

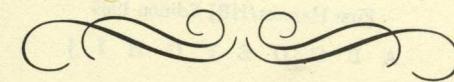
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VIRGINIA WOOLF

*The Common
Reader*

FIRST SERIES



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To Lytton Strachey

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THE COMMON READER

There is a sentence in Dr Johnson's Life of Gray which might well be written up in all those rooms, too humble to be called libraries, yet full of books, where the pursuit of reading is carried on by private people. ' . . . I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours.' It defines their qualities; it dignifies their aims; it bestows upon a pursuit which devours a great deal of time, and is yet apt to leave behind it nothing very substantial, the sanction of the great man's approval.

The common reader, as Dr Johnson implies, differs from the critic and the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing. He never ceases, as he reads, to run up some rickety and ramshackle fabric which shall give him the temporary satisfaction of looking sufficiently like the real object to allow of affection, laughter, and argument. Hasty, inaccurate, and superficial, snatching now this poem, now that scrap of old furniture, without caring where he finds it or of what nature it may be so long as it serves his purpose and rounds his structure, his deficiencies as a critic are too obvious to be pointed out; but if he has, as Dr Johnson maintained, some say in the final distribution of poetical honours, then, perhaps, it may be worth

while to write down a few of the ideas and opinions which, insignificant in themselves, yet contribute to so mighty a result.

— Sir John Paston to Sir John Fastolf, 1451, concerning a man he had taken up at Sidney and sent to him in prison. Sir John Fastolf signifies to Sir John Paston, when he has received his letters, to let him know what he will do with him. Sir John Paston writes to Sir John Fastolf, 1451, concerning a man he had taken up at Sidney and sent to him in prison. Sir John Fastolf signifies to Sir John Paston, when he has received his letters, to let him know what he will do with him. Sir John Paston writes to Sir John Fastolf, 1451, concerning a man he had taken up at Sidney and sent to him in prison. Sir John Fastolf signifies to Sir John Paston, when he has received his letters, to let him know what he will do with him.

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THE PASTONS AND CHAUCER

The tower of Caister Castle still rises ninety feet into the air, and the arch still stands from which Sir John Fastolf's barges sailed out to fetch stone for the building of the great castle. But now jackdaws nest on the tower, and of the castle, which once covered six acres of ground, only ruined walls remain, pierced by loop-holes and surmounted by battlements, though there are neither archers within nor cannon without. As for the 'seven religious men' and the 'seven poor folk' who should, at this very moment, be praying for the souls of Sir John and his parents, there is no sign of them nor sound of their prayers. The place is a ruin. Antiquaries speculate and differ.

Not so very far off lie more ruins — the ruins of Bromholm Priory, where John Paston was buried, naturally enough, since his house was only a mile or so away, lying on low ground by the sea, twenty miles north of Norwich. The coast is dangerous, and the land, even in our time, inaccessible. Nevertheless, the little bit of wood at Bromholm, the fragment of the true Cross, brought pilgrims incessantly to the Priory, and sent them away with eyes opened and limbs straightened. But some of them with their newly-opened eyes saw a sight which shocked them — the grave of John Paston in Bromholm Priory without a tombstone. The news spread over the country-side. The Pastons had fallen; they that had been so powerful could no longer afford a stone to put above John Paston's head. Margaret, his widow, could not pay her debts; the eldest son, Sir John, wasted his property upon women and tournaments, while the younger, John also, though a man of greater parts, thought more of his hawks than of his harvests.

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The pilgrims of course were liars, as people whose eyes have just been opened by a piece of the true Cross have every right to be; but their news, none the less, was welcome. The Pastons had risen in the world. People said even that they had been bondmen not so very long ago. At any rate, men still living could remember John's grandfather Clement tilling his own land, a hard-working peasant; and William,¹ Clement's son, becoming a judge and buying land; and John, William's son, marrying well and buying more land and quite lately inheriting the vast new castle at Caister, and all Sir John's lands in Norfolk and Suffolk. People said that he had forged the old knight's will. What wonder, then, that he lacked a tombstone? But, if we consider the character of Sir John Paston, John's eldest son, and his upbringing and his surroundings, and the relations between himself and his father as the family letters reveal them, we shall see how difficult it was, and how likely to be neglected – this business of making his father's tombstone.

For let us imagine, in the most desolate part of England known to us at the present moment, a raw, new-built house, without telephone, bathroom or drains, arm-chairs or newspapers, and one shelf perhaps of books, unwieldy to hold, expensive to come by. The windows look out upon a few cultivated fields and a dozen hovels, and beyond them there is the sea on one side, on the other a vast fen. A single road crosses the fen, but there is a hole in it, which, one of the farm hands reports, is big enough to swallow a carriage. And, the man adds, Tom Topcroft, the mad bricklayer, has broken loose again and ranges the country half-naked, threatening to kill any one who approaches him. That is what they talk about at dinner in the desolate house, while the chimney smokes horribly, and the draught lifts the carpets on the floor. Orders are given to lock all gates at sunset, and, when the long dismal evening has worn itself away, simply and solemnly, girt about with dangers as they are, these isolated men and women fall upon their knees in prayer.

The Pastons and Chaucer

In the fifteenth century, however, the wild landscape was broken suddenly and very strangely by vast piles of brand-new masonry. There rose out of the sandhills and heaths of the Norfolk coast a huge bulk of stone, like a modern hotel in a watering-place; but there was no parade, no lodging-houses, and no pier at Yarmouth then, and this gigantic building on the outskirts of the town was built to house one solitary old gentleman without any children – Sir John Fastolf, who had fought at Agincourt and acquired great wealth. He had fought at Agincourt and got but little reward. No one took his advice. Men spoke ill of him behind his back. He was well aware of it; his temper was none the sweeter for that. He was a hot-tempered old man, powerful, embittered by a sense of grievance. But whether on the battlefield or at court he thought perpetually of Caister, and how, when his duties allowed, he would settle down on his father's land and live in a great house of his own building.

The gigantic structure of Caister Castle was in progress not so many miles away when the little Pastons were children. John Paston, the father, had charge of some part of the business, and the children listened, as soon as they could listen at all, to talk of stone and building, of barges gone to London and not yet returned, of the twenty-six private chambers, of the hall and chapel; of foundations, measurements, and rascally work-people. Later, in 1454, when the work was finished and Sir John had come to spend his last years at Caister, they may have seen for themselves the mass of treasure that was stored there; the tables laden with gold and silver plate; the wardrobes stuffed with gowns of velvet and satin and cloth of gold, with hoods and tippets and beaver hats and leather jackets and velvet doublets; and how the very pillow-cases on the beds were of green and purple silk. There were tapestries everywhere. The beds were laid and the bedrooms hung with tapestries representing sieges, hunting and hawking, men fishing, archers shooting, ladies

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playing on their harps, dallying with ducks, or a giant 'bearing the leg of a bear in his hand'.² Such were the fruits of a well-spent life. To buy land, to build great houses, to stuff these houses full of gold and silver plate (though the privy might well be in the bedroom), was the proper aim of mankind. Mr and Mrs Paston spent the greater part of their energies in the same exhausting occupation. For since the passion to acquire was universal, one could never rest secure in one's possessions for long. The outlying parts of one's property were in perpetual jeopardy. The Duke of Norfolk might covet this manor, the Duke of Suffolk that. Some trumped-up excuse, as for instance that the Pastons were bondmen, gave them the right to seize the house and batter down the lodges in the owner's absence. And how could the owner of Paston and Mauteby and Drayton and Gresham be in five or six places at once, especially now that Caister Castle was his, and he must be in London trying to get his rights recognised by the King? The King was mad too, they said; did not know his own child, they said; or the King was in flight; or there was civil war in the land. Norfolk was always the most distressed of counties and its country gentlemen the most quarrelsome of mankind. Indeed, had Mrs Paston chosen, she could have told her children how when she was a young woman a thousand men with bows and arrows and pans of burning fire had marched upon Gresham and broken the gates and mined the walls of the room where she sat alone. But much worse things than that had happened to women. She neither bewailed her lot nor thought herself a heroine. The long, long letters which she wrote so laboriously in her clear cramped hand to her husband, who was (as usual) away, make no mention of herself. The sheep had wasted the hay. Heyden's and Tuddenham's men were out. A dyke had been broken and a bullock stolen. They needed treacle badly, and really she must have stuff for a dress.

