her. Elizabeth holds a parasol, eyes wide. Both women are portrayed with a single artfully placed foot, daintily pointed toward the front of the frame. The captioned quotation reads, "This is not to be borne, Miss Bennet. I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew made you an offer of marriage?" As with the *Sense and Sensibility* frontispiece, this *Pride and Prejudice* vignette gives voice to the female villain.

Mansfield Park continues Pickering's selecting out of female-female interaction. Its frontispiece image shows Mary Crawford taking Fanny's hand, leading her toward a full-length mirror set in front of a window. The caption reads, "Miss Crawford smiled her approbation and hastened to complete her gift by putting the necklace round her and making her see how well it looked." The illustration emphasizes the moment of making Fanny see, although viewers aren't privy to her reflected image. There's no smile on Mary's face, as Fanny holds up the necklace, appearing to admire it—and herself—in a way that doesn't square with the original novel. Still, there's something ominous about the image, especially when viewed alongside the vignette for *Pride and Prejudice*. Mary's grabbing the heroine's hand looks a little like Lady Catherine's doing so to Elizabeth.

The *Mansfield Park* title-page vignette, in its use of male characters only, presents an anomaly in Pickering's work, although it showcases a characteristic scene of surprise and shock: the moment when Mr. Yates discovers Sir Thomas Bertram (or vice versa), as the patriarch returns home and disrupts the young people's ill-advised private theatricals. The caption reads, "The moment Yates perceived Sir Thomas he gave perhaps the very best start he had ever given during the whole course of his rehearsals." The line quoted is a funny one. The narrator comments on Yates's bad acting, in contrast to his believable and warranted display of everyday fright. Pickering's image communicates the humor of Austen's original, but it's possible to read the illustration without so much as a smirk if one has little familiarity with the original novel. (It's amusing, too, of course, because this is Sir Thomas's first meeting with his vacuous future son-in-law.)

There's some humor as well in Pickering's frontispiece to *Emma*, which shows Emma Woodhouse drawing Harriet Smith's portrait, while Mr. Elton looks on appreciatively. Emma is seated, pencil perched midair, studying Harriet from across the room. But the viewer's eye may be drawn first to Harriet, taking a Sarah Siddons–esque "Tragic Muse" pose, arm outstretched

and mouth a little bit open. Mr. Elton hovers over Emma. The captioned quotation is, "There was no being displeased with such an encourager, for his admiration made him discern a likeness before it was possible." Emma studies Harriet, Mr. Elton leers at Emma, and Harriet looks either absent-mindedly out the window or surreptitiously over at Mr. Elton. For a reader familiar with this scene, Pickering's image presents a love triangle in which all the actors mistake the others' feelings and intentions—potentially a comic moment. But for a first-time reader on whom the humor of the image may be lost, the image shows a portrait painter and her subject watched by a curious man.

The title-page vignette of *Emma* is unusual in depicting hero and heroine together in a declaration of love. It's the only one of its kind among Pickering's Austen designs. This is the scene in which Mr. Knightley asks Emma, "Tell me! Then; have I no chance of succeeding." Emma stands to the side of Mr. Knightley, looking perhaps too demurely downward and away from him, given what we know of this scene. Mr. Knightley, carrying a riding crop, grasps her hand with his own and pleads. It could be a menacing image, like the others we've seen from Pickering that involve the grasping of hands. Informed readers would know otherwise, but uninformed readers might be left in suspense. Both lovers' feet are again arranged so neatly as to be something out of a dance, rather than an anxious, perambulatory proposal.

The Standard Novel's single-volume *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* includes one scene from each novel, with the more melodramatic *Northanger Abbey* winning the larger frontispiece. It portrays the climactic scene in which Henry Tilney finds Catherine Morland on the Abbey's stairs, inspecting his late mother's off-limits chambers. The caption accompanying the image is from Henry's perspective, likening him to the villainous women quoted in the other Pickering images. It reads, "'How came I up that staircase!' he replied, greatly surprised. 'Because it is the nearest way from the stable yard to my own chamber.'" Henry, one leg artfully draped over the top stair, points an accusatory finger at Catherine, looking her directly in the eye. He resembles Mr. Knightley down to his riding crop, but unsuspecting readers may mistakenly identify him as villain, not hero.

The title-page vignette from *Persuasion* shows the heroine again caught in an awkward moment that proves a turning point: Pickering's Anne Elliot, seated on a hill and against a rock, overhears Captain Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove talking about Anne's long-ago refusal of her brother Charles Musgrove's hand. The caption is the narrator's from Anne's perspective: "Her

own emotions kept her fixed; she had much to recover from before she could move." Viewers look on Anne as her head rests on her elbow. Her eyes are closed or cast down, much like Emma's were. Anne's feet are outspread in a manner suggesting fatigue or fainting. The image beautifully captures Anne's status as an outsider heroine for whom readers are meant to have sympathy.

Seen quantitatively, Pickering's Austen images focus overwhelmingly on female characters. His ten designs feature a total of twenty-three figures, fifteen of whom are women and eight of whom are men, making them 65 percent female. One, the vignette for *Mansfield Park*, features three men. There are more female villains or rivals depicted than male heroes, four compared to two or three. There are rarely more than two figures to an image. No group or social scenes are ever chosen. Later Bentley editions of Austen, those published after 1869, reproduced only Pickering's frontispieces, leaving out the vignettes. When the five frontispieces are studied together, the images are three-quarters female; only one of the five, *Northanger Abbey*'s, features a hero. Pickering's illustrations provided the basis for reengraved frontispieces in American editions, too, experiencing, in those derivative versions, a circulation abroad.[18] Over the course of the nineteenth century, thousands of new readers would have been invited to approach Austen's novels through Pickering's images, expecting a focus on put-upon young women, villainous-looking rivals, and sensationalized domestic conflict. It may well have led early audiences to downplay or misjudge the importance of humor, irony, sociality, or social criticism in her fiction.

Pickering's Austen illustrations are also noteworthy for employing then-contemporary hairstyles and costuming, rather than historically accurate Regency fashions. Pickering's women sport the large, flowing skirts, with puffed-sleeves and tight, neck-plunging bodices, gathered at the waists, of his era, rather than the empire-waisted and loose-flowing gowns of the earlier nineteenth century. The choice to put Austen's characters in the fashions of the 1830s was not peculiar to Pickering's Austen novels. He rendered almost all of his human figures in the Standard Novels illustrations in contemporary clothing, with exceptions being made for fiction set further back in the eighteenth-century past. Critics Carroll and Wiltshire note that this practice of putting Austen's characters in 1830s dress at first must have helped her novels seem more fresh and timely. Doing so avoided "casting [them] . . . as documentaries of past times or as distant museum pieces" (65). Pickering, in 1833, may even have intentionally set out to make Austen

seem fresh and fashionable at the moment of Bentley's republication, whether that was his own idea or was done at Bentley's direction.

But, of course, the fashions of the 1830s were ephemeral, too. Pickering's designs, reissued as they were for some sixty years, set the stage for generations of readers to associate Austen's fiction with the 1830s. It's an interesting factor to consider when seeking to explain why, in the late nineteenth-century, Austen was so often grouped with the likes of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, all of them judged as Victorian novelists. Certainly, it had to do with these authors' common commercial and critical success and their common gender. But Pickering's widely circulating images, in effect freezing Austen's characters in the fashions of the 1830s, may also have added to the public's comfort in imagining her as a fellow (early) Victorian. Indeed, it is possible that Pickering's images had an even more enduring impact on the choice of Victorian costuming for Austen, carrying well over into the twentieth century, perhaps as far as the Victorian wardrobe choices for the 1940 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.[19]

We've amassed little evidence about how Pickering's images were judged by actual nineteenth-century viewers, but one prominent surviving account isn't favorable. Historian and critic Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–59) reports in a private letter that he is reading from the Bentley edition of Austen in 1833, enjoying *Persuasion* ("charming") and *Northanger Abbey* ("a little less pure in manner than her later works"). We know that Macaulay thought highly of Austen; a decade later, he would make Janeite history by comparing her favorably with Shakespeare.[20] What Macaulay is most dismissive of are the Bentley edition's illustrations. He writes to his sister Hannah Macaulay (later Lady Trevelyan), "The publisher of the last volume of poor Miss Austin has succeeded in procuring two pictures decidedly worse than the worst that I ever saw before." It's hard to tell what images Macaulay is comparing Pickering's to—all novels? All Bentley illustrated novels? He couldn't have meant all Austen illustrations, as Pickering's were among the very few of the kind then available to see.

Macaulay especially skewers Pickering's melodramatic interpretations. He writes, "Get a sight of the Book next time you go to a circulating library at Liverpool; and tell me whether Henry Tilney be not the most offensive Varmint man that ever you saw. The artist must have read the book carelessly and must have confounded the adorable young parson with John Thorp. As to Miss Anne, sitting under a hedge, her appearance at once vindicates all

Captain Wentworth's doubts as to her identity with the pretty girl whom he had known, and renders the final triumph of his constancy so admirable as to be almost incredible."[21] Macaulay's response to Pickering's designs, whether typical or not, shows us the sort of challenges that early illustrators faced in trying to live up to readers' sense of their beloved characters' imagined looks and demeanors.