But Mrs Paston did not talk about herself.

The Pastons and Chaucer

Thus the little Pastons would see their mother writing or dictating page after page, hour after hour, long long letters, but to interrupt a parent who writes so laboriously of such important matters would have been a sin. The prattle of children, the lore of the nursery or schoolroom, did not find its way into these elaborate communications. For the most part her letters are the letters of an honest bailiff to his master, explaining, asking advice, giving news, rendering accounts. There was robbery and manslaughter; it was difficult to get in the rents; Richard Calle had gathered but little money; and what with one thing and another Margaret had not had time to make out, as she should have done, the inventory of the goods which her husband desired. Well might old Agnes, surveying her son's affairs rather grimly from a distance, counsel him to contrive it so that 'ye may have less to do in the world; your father said, In little business lieth much rest. This world is but a thoroughfare, and full of woe; and when we depart therefrom, right nought bear with us but our good deeds and ill.'³

The thought of death would thus come upon them in a clap. Old Fastolf, cumbered with wealth and property, had his vision at the end of Hell fire, and shrieked aloud to his executors to distribute alms, and see that prayers were said 'in perpetuum', so that his soul might escape the agonies of purgatory. William Paston, the judge, was urgent too that the monks of Norwich should be retained to pray for his soul 'for ever'. The soul was no wisp of air, but a solid body capable of eternal suffering, and the fire that destroyed it was as fierce as any that burnt on mortal grates. For ever there would be monks and the town of Norwich, and for ever the Chapel of Our Lady in the town of Norwich. There was something matter-of-fact, positive, and enduring in their conception both of life and of death.

With the plan of existence so vigorously marked out, children of course were well beaten, and boys and girls taught to know their places. They must acquire land; but they must obey their

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parents. A mother would clout her daughter's head three times a week and break the skin if she did not conform to the laws of behaviour. Agnes Paston, a lady of birth and breeding, beat her daughter Elizabeth. Margaret Paston, a softer-hearted woman, turned her daughter out of the house for loving the honest bailiff Richard Calle. Brothers would not suffer their sisters to marry beneath them, and 'sell candle and mustard in Framlingham'.⁴ The fathers quarrelled with the sons, and the mothers, fonder of their boys than of their girls, yet bound by all law and custom to obey their husbands, were torn asunder in their efforts to keep the peace. With all her pains, Margaret failed to prevent rash acts on the part of her eldest son John, or the bitter words with which his father denounced him. He was a 'drone among bees', the father burst out, 'which labour for gathering honey in the fields, and the drone doth naught but taketh his part of it'.⁵ He treated his parents with insolence, and yet was fit for no charge of responsibility abroad.

But the quarrel was ended, very shortly, by the death (22nd May 1466) of John Paston, the father, in London. The body was brought down to Bromholm to be buried. Twelve poor men trudged all the way bearing torches beside it. Alms were distributed; masses and dirges were said. Bells were rung. Great quantities of fowls, sheep, pigs, eggs, bread, and cream were devoured, ale and wine drunk, and candles burnt. Two panes were taken from the church windows to let out the reek of the torches. Black cloth was distributed, and a light set burning on the grave. But John Paston, the heir, delayed to make his father's tombstone.

He was a young man, something over twenty-four years of age. The discipline and the drudgery of a country life bored him. When he ran away from home, it was, apparently, to attempt to enter the King's household. Whatever doubts, indeed, might be cast by their enemies on the blood of the Pastons, Sir John was unmistakably a gentleman. He had inherited his lands; the

The Pastons and Chaucer

honey was his that the bees had gathered with so much labour. He had the instincts of enjoyment rather than of acquisition, and with his mother's parsimony was strangely mixed something of his father's ambition. Yet his own indolent and luxurious temperament took the edge from both. He was attractive to women, liked society and tournaments, and court life and making bets, and sometimes, even, reading books. And so life now that John Paston was buried started afresh upon rather a different foundation. There could be little outward change indeed. Margaret still ruled the house. She still ordered the lives of the younger children as she had ordered the lives of the elder. The boys still needed to be beaten into book-learning by their tutors, the girls still loved the wrong men and must be married to the right. Rents had to be collected; the interminable lawsuit for the Fastolf property dragged on. Battles were fought; the roses of York and Lancaster alternately faded and flourished. Norfolk was full of poor people seeking redress for their grievances, and Margaret worked for her son as she had worked for her husband, with this significant change only, that now, instead of confiding in her husband, she took the advice of her priest.

But inwardly there was a change. It seems at last as if the hard outer shell had served its purpose and something sensitive, appreciative, and pleasure-loving had formed within. At any rate Sir John, writing to his brother John at home, strayed sometimes from the business on hand to crack a joke, to send a piece of gossip, or to instruct him, knowingly and even subtly, upon the conduct of a love affair. Be 'as lowly to the mother as ye list, but to the maid not too lowly, nor that ye be too glad to speed, nor too sorry to fail. And I shall always be your herald both here, if she come hither, and at home, when I come home, which I hope hastily within XI. days at the furthest'.⁶ And then a hawk was to be brought, a hat, or new silk laces sent down to John in Norfolk, prosecuting his suit, flying his hawks, and

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attending with considerable energy and not too nice a sense of honesty to the affairs of the Paston estates.

The lights had long since burnt out on John Paston's grave. But still Sir John delayed; no tomb replaced them. He had his excuses; what with the business of the lawsuit, and his duties at Court, and the disturbance of the civil wars, his time was occupied and his money spent. But perhaps something strange had happened to Sir John himself, and not only to Sir John dallying in London, but to his sister Margery falling in love with the bailiff, and to Walter making Latin verses at Eton, and to John flying his hawks at Paston. Life was a little more various in its pleasures. They were not quite so sure as the elder generation had been of the rights of man and of the dues of God, of the horrors of death, and of the importance of tombstones. Poor Margaret Paston scented the change and sought uneasily, with the pen which had marched so stiffly through so many pages, to lay bare the root of her troubles. It was not that the lawsuit saddened her; she was ready to defend Caister with her own hands if need be, 'though I cannot well guide nor rule soldiers',⁷ but there was something wrong with the family since the death of her husband and master. Perhaps her son had failed in his service to God; he had been too proud or too lavish in his expenditure; or perhaps he had shown too little mercy to the poor. Whatever the fault might be, she only knew that Sir John spent twice as much money as his father for less result; that they could scarcely pay their debts without selling land, wood, or household stuff ('It is a death to me to think upon it');⁸ while every day people spoke ill of them in the country because they left John Paston to lie without a tombstone. The money that might have bought it, or more land, and more goblets and more tapestry, was spent by Sir John on clocks and trinkets, and upon paying a clerk to copy out Treatises upon Knighthood and other such stuff. There they stood at Paston—eleven volumes, with the poems of Lydgate and Chaucer among them, diffusing a strange

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air into the gaunt, comfortless house, inviting men to indolence and vanity, distracting their thoughts from business, and leading them not only to neglect their own profit but to think lightly of the sacred dues of the dead.

For sometimes, instead of riding off on his horse to inspect his crops or bargain with his tenants, Sir John would sit, in broad daylight, reading. There, on the hard chair in the comfortless room with the wind lifting the carpet and the smoke stinging his eyes, he would sit reading Chaucer, wasting his time, dreaming—or what strange intoxication was it that he drew from books? Life was rough, cheerless, and disappointing. A whole year of days would pass fruitlessly in dreary business, like dashes of rain on the window-pane. There was no reason in it as there had been for his father; no imperative need to establish a family and acquire an important position for children who were not born, or if born, had no right to bear their father's name. But Lydgate's poems or Chaucer's, like a mirror in which figures move brightly, silently, and compactly, showed him the very skies, fields, and people whom he knew, but rounded and complete. Instead of waiting listlessly for news from London or piecing out from his mother's gossip some country tragedy of love and jealousy, here, in a few pages, the whole story was laid before him. And then as he rode or sat at table he would remember some description or saying which bore upon the present moment and fixed it, or some string of words would charm him, and putting aside the pressure of the moment, he would hasten home to sit in his chair and learn the end of the story.

To learn the end of the story—Chaucer can still make us wish to do that. He has pre-eminently that story-teller's gift, which is almost the rarest gift among writers at the present day. Nothing happens to us as it did to our ancestors; events are seldom important; if we recount them, we do not really believe in them; we have perhaps things of greater interest to say, and for these

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reasons natural story-tellers like Mr Garnett, whom we must distinguish from self-conscious story-tellers like Mr Masefield,⁹ have become rare. For the story-teller, besides his indescribable zest for facts, must tell his story craftily, without undue stress or excitement, or we shall swallow it whole and jumble the parts together; he must let us stop, give us time to think and look about us, yet always be persuading us to move on. Chaucer was helped to this to some extent by the time of his birth; and in addition he had another advantage over the moderns which will never come the way of English poets again. England was an unspoilt country. His eyes rested on a virgin land, all unbroken grass and wood except for the small towns and an occasional castle in the building. No villa roofs peered through Kentish tree-tops; no factory chimney smoked on the hill-side. The state of the country, considering how poets go to Nature, how they use her for their images and their contrasts even when they do not describe her directly, is a matter of some importance. Her cultivation or her savagery influences the poet far more profoundly than the prose writer. To the modern poet, with Birmingham, Manchester, and London the size they are, the country is the sanctuary of moral excellence in contrast with the town which is the sink of vice. It is a retreat, the haunt of modesty and virtue, where men go to hide and moralise. There is something morbid, as if shrinking from human contact, in the nature worship of Wordsworth, still more in the microscopic devotion which Tennyson lavished upon the petals of roses and the buds of lime trees. But these were great poets. In their hands, the country was no mere jeweller's shop, or museum of curious objects to be described, even more curiously, in words. Poets of smaller gift, since the view is so much spoilt, and the garden or the meadow must replace the barren heath and the precipitous mountain-side, are now confined to little landscapes, to birds' nests, to acorns with every wrinkle drawn to the life. The wider landscape is lost.

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But to Chaucer the country was too large and too wild to be altogether agreeable. He turned instinctively, as if he had painful experience of their nature, from tempests and rocks to the bright May day and the jocund landscape, from the harsh and mysterious to the gay and definite. Without possessing a tithe of the virtuosity in word-painting which is the modern inheritance, he could give, in a few words, or even, when we come to look, without a single word of direct description, the sense of the open air.

And se the fresshe floures how they spryne¹⁰

— that is enough.

Nature, uncompromising, untamed, was no looking-glass for happy faces, or confessor of unhappy souls. She was herself; sometimes, therefore, disagreeable enough and plain, but always in Chaucer's pages with the hardness and the freshness of an actual presence. Soon, however, we notice something of greater importance than the gay and picturesque appearance of the mediaeval world — the solidity which plumps it out, the conviction which animates the characters. There is immense variety in the *Canterbury Tales*, and yet, persisting underneath, one consistent type. Chaucer has his world; he has his young men; he has his young women. If one met them straying in Shakespeare's world one would know them to be Chaucer's, not Shakespeare's. He wants to describe a girl, and this is what she looks like:

Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was,
Hir nose trety; hir eyen greye as glas;
Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to soft and reed;
But sikerly she hadde a fair foreheed;
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;
For, hardily, she was nat undergroe.¹¹

Then he goes on to develop her; she was a girl, a virgin, cold in her virginity:

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I am, thou woost, yet of thy compayne,
A mayde, and love hunting and venerye,
And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
And noght to been a wylf and be with childe.²

Next he bethinks him how

Discreet she was in answering alway;
And though she had been as wise as Pallas
No countrefeted termes hadde she
To seme wys; but after hir degree
She spak, and alle hir wordes more and lesse
Souninge in vertu and in gentillesse.¹³

Each of these quotations, in fact, comes from a different Tale, but they are parts, one feels, of the same personage, whom he had in mind, perhaps unconsciously, when he thought of a young girl, and for this reason, as she goes in and out of the *Canterbury Tales* bearing different names, she has a stability which is only to be found where the poet has made up his mind about young women, of course, but also about the world they live in, its end, its nature, and his own craft and technique, so that his mind is free to apply its force fully to its object. It does not occur to him that his Griselda might be improved or altered. There is no blur about her, no hesitation; she proves nothing; she is content to be herself. Upon her, therefore, the mind can rest with that unconscious ease which allows it, from hints and suggestions, to endow her with many more qualities than are actually referred to. Such is the power of conviction, a rare gift, a gift shared in our day by Joseph Conrad in his earlier novels, and a gift of supreme importance, for upon it the whole weight of the building depends. Once believe in Chaucer's young men and women and we have no need of preaching or protest. We know what he finds good, what evil; the less said the better. Let him get on with his story, paint knights and squires, good women and bad, cooks, shipmen, priests, and we will supply the

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landscape, give his society its belief, its standing towards life and death, and make of the journey to Canterbury a spiritual pilgrimage.

This simple faithfulness to his own conceptions was easier then than now in one respect at least, for Chaucer could write frankly where we must either say nothing or say it slyly. He could sound every note in the language instead of finding a great many of the best gone dumb from disuse, and thus, when struck by daring fingers, giving off a loud discordant jangle out of keeping with the rest. Much of Chaucer – a few lines perhaps in each of the Tales – is improper and gives us as we read it the strange sensation of being naked to the air after being muffled in old clothing. And, as a certain kind of humour depends upon being able to speak without self-consciousness of the parts and functions of the body, so with the advent of decency literature lost the use of one of its limbs. It lost its power to create the Wife of Bath, Juliet's nurse, and their recognisable though already colourless relation, Moll Flanders. Sterne, from fear of coarseness, is forced into indecency. He must be witty, not humorous; he must hint instead of speaking outright. Nor can we believe, with Mr Joyce's *Ulysses*¹⁴ before us, that laughter of the old kind will ever be heard again.

But, lord Christ! When that it remembreth me
Up-on my yowthe, and on my Iolitee,
It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote.
Unto this day it doth myn herte bote
That I have had my world as in my tyme.¹⁵

The sound of that old woman's voice is still.

But there is another and more important reason for the surprising brightness, the still effective merriment of the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer was a poet; but he never flinched from the life that was being lived at the moment before his eyes. A

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farmyard, with its straw, its dung, its cocks and its hens, is not (we have come to think) a poetic subject; poets seem either to rule out the farmyard entirely or to require that it shall be a farmyard in Thessaly and its pigs of mythological origin. But Chaucer says outright:

Three large sowes hadde she, and namo,
Three kyn, and eek a sheep that highte Malle;¹⁶

or again,

A yard she hadde, enclosed al aboute
With stikkes, and a drye ditch with-oute.¹⁷

He is unabashed and unafraid. He will always get close up to his object – an old man's chin –

With thikke bristles of his berde unsofte,
Lyk to the skin of houndfish, sharp as brere;¹⁸

or an old man's neck –

The slakke skin aboute his nekke shaketh
Whyl that he sang;¹⁹

and he will tell you what his characters wore, how they looked, what they ate and drank, as if poetry could handle the common facts of this very moment of Tuesday, the sixteenth day of April, 1387,²⁰ without dirtying her hands. If he withdraws to the time of the Greeks or the Romans, it is only that his story leads him there. He has no desire to wrap himself round in antiquity, to take refuge in age, or to shirk the associations of common grocer's English.

Therefore when we say that we know the end of the journey, it is hard to quote the particular lines from which we take our knowledge. Chaucer fixed his eyes upon the road before him, not upon the world to come. He was little given to abstract contemplation. He deprecated, with peculiar archness, any competition with the scholars and divines:

The Pastons and Chaucer

The answere of this I lete to divynis,
But wel I woot, that in this world grey pyne is.²¹

What is this world? What asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, withouten any companye,²²

O cruel goddes, that governe
This world with binding of your worde eterne,
And wryten in the table of athamaunt
Your parlement, and your eterne graunt,
What is mankinde more un-to yow holde
Than is the sheepe, that rouketh in the folde?²³

Questions press upon him; he asks them, but he is too true a poet to answer them; he leaves them unsolved, uncramped by the solution of the moment, and thus fresh for the generations that come after him. In his life, too, it would be impossible to write him down a man of this party or of that, a democrat or an aristocrat. He was a staunch churchman, but he laughed at priests. He was an able public servant and a courtier, but his views upon sexual morality were extremely lax. He sympathised with poverty, but did nothing to improve the lot of the poor. It is safe to say that not a single law has been framed or one stone set upon another because of anything that Chaucer said or wrote; and yet, as we read him, we are absorbing morality at every pore. For among writers there are two kinds: there are the priests who take you by the hand and lead you straight up to the mystery; there are the laymen who imbed their doctrines in flesh and blood and make a complete model of the world without excluding the bad or laying stress upon the good. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley are among the priests; they give us text after text to be hung upon the wall, saying after saying to be laid upon the heart like an amulet against disaster –

Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone²⁴

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He prayeth best that loveth best
All things both great and small²⁵

— such lines of exhortation and command spring to memory instantly. But Chaucer lets us go our ways doing the ordinary things with the ordinary people. His morality lies in the way men and women behave to each other. We see them eating, drinking, laughing, and making love, and come to feel without a word being said what their standards are and so are steeped through and through with their morality. There can be no more forcible preaching than this where all actions and passions are represented, and instead of being solemnly exhorted we are left to stray and stare and make out a meaning for ourselves. It is the morality of ordinary intercourse, the morality of the novel, which parents and librarians rightly judge to be far more persuasive than the morality of poetry.

And so, when we shut Chaucer, we feel that without a word being said the criticism is complete; what we are saying, thinking, reading, doing, has been commented upon. Nor are we left merely with the sense, powerful though that is, of having been in good company and got used to the ways of good society. For as we have jogged through the real, the unadorned countryside, with first one good fellow cracking his joke or singing his song and then another, we know that though this world resembles, it is not in fact our daily world. It is the world of poetry. Everything happens here more quickly and more intensely, and with better order than in life or in prose; there is a formal elevated dullness which is part of the incantation of poetry; there are lines speaking half a second in advance what we were about to say, as if we read our thoughts before words cumbered them; and lines which we go back to read again with that heightened quality, that enchantment which keeps them glittering in the mind long afterwards. And the whole is held in its place, and its variety and divagations ordered by the power

The Pastons and Chaucer

which is among the most impressive of all — the shaping power, the architect's power. It is the peculiarity of Chaucer, however, that though we feel at once this quickening, this enchantment, we cannot prove it by quotation. From most poets quotation is easy and obvious; some metaphor suddenly flowers; some passage breaks off from the rest. But Chaucer is very equal, very even-paced, very unmetaphorical. If we take six or seven lines in the hope that the quality will be contained in them it has escaped.

My lord, ye woot that in my fadres place,
Ye dede me strepe out of my povre wede,
And richely me cladden, o your grace
To yow broghte I noght elles, out of drede,
But feyth and nakedness and maydenhede.²⁶

In its place that seemed not only memorable and moving but fit to set beside striking beauties. Cut out and taken separately it appears ordinary and quiet. Chaucer, it seems, has some art by which the most ordinary words and the simplest feelings when laid side by side make each other shine; when separated, lose their lustre. Thus the pleasure he gives us is different from the pleasure that other poets give us, because it is more closely connected with what we have ourselves felt or observed. Eating, drinking, and fine weather, the May, cocks and hens, millers, old peasant women, flowers — there is a special stimulus in seeing all these common things so arranged that they affect us as poetry affects us, and are yet bright, sober, precise as we see them out of doors. There is a pungency in this unfigurative language; a stately and memorable beauty in the undraped sentences which follow each other like women so slightly veiled that you see the lines of their bodies as they go —

And she set down hir water pot anon
Biside the threshold in an oxe's stall.²⁷

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And then, as the procession takes its way, out from behind peeps the face of Chaucer, in league with all foxes, donkeys, and hens, to mock the pomps and ceremonies of life – witty, intellectual, French, at the same time based upon a broad bottom of English humour.

So Sir John read his Chaucer in the comfortless room with the wind blowing and the smoke stinging, and left his father's tombstone unmade. But no book, no tomb, had power to hold him long. He was one of those ambiguous characters who haunt the boundary line where one age merges in another and are not able to inhabit either. At one moment he was all for buying books cheap; next he was off to France and told his mother, 'My mind is now not most upon books.'²⁸ In his own house, where his mother Margaret was perpetually making out inventories or confiding in Gloys the priest, he had no peace or comfort. There was always reason on her side; she was a brave woman, for whose sake one must put up with the priest's insolence and choke down one's rage when the grumbling broke into open abuse, and 'Thou proud priest' and 'Thou proud Squire' were bandied angrily about the room. All this, with the discomforts of life and the weakness of his own character, drove him to loiter in pleasanter places, to put off coming, to put off writing, to put off, year after year, the making of his father's tombstone.

Yet John Paston had now lain for twelve years under the bare ground. The Prior of Bromholm sent word that the grave-cloth was in tatters, and he had tried to patch it himself. Worse still, for a proud woman like Margaret Paston, the country people murmured at the Pastons' lack of piety, and other families she heard, of no greater standing than theirs, spent money in pious restoration in the very church where her husband lay unremembered. At last, turning from tournaments and Chaucer and Mistress Anne Hault, Sir John bethought him of a piece of cloth of gold which had been used to cover his father's hearse and

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might now be sold to defray the expenses of his tomb. Margaret had it in safe keeping; she had hoarded it and cared for it, and spent twenty marks on its repair. She grudged it; but there was no help for it. She sent it him, still distrusting his intentions or his power to put them into effect. 'If you sell it to any other use,' she wrote, 'by my troth I shall never trust you while I live.'²⁹

But this final act, like so many that Sir John had undertaken in the course of his life, was left undone. A dispute with the Duke of Suffolk in the year 1479 made it necessary for him to visit London in spite of the epidemic of sickness that was abroad; and there, in dirty lodgings, alone, busy to the end with quarrels, clamorous to the end for money, Sir John died and was buried at Whitefriars in London. He left a natural daughter; he left a considerable number of books; but his father's tomb was still unmade.

The four thick volumes of the Paston letters, however, swallow up this frustrated man as the sea absorbs a raindrop. For, like all collections of letters, they seem to hint that we need not care overmuch for the fortunes of individuals. The family will go on, whether Sir John lives or dies. It is their method to heap up in mounds of insignificant and often dismal dust the innumerable trivialities of daily life, as it grinds itself out, year after year. And then suddenly they blaze up; the day shines out, complete, alive, before our eyes. It is early morning, and strange men have been whispering among the women as they milk. It is evening, and there in the churchyard Warne's wife bursts out against old Agnes Paston: 'All the devils of Hell draw her soul to Hell.'³⁰ Now it is the autumn in Norfolk, and Cecily Dawne comes whining to Sir John for clothing. 'Moreover, Sir, liketh it your mastership to understand that winter and cold weather draweth nigh and I have few clothes but of your gift.'³¹ There is the ancient day, spread out before us, hour by hour.

But in all this there is no writing for writing's sake; no use of the pen to convey pleasure or amusement or any of the million

shades of endearment and intimacy which have filled so many English letters since. Only occasionally, under stress of anger for the most part, does Margaret Paston quicken into some shrewd saw or solemn curse. 'Men cut large thongs here out of other men's leather. . . . We beat the bushes and other men have the birds. . . . Haste reweth . . . which is to my heart a very spear.'³² That is her eloquence and that her anguish. Her sons, it is true, bend their pens more easily to their will. They jest rather stiffly; they hint rather clumsily; they make a little scene like a rough puppet show of the old priest's anger and give a phrase or two directly as they were spoken in person. But when Chaucer lived he must have heard this very language, matter of fact, unmetaphorical, far better fitted for narrative than for analysis, capable of religious solemnity or of broad humour, but very stiff material to put on the lips of men and women accosting each other face to face. In short, it is easy to see, from the Paston letters, why Chaucer wrote not *Lear* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but the *Canterbury Tales*.

Sir John was buried; and John the younger brother succeeded in his turn. The Paston letters go on; life at Paston continued much the same as before. Over it all broods a sense of discomfort and nakedness; of unwashed limbs thrust into splendid clothing; of tapestry blowing on the draughty walls; of the bedroom with its privy; of winds sweeping straight over land unmitigated by hedge or town; of Caister Castle covering with solid stone six acres of ground, and of the plain-faced Pastons indefatigably accumulating wealth, treading out the roads of Norfolk, and persisting with an obstinate courage which does them infinite credit in furnishing the bareness of England.

ON NOT KNOWING GREEK

For it is vain and foolish to talk of knowing Greek, since in our ignorance we should be at the bottom of any class of schoolboys, since we do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted, and between this foreign people and ourselves there is not only difference of race and tongue but a tremendous breach of tradition. All the more strange, then, is it that we should wish to know Greek, try to know Greek, feel for ever drawn back to Greek, and be for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek, though from what incongruous odds and ends, with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek, who shall say?

It is obvious in the first place that Greek literature is the impersonal literature. Those few hundred years that separate John Paston from Plato, Norwich from Athens, make a chasm which the vast tide of European chatter can never succeed in crossing. When we read Chaucer, we are floated up to him insensibly on the current of our ancestors' lives, and later, as records increase and memories lengthen, there is scarcely a figure which has not its nimbus of association, its life and letters, its wife and family, its house, its character, its happy or dismal catastrophe. But the Greeks remain in a fastness of their own. Fate has been kind there too. She has preserved them from vulgarity. Euripides was eaten by dogs; Aeschylus killed by a stone; Sappho leapt from a cliff. We know no more of them than that. We have their poetry, and that is all.

But that is not, and perhaps never can be, wholly true. Pick up any play by Sophocles, read—
Son of him who led our hosts at Troy of old, son of Agamemnon,¹

JANE AUSTEN

It is probable that if Miss Cassandra Austen had had her way we should have had nothing of Jane Austen's except her novels. To her elder sister alone did she write freely; to her alone she confided her hopes and, if rumour is true, the one great disappointment of her life; but when Miss Cassandra Austen grew old, and the growth of her sister's fame made her suspect that a time might come when strangers would pry and scholars speculate, she burnt, at great cost to herself, every letter that could gratify their curiosity, and spared only what she judged too trivial to be of interest.

Hence our knowledge of Jane Austen is derived from a little gossip, a few letters, and her books. As for the gossip, gossip which has survived its day is never despicable; with a little rearrangement it suits our purpose admirably. For example, Jane 'is not at all pretty and very prim, unlike a girl of twelve... Jane is whimsical and affected,' says little Philadelphia Austen of her cousin.¹ Then we have Mrs Mitford,² who knew the Austens as girls and thought Jane 'the prettiest, silliest, most affected husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembers'. Next, there is Miss Mitford's anonymous friend 'who visits her now [and] says that she has stiffened into the most perpendicular, precise, taciturn piece of "single blessedness" that ever existed, and that, until *Pride and Prejudice* showed what a precious gem was hidden in that unbending case, she was no more regarded in society than a poker or firescreen.... The case is very different now', the good lady goes on; 'she is still a poker—but a poker of whom everybody is afraid.... A wit, a delineator of character, who does not talk is terrific indeed!' On the other side, of course,

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there are the Austens, a race little given to panegyric of themselves, but nevertheless, they say, her brothers 'were very fond and very proud of her. They were attached to her by her talents, her virtues, and her engaging manners, and each loved afterwards to fancy a resemblance in some niece or daughter of his own to the dear sister Jane, whose perfect equal they yet never expected to see.'³ Charming but perpendicular, loved at home but feared by strangers, biting of tongue but tender of heart—these contrasts are by no means incompatible, and when we turn to the novels we shall find ourselves stumbling there too over the same complexities in the writer.

To begin with, that prim little girl whom Philadelphia found so unlike a child of twelve, whimsical and affected, was soon to be the authoress of an astonishing and unchildish story, *Love and Freindship*,⁴ which, incredible though it appears, was written at the age of fifteen. It was written, apparently, to amuse the schoolroom; one of the stories in the same book is dedicated with mock solemnity to her brother; another is neatly illustrated with water-colour heads by her sister. These are jokes which, one feels, were family property; thrusts of satire, which went home because all little Austens made mock in common of fine ladies who 'sighed and fainted on the sofa'.

Brothers and sisters must have laughed when Jane read out loud her last hit at the vices which they all abhorred. 'I die a martyr to my grief for the loss of Augustus. One fatal swoon has cost me my life. Beware of Swoons, Dear Laura.... Run mad as often as you chuse, but do not faint....'⁵ And on she rushed, as fast as she could write and quicker than she could spell, to tell the incredible adventures of Laura and Sophia, of Philander and Gustavus, of the gentleman who drove a coach between Edinburgh and Stirling every other day, of the theft of the fortune that was kept in the table drawer, of the starving mothers and the sons who acted Macbeth. Undoubtedly, the story must have roused the schoolroom to uproarious laughter.

And yet, nothing is more obvious than that this girl of fifteen, sitting in her private corner of the common parlour, was writing not to draw a laugh from brother and sisters, and not for home consumption. She was writing for everybody, for nobody, for our age, for her own; in other words, even at that early age Jane Austen was writing. One hears it in the rhythm and shapeliness and severity of the sentences. ‘She was nothing more than a mere good-tempered, civil, and obliging young woman; as such we could scarcely dislike her — she was only an object of contempt.’⁶ Such a sentence is meant to outlast the Christmas holidays. Spirited, easy, full of fun, verging with freedom upon sheer nonsense, — *Love and Freindship* is all that; but what is this note which never merges in the rest, which sounds distinctly and penetratingly all through the volume? It is the sound of laughter. The girl of fifteen is laughing, in her corner, at the world.

Girls of fifteen are always laughing. They laugh when Mr Binney helps himself to salt instead of sugar. They almost die of laughing when old Mrs Tomkins sits down upon the cat. But they are crying the moment after. They have no fixed abode from which they see that there is something eternally laughable in human nature, some quality in men and women that for ever excites our satire. They do not know that Lady Greville who snubs, and poor Maria who is snubbed, are permanent features of every ballroom. But Jane Austen knew it from her birth upwards. One of those fairies who perch upon cradles must have taken her a flight through the world directly she was born. When she was laid in the cradle again she knew not only what the world looked like, but had already chosen her kingdom. She had agreed that if she might rule over that territory, she would covet no other. Thus at fifteen she had few illusions about other people and none about herself. Whatever she writes is finished and turned and set in its relation, not to the parsonage, but to the universe. She is impersonal; she is inscrutable. When the

writer, Jane Austen, wrote down in the most remarkable sketch in the book a little of Lady Greville’s conversation,⁷ there is no trace of anger at the snub which the clergyman’s daughter, Jane Austen, once received. Her gaze passes straight to the mark, and we know precisely where, upon the map of human nature, that mark is. We know because Jane Austen kept to her compact; she never trespassed beyond her boundaries. Never, even at the emotional age of fifteen, did she round upon herself in shame, obliterate a sarcasm in a spasm of compassion, or blur an outline in a mist of rhapsody. Spasms and rhapsodies, she seems to have said, pointing with her stick, end *there*; and the boundary line is perfectly distinct. But she does not deny that moons and mountains and castles exist — on the other side. She has even one romance of her own. It is for the Queen of Scots. She really admired her very much. ‘One of the first characters in the world’,⁸ she called her, ‘a bewitching Princess whose only friend was then the Duke of Norfolk, and whose only ones now Mr Whitaker, Mrs Lefroy, Mrs Knight and myself.’⁹ With these words her passion is neatly circumscribed, and rounded with a laugh. It is amusing to remember in what terms the young Brontës wrote, not very much later, in their northern parsonage, about the Duke of Wellington.¹⁰

The prim little girl grew up. She became ‘the prettiest, silliest, most affected husband-hunting butterfly’ Mrs Mitford ever remembered, and, incidentally, the authoress of a novel called *Pride and Prejudice*, which, written stealthily under cover of a creaking door, lay for many years unpublished.¹¹ A little later, it is thought, she began another story, *The Watsons*, and being for some reason dissatisfied with it, left it unfinished.¹² The second-rate works of a great writer are worth reading because they offer the best criticism of his masterpieces. Here her difficulties are more apparent, and the method she took to overcome them less artfully concealed. To begin with, the stiffness and the bareness of the first chapters prove that she was one of those writers who

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lay their facts out rather baldly in the first version and then go back and back and back and cover them with flesh and atmosphere. How it would have been done we cannot say – by what suppressions and insertions and artful devices. But the miracle would have been accomplished; the dull history of fourteen years of family life would have been converted into another of those exquisite and apparently effortless introductions; and we should never have guessed what pages of preliminary drudgery Jane Austen forced her pen to go through. Here we perceive that she was no conjuror after all. Like other writers, she had to create the atmosphere in which her own peculiar genius could bear fruit. Here she fumbles; here she keeps us waiting. Suddenly she has done it; now things can happen as she likes things to happen. The Edwardses are going to the ball. The Tomlinsons' carriage is passing; she can tell us that Charles is 'being provided with his gloves and told to keep them on',¹³ Tom Musgrave retreats to a remote corner with a barrel of oysters and is famously snug.¹⁴ Her genius is freed and active. At once our senses quicken; we are possessed with the peculiar intensity which she alone can impart. But of what is it all composed? Of a ball in a country town; a few couples meeting and taking hands in an assembly room; a little eating and drinking; and for catastrophe, a boy being snubbed by one young lady and kindly treated by another. There is no tragedy and no heroism. Yet for some reason the little scene is moving out of all proportion to its surface solemnity. We have been made to see that if Emma acted so in the ball-room, how considerate, how tender, inspired by what sincerity of feeling she would have shown herself in those graver crises of life which, as we watch her, come inevitably before our eyes. Jane Austen is thus a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes

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which are outwardly trivial. Always the stress is laid upon character. How, we are made to wonder, will Emma behave when Lord Osborne and Tom Musgrave make their call at five minutes before three, just as Mary is bringing in the tray and the knife-case? It is an extremely awkward situation. The young men are accustomed to much greater refinement. Emma may prove herself ill-bred, vulgar, a nonentity. The turns and twists of the dialogue keep us on the tenterhooks of suspense. Our attention is half upon the present moment, half upon the future. And when, in the end, Emma behaves in such a way as to vindicate our highest hopes of her, we are moved as if we had been made witnesses of a matter of the highest importance. Here, indeed, in this unfinished and in the main inferior story, are all the elements of Jane Austen's greatness. It has the permanent quality of literature. Think away the surface animation, the likeness to life, and there remains, to provide a deeper pleasure, an exquisite discrimination of human values. Dismiss this too from the mind and one can dwell with extreme satisfaction upon the more abstract art which, in the ball-room scene, so varies the emotions and proportions the parts that it is possible to enjoy it, as one enjoys poetry, for itself, and not as a link which carries the story this way and that.

But the gossip says of Jane Austen that she was perpendicular, precise, and taciturn – 'a poker of whom everybody is afraid'. Of this too there are traces; she could be merciless enough; she is one of the most consistent satirists in the whole of literature. Those first angular chapters of *The Watsons* prove that hers was not a prolific genius; she had not, like Emily Brontë, merely to open the door to make herself felt. Humbly and gaily she collected the twigs and straws out of which the nest was to be made and placed them neatly together. The twigs and straws were a little dry and a little dusty in themselves. There was the big house and the little house; a tea party, a dinner party, and an occasional picnic; life was hedged in by valuable connections

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and adequate incomes; by muddy roads, wet feet, and a tendency on the part of the ladies to get tired; a little principle supported it, a little consequence, and the education commonly enjoyed by upper middle-class families living in the country. Vice, adventure, passion were left outside. But of all this prosiness, of all this littleness, she evades nothing, and nothing is slurred over. Patiently and precisely she tells us how they 'made no stop anywhere till they reached Newbury, where a comfortable meal, uniting dinner and supper, wound up the enjoyments and fatigues of the day'.¹⁵ Nor does she pay to conventions merely the tribute of lip homage; she believes in them besides accepting them. When she is describing a clergyman, like Edmund Bertram, or a sailor, in particular, she appears debarred by the sanctity of his office from the free use of her chief tool, the comic genius, and is apt therefore to lapse into decorous panegyric or matter-of-fact description. But these are exceptions; for the most part her attitude recalls the anonymous lady's ejaculation - 'A wit, a delineator of character, who does not talk is terrific indeed!' She wishes neither to reform nor to annihilate; she is silent; and that is terrific indeed. One after another she creates her fools, her prigs, her worldlings, her Mr Collinsees, her Sir Walter Elliots, her Mrs Bennets. She encircles them with the lash of a whip-like phrase which, as it runs round them, cuts out their silhouettes for ever. But there they remain; no excuse is found for them and no mercy shown them. Nothing remains of Julia and Maria Bertram when she has done with them; Lady Bertram is left 'sitting and calling to Pug and trying to keep him from the flower-beds' eternally.¹⁶ A divine justice is meted out; Dr Grant, who begins by liking his goose tender, ends by bringing on 'apoplexy and death, by three great institutional dinners in one week'.¹⁷ Sometimes it seems as if her creatures were born merely to give Jane Austen the supreme delight of slicing their heads off. She is satisfied; she is content; she would not alter a hair on anybody's head, or move one brick

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or one blade of grass in a world which provides her with such exquisite delight.

Nor, indeed, would we. For even if the pangs of outraged vanity, or the heat of moral wrath, urged us to improve away a world so full of spite, pettiness, and folly, the task is beyond our powers. People are like that - the girl of fifteen knew it; the mature woman proves it. At this very moment some Lady Bertram is trying to keep Pug from the flower beds; she sends Chapman to help Miss Fanny a little late. The discrimination is so perfect, the satire so just, that, consistent though it is, it almost escapes our notice. No touch of pettiness, no hint of spite, rouse us from our contemplation. Delight strangely mingles with our amusement. Beauty illuminates these fools.

That elusive quality is, indeed, often made up of very different parts, which it needs a peculiar genius to bring together. The wit of Jane Austen has for partner the perfection of her taste. Her fool is a fool, her snob is a snob, because he departs from the model of sanity and sense which she has in mind, and conveys to us unmistakably even while she makes us laugh. Never did any novelist make more use of an impeccable sense of human values. It is against the disc of an unerring heart, an unfailing good taste, an almost stern morality, that she shows up those deviations from kindness, truth, and sincerity which are among the most delightful things in English literature. She depicts a Mary Crawford in her mixture of good and bad entirely by this means. She lets her rattle on against the clergy, or in favour of a baronetage and ten thousand a year, with all the ease and spirit possible; but now and again she strikes one note of her own, very quietly, but in perfect tune, and at once all Mary Crawford's chatter, though it continues to amuse, rings flat. Hence the depth, the beauty, the complexity of her scenes. From such contrasts there comes a beauty, a solemnity even, which are not only as remarkable as her wit, but an inseparable part of it. In *The Watsons* she gives us a foretaste of this power; she makes us

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wonder why an ordinary act of kindness, as she describes it, becomes so full of meaning. In her masterpieces, the same gift is brought to perfection. Here is nothing out of the way; it is midday in Northamptonshire; a dull young man is talking to rather a weakly young woman on the stairs as they go up to dress for dinner, with housemaids passing. But, from triviality, from commonplace, their words become suddenly full of meaning, and the moment for both one of the most memorable in their lives. It fills itself; it shines; it glows; it hangs before us, deep, trembling, serene for a second; next, the housemaid passes, and this drop, in which all the happiness of life has collected, gently subsides again to become part of the ebb and flow of ordinary existence.

What more natural, then, with this insight into their profundity, than that Jane Austen should have chosen to write of the trivialities of day-to-day existence, of parties, picnics, and country dances? No 'suggestions to alter her style of writing'¹⁸ from the Prince Regent or Mr Clarke could tempt her; no romance, no adventure, no politics or intrigue could hold a candle to life on a country-house staircase as she saw it. Indeed, the Prince Regent and his librarian had run their heads against a very formidable obstacle; they were trying to tamper with an incorruptible conscience, to disturb an infallible discretion. The child who formed her sentences so finely when she was fifteen never ceased to form them, and never wrote for the Prince Regent or his Librarian, but for the world at large. She knew exactly what her powers were, and what material they were fitted to deal with as material should be dealt with by a writer whose standard of finality was high. There were impressions that lay outside her province; emotions that by no stretch or artifice could be properly coated and covered by her own resources. For example, she could not make a girl talk enthusiastically of banners and chapels. She could not throw herself whole-heartedly into a romantic moment. She had all sorts of

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devices for evading scenes of passion. Nature and its beauties she approached in a sidelong way of her own. She describes a beautiful night without once mentioning the moon. Nevertheless, as we read the few formal phrases about 'the brilliancy of an unclouded night and the contrast of the deep shade of the woods', the night is at once as 'solemn, and soothing, and lovely' as she tells us, quite simply, that it was.¹⁹

The balance of her gifts was singularly perfect. Among her finished novels there are no failures, and among her many chapters few that sink markedly below the level of the others. But, after all, she died at the age of forty-two. She died at the height of her powers. She was still subject to those changes which often make the final period of a writer's career the most interesting of all. Vivacious, irrepressible, gifted with an invention of great vitality, there can be no doubt that she would have written more, had she lived, and it is tempting to consider whether she would not have written differently. The boundaries were marked; moons, mountains, and castles lay on the other side. But was she not sometimes tempted to trespass for a minute? Was she not beginning, in her own gay and brilliant manner, to contemplate a little voyage of discovery?

Let us take *Persuasion*, the last completed novel, and look by its light at the books she might have written had she lived. There is a peculiar beauty and a peculiar dullness in *Persuasion*. The dullness is that which so often marks the transition stage between two different periods. The writer is a little bored. She has grown too familiar with the ways of her world; she no longer notes them freshly. There is an asperity in her comedy which suggests that she has almost ceased to be amused by the vanities of a Sir Walter or the snobbery of a Miss Elliot. The satire is harsh, and the comedy crude. She is no longer so freshly aware of the amusements of daily life. Her mind is not altogether on her object. But, while we feel that Jane Austen has done this before, and done it better, we also feel that she is trying to do

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something which she has never yet attempted. There is a new element in *Persuasion*, the quality, perhaps, that made Dr Whewell fire up and insist that it was 'the most beautiful of her works'.²⁰ She is beginning to discover that the world is larger, more mysterious, and more romantic than she had supposed. We feel it to be true of herself when she says of Anne: 'She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older – the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning'.²¹ She dwells frequently upon the beauty and the melancholy of nature, upon the autumn where she had been wont to dwell upon the spring. She talks of the 'influence so sweet and so sad of autumnal months in the country'.²² She marks 'the tawny leaves and withered hedges'.²³ 'One does not love a place the less because one has suffered in it', she observes.²⁴ But it is not only in a new sensibility to nature that we detect the change. Her attitude to life itself is altered. She is seeing it, for the greater part of the book, through the eyes of a woman who, unhappy herself, has a special sympathy for the happiness and unhappiness of others, which, until the very end, she is forced to comment upon in silence. Therefore the observation is less of facts and more of feelings than is usual. There is an expressed emotion in the scene at the concert and in the famous talk about woman's constancy which proves not merely the biographical fact that Jane Austen had loved, but the aesthetic fact that she was no longer afraid to say so. Experience, when it was of a serious kind, had to sink very deep, and to be thoroughly disinfected by the passage of time, before she allowed herself to deal with it in fiction. But now, in 1817, she was ready. Outwardly, too, in her circumstances, a change was imminent. Her fame had grown very slowly. 'I doubt', wrote Mr Austen Leigh, 'whether it would be possible to mention any other author of note whose personal obscurity was so complete'.²⁵ Had she lived a few more years only, all that would have been altered. She would have stayed in London, dined out, lunched

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out, met famous people, made new friends, read, travelled, and carried back to the quiet country cottage a hoard of observations to feast upon at leisure.

And what effect would all this have had upon the six novels that Jane Austen did not write? She would not have written of crime, of passion, or of adventure. She would not have been rushed by the importunity of publishers or the flattery of friends into slovenliness or insincerity. But she would have known more. Her sense of security would have been shaken. Her comedy would have suffered. She would have trusted less (this is already perceptible in *Persuasion*) to dialogue and more to reflection to give us a knowledge of her characters. Those marvellous little speeches which sum up, in a few minutes' chatter, all that we need in order to know an Admiral Croft or a Mrs Musgrove for ever, that shorthand, hit-or-miss method which contains chapters of analysis and psychology, would have become too crude to hold all that she now perceived of the complexity of human nature. She would have devised a method, clear and composed as ever, but deeper and more suggestive, for conveying not only what people say, but what they leave unsaid; not only what they are, but what life is. She would have stood farther away from her characters, and seen them more as a group, less as individuals. Her satire, while it played less incessantly, would have been more stringent and severe. She would have been the forerunner of Henry James and of Proust – but enough. Vain are these speculations: the most perfect artist among women, the writer whose books are immortal, died 'just as she was beginning to feel confidence in her own success'.²⁶

why should this voice of protest mix itself with our gloom? The voice of protest is the voice of another and an ancient civilisation which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand. English fiction from Sterne to Meredith bears witness to our natural delight in humour and comedy, in the beauty of earth, in the activities of the intellect, and in the splendour of the body. But any deductions that we may draw from the comparison of two fictions so immeasurably far apart are futile save indeed as they flood us with a view of the infinite possibilities of the art and remind us that there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing – no ‘method’, no experiment, even of the wildest – is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. ‘The proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured.

'JANE EYRE' AND 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS'

Of the hundred years that have passed since Charlotte Brontë was born, she, the centre now of so much legend, devotion, and literature, lived but thirty-nine. It is strange to reflect how different those legends might have been had her life reached the ordinary human span. She might have become, like some of her famous contemporaries, a figure familiarly met with in London and elsewhere, the subject of pictures and anecdotes innumerable, the writer of many novels, of memoirs possibly, removed from us well within the memory of the middle-aged in all the splendour of established fame. She might have been wealthy, she might have been prosperous. But it is not so. When we think of her we have to imagine some one who had no lot in our modern world; we have to cast our minds back to the 'fifties of the last century, to a remote parsonage upon the wild Yorkshire moors. In that parsonage, and on those moors, unhappy and lonely, in her poverty and her exaltation, she remains for ever.

These circumstances, as they affected her character, may have left their traces on her work. A novelist, we reflect, is bound to build up his structure with much very perishable material which begins by lending it reality and ends by cumbering it with rubbish. As we open *Jane Eyre* once more we cannot stifle the suspicion that we shall find her world of imagination as antiquated, mid-Victorian, and out of date as the parsonage on the moor, a place only to be visited by the curious, only preserved by the pious. So we open *Jane Eyre*; and in two pages every doubt is swept clean from our minds.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.¹

There is nothing there more perishable than the moor itself, or more subject to the sway of fashion than the 'long and lamentable blast'. Nor is this exhilaration short-lived. It rushes us through the entire volume, without giving us time to think, without letting us lift our eyes from the page. So intense is our absorption that if some one moves in the room the movement seems to take place not there but up in Yorkshire. The writer has us by the hand, forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees, never leaves us for a moment or allows us to forget her. At the end we are steeped through and through with the genius, the vehemence, the indignation of Charlotte Brontë. Remarkable faces, figures of strong outline and gnarled feature have flashed upon us in passing; but it is through her eyes that we have seen them. Once she is gone, we seek for them in vain. Think of Rochester and we have to think of Jane Eyre. Think of the moor, and again there is Jane Eyre. Think of the drawing-room,*

* Charlotte and Emily Brontë had much the same sense of colour. '... we saw — ah! it was beautiful — a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers' (*Wuthering Heights*).² 'Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing-room, and within it a boudoir, both spread with white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans; while the ornaments on the pale Parian mantelpiece were of sparkling Bohemia glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire' (*Jane Eyre*).³

even, those 'white carpets on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers', that 'pale Parian mantelpiece' with its Bohemia glass of 'ruby red' and the 'general blending of snow and fire' — what is all that except Jane Eyre?

The drawbacks of being Jane Eyre are not far to seek. Always to be a governess and always to be in love is a serious limitation in a world which is full, after all, of people who are neither one nor the other. The characters of a Jane Austen or of a Tolstoy have a million facets compared with these. They live and are complex by means of their effect upon many different people who serve to mirror them in the round. They move hither and thither whether their creators watch them or not, and the world in which they live seems to us an independent world which we can visit, now that they have created it, by ourselves. Thomas Hardy is more akin to Charlotte Brontë in the power of his personality and the narrowness of his vision. But the differences are vast. As we read *Jude the Obscure* we are not rushed to a finish; we brood and ponder and drift away from the text in plethoric trains of thought which build up round the characters an atmosphere of question and suggestion of which they are themselves, as often as not, unconscious. Simple peasants as they are, we are forced to confront them with destinies and questionings of the hugest import, so that often it seems as if the most important characters in a Hardy novel are those which have no names. Of this power, of this speculative curiosity, Charlotte Brontë has no trace. She does not attempt to solve the problems of human life; she is even unaware that such problems exist; all her force, and it is the more tremendous for being constricted, goes into the assertion, 'I love', 'I hate', 'I suffer'.

For the self-centred and self-limited writers have a power denied the more catholic and broad-minded. Their impressions are close packed and strongly stamped between their narrow walls. Nothing issues from their minds which has not been marked with their own impress. They learn little from other

writers, and what they adopt they cannot assimilate. Both Hardy and Charlotte Brontë appear to have founded their styles upon a stiff and decorous journalism. The staple of their prose is awkward and unyielding. But both with labour and the most obstinate integrity, by thinking every thought until it has subdued words to itself, have forged for themselves a prose which takes the mould of their minds entire; which has, into the bargain, a beauty, a power, a swiftness of its own. Charlotte Brontë, at least, owed nothing to the reading of many books. She never learnt the smoothness of the professional writer, or acquired his ability to stuff and sway his language as he chooses. 'I could never rest in communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, whether male or female',⁴ she writes, as any leader-writer in a provincial journal might have written; but gathering fire and speed goes on in her own authentic voice 'till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place by their hearts' very hearthstone'. It is there that she takes her seat; it is the red and fitful glow of the heart's fire which illuminates her page. In other words, we read Charlotte Brontë not for exquisite observation of character — her characters are vigorous and elementary; not for comedy — hers is grim and crude; not for a philosophic view of life — hers is that of a country parson's daughter; but for her poetry. Probably that is so with all writers who have, as she has, an overpowering personality, so that, as we say in real life, they have only to open the door to make themselves felt. There is in them some untamed ferocity perpetually at war with the accepted order of things which makes them desire to create instantly rather than to observe patiently. This very ardour, rejecting half shades and other minor impediments, wings its way past the daily conduct of ordinary people and allies itself with their more inarticulate passion. It makes them poets, or, if they choose to write in prose, intolerant of its restrictions. Hence it is that both Emily and Charlotte are

always invoking the help of nature. They both feel the need of some more powerful symbol of the vast and slumbering passions in human nature than words or actions can convey. It is with a description of a storm that Charlotte ends her finest novel *Villette*. 'The skies hang full and dark — a wrack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms.'⁵ So she calls in nature to describe a state of mind which could not otherwise be expressed. But neither of the sisters observed nature accurately as Dorothy Wordsworth observed it, or painted it minutely as Tennyson painted it. They seized those aspects of the earth which were most akin to what they themselves felt or imputed to their characters, and so their storms, their moors, their lovely spaces of summer weather are not ornaments applied to decorate a dull page or display the writer's powers of observations — they carry on the emotion and light up the meaning of the book.

The meaning of a book, which lies so often apart from what happens and what is said and consists rather in some connection which things in themselves different have had for the writer, is necessarily hard to grasp. Especially this is so when, like the Brontës, the writer is poetic, and his meaning inseparable from his language, and itself rather a mood than a particular observation. *Wuthering Heights* is a more difficult book to understand than *Jane Eyre*, because Emily was a greater poet than Charlotte. When Charlotte wrote she said with eloquence and splendour and passion 'I love', 'I hate', 'I suffer'. Her experience, though more intense, is on a level with our own. But there is no 'I' in *Wuthering Heights*. There are no governesses. There are no employers. There is love, but it is not the love of men and women. Emily was inspired by some more general conception. The impulse which urged her to create was not her own suffering or her own injuries. She looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her the power to unite it in a book. That gigantic ambition is to be felt throughout the

novel – a struggle, half thwarted but of superb conviction, to say something through the mouths of her characters which is not merely ‘I love’ or ‘I hate’, but ‘we, the whole human race’ and ‘you, the eternal powers . . .’ the sentence remains unfinished. It is not strange that it should be so; rather it is astonishing that she can make us feel what she had it in her to say at all. It surges up in the half-articulate words of Catherine Earnshaw, ‘If all else perished and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained and *he* were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger; I should not seem part of it’.⁶ It breaks out again in the presence of the dead. ‘I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter – the eternity they have entered – where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy and joy in its fulness.’⁷ It is this suggestion of power underlying the apparitions of human nature and lifting them up into the presence of greatness that gives the book its huge stature among other novels. But it was not enough for Emily Brontë to write a few lyrics, to utter a cry, to express a creed. In her poems she did this once and for all, and her poems will perhaps outlast her novel. But she was novelist as well as poet. She must take upon herself a more laborious and a more ungrateful task. She must face the fact of other existences, grapple with the mechanism of external things, build up, in recognisable shape, farms and houses and report the speeches of men and women who existed independently of herself. And so we reach these summits of emotion