Pickering, as it turns out, faced many kinds of challenges. After the commission for Bentley, the artist led an eccentric and remarkable life. His Standard Novels designs would turn out to be his foremost artistic achievement, although records about his life and career are scant. Dictionaries of Victorian painting mention him briefly, noting that he flourished from 1831–82 as a "painter of genre and historical subjects," who exhibited at the Royal Academy, early on winning several silver medals. The titles of his exhibited works suggest that he specialized in painting women and scenes from the Far East or Middle East.[22] The rest of his artwork treated literary subjects, including Shakespeare, Molière, and Samuel Johnson, suggesting perhaps the force of habit, the recognition of a market niche, or the mark of an artist with a strong literary bent.

Pickering also tried his hand at portraiture. He was, according to Charles Dickens's letters, undertaking a portrait of that author, circa 1838–39, in a work either now lost or never completed. Pickering probably came into Dickens's orbit through Bentley, before Bentley and Dickens had their well-known falling out. Once, in a letter, Dickens mentions Pickering in the course of apologizing to a correspondent for the mean state of his own signature; he says it's the result of "writing under the soothing influence of Mr. Pickering, the author of that meek portrait still unfinished."[23] A year later, Dickens's assessment is far less sanguine. He refers to "Pickering the snobbish" and calls the portrait in progress "his practical joke against me."[24] With those anecdotes, we virtually exhaust the usual sources in which to research little-known nineteenth-century artists and illustrators.

Searching for Pickering in the *unusual* places, however, rewards the effort. An unnamed artist, writing a decade after Pickering's death, describes him as "a life student at the Royal Academy and artist of divers frontispieces and vignettes to some of the novels of half a century ago, who came from an old Yorkshire family." The "life student" part is worth unpacking first. We know that, at age twenty-nine in 1840, after his Bentley commissions came (for some reason) to an end, Pickering entered the Royal Academy Schools as a painter, and, it is said, never left them. He didn't have to. When he entered

the academy, training there lasted for ten years, with no fees requested from the student. Only one's own artistic materials needed to be provided. But if you were awarded two medals, as Pickering was, then you won the right to a life studentship. Pickering was apparently one of the last—or at least one of the longest and most notorious—of a category thereafter abolished.

Further accolades didn't follow. As artistic success "eluded him," one critic speculates, "he . . . slowly sunk into a state of apathy and destitution." His becoming a permanent fixture as a life student at the Royal Academy Schools may well have been a matter of his having "nowhere else to go." It is reported that, "year after year, he pursued the same course, rubbing out whatever he had done at the end of each sitting because he only had one board."[25] Pickering became not only a legend but a target for tomfoolery. His fellow students are said often to have played cruel jokes on him. The Royal Academy Schools in the mid-nineteenth century offered a chaotic, even violent, learning environment. The students were "left entirely without control or supervision" and "quarrels, ending in stand-up fights would not infrequently take place" (Ormond 1349). Teachers were brought in to the school in a kind of revolving door, under the assumption that they would have "no time to get stale" and would provide "a variety of different ideas and techniques" (1348). This is the atmosphere in which Pickering spent a good portion of his adult life.

For a time he lived in an apartment in High Street, Camden Town, shared with his Spanish mother (which explains his unusual first name) and various siblings; he would end up living on the same street for more than fifty years.[26] Despite his not having made a great name for himself in the Victorian art world, we do have a sense of what Pickering himself looked like. His tenacious hold on his life studentship, not his own art, allowed his likeness to survive at the National Portrait Gallery. He became another artist's subject. Historical painter and academician Charles West Cope (1811–90) took a visiting duty in rotation at the Royal Academy Schools in the 1860s. During his rotation at the schools, Cope completed sketches of the students at work.

Several of Cope's images depict Ferdinand Pickering, an exceptionally eye-catching figure, almost exactly Cope's age. Pickering appears in Cope's drawings as an intense, disheveled person, near-sighted, hair wild. He seems tall, awkward, and uncertain how to manage his elbows and knees, which almost touch each other as he looks through his eyeglass onto his canvas. Another of Cope's drawings, labeled *Pickering; Painting School*, shows a somewhat more controlled man, although, again, with an eccentric, stiff stance

and gangly limbs. It's interesting to speculate on whether Cope, who had himself been bullied as a boy, took a personal interest in Pickering during his rotation for sympathetic reasons.[27] Whatever led Cope to draw Pickering, it's a peculiar fact of history that we have a greater number of authenticated portraits of her long-forgotten first illustrator than we do of Jane Austen herself.

Ferdinand Pickering may have had many reasons for escaping his home life at the Royal Academy Schools and for not reaching what we'd call today his artistic potential. In October 1850, London newspapers covered a lurid story of a well-dressed thirty-six-year-old man, a linguist, accused of stabbing his mother in the neck and face, nearly killing her. The alleged assailant was Richard Pickering, son of Josephine Pickering. Offering evidence about the assault was a man named "Frederick" Pickering, of High Street, Camden Town, an artist, brother of the assailant. This was certainly Ferdinand. "Frederick" reports that one morning, after mother had called him down to breakfast in the home they all shared, he heard her screaming, "Murder." Mrs. Pickering had scolded Richard for his indolence. In response, he came

Figure 1.3. Ferdinand Pickering (1862), by Charles West Cope. ©National Portrait Gallery, London.

after her with a table knife. "Frederick" found his injured mother on the stairs. A doctor gave evidence to the court, testifying that her life was in danger. Richard was imprisoned. When his mother survived the injury and returned to court a week later, she indicated a hope that her son would not be hurt, despite wanting to protect herself from further violence.

Pickering's younger brother, Charles Louis, had his own troubles with the law. Early census data lists him, ten years younger than Ferdinand, in the same household, describing him as a tutor by profession. Later in life, he would call himself an artist and watercolorist. Newspaper accounts record that one Charles Louis Pickering, "a gentlemanly looking young man, an artist and author," pleaded guilty to bigamy and ended up doing six months' hard labor in 1867.[28] The newspaper also reported Charles Pickering's having previously been brought before the court for assaulting his (unlawful and bigamous) second wife.[29] With these details in mind, we might speculate that Ferdinand Pickering had biographical reasons for presenting fictional characters in scenes dark and stormy when he illustrated Austen's and others' fiction. The actual lives around him later seem to have been torrid.

Perhaps it is only fitting that Pickering himself, after his death, would become a character in a novel. Pre-Raphaelite artist William de Morgan (1839–1917) turned to fiction writing in his sixties, publishing several loosely autobiographical novels. One, *Alice-for-Short* (1907), features a character said to have been based on Ferdinand Pickering. The character, named J. W. Verrinder, is described as an "art-student of sixty-odd" "at the Royal Academy schools": "A strange connecting link with the past, a life-student of the schools, dating back almost if not quite to the days of Fuseli. His name occurs at the corner of copperplate illustrations of the days of our Grandmothers . . . By what slow decadence the unhappy artist had dwindled to his present position, Heaven only knew! But there he was, a perpetual life-student . . . [Who] had never completed a drawing or a study since the one that had won him his medal and gained him his position, early in the century."[30] The fictional Verrinder was said, at the end of each model's sitting, to use turpentine to wipe out his work on the only canvas he owned, in order to begin again with the next sitter. He's said to have worn always the same clothes and to have had an indifference to soap and water, leading to an unpleasant body odor. De Morgan writes, "An impudent youth once said to him, 'Why do you never wash yourself?' and he replied, 'Why should I?' and then added 'If you were me, *you* wouldn't.'" De Morgan's Verrinder never ate lunch and borrowed all of his paint tubes and brushes from others, retreating rapidly from his

pictures as though to get an effect from afar, then accosting a nearby student for a squeeze of a particular color (119).

To what degree is Pickering's life reflected in the fictional character Verrinder? It's impossible to determine the boundaries. We may surmise that De Morgan and Pickering knew each other when the two men were together for some years at the Royal Academy Schools. But it's probable that de Morgan knew a great deal more about Pickering than that mere acquaintanceship would suggest, a supposition supported by two things. First, De Morgan's novel begins with a scene very much like that in which Pickering's mother was attacked. *Alice-for-Short* opens with a mother's being hit with a hammer on the head and neck, although, in the novel, it's by her husband, not her son. She screams, "Murder," and is assisted by the police and an artist-boarder who lives upstairs. Second, De Morgan was married to a famous Pre-Raphaelite painter, Evelyn de Morgan (1855–1919). Her maiden name was Pickering. Perhaps she was distantly related.

This much is certain: Ferdinand Pickering survived long enough to see his Austen images reprinted through many editions and iterations. They were his most famous, most viewed, and longest-lasting artistic contributions. When he died at age seventy-nine, a bachelor, his Austen images were still being widely reprinted. He himself was also still being referenced, by surname at least, in the advertisements for the Bentley Complete Austen. Their 1870 new edition was advertised as "illustrated by Pickering." But slowly, over the course of second half of the nineteenth century, posthumous Austen's first long-term, print-illustration partnership—Bentley, Pickering, and Greatbatch—began to lose its dominance. It gave way to competing editions and illustrators, as we'll see in the next chapter. Dozens of illustrator-publisher teams entered the field, ending Bentley's and Pickering's dominance. With it ended the dominance of the sensational, female-focused, intimate, and ominous illustrated Jane Austen. Yet some effects of Pickering's Austen images—especially his manufacturing of Austen's Victorian provenance—endured. The eccentric, slovenly, made-for-a-novel lifelong art student got neither credit nor blame.[31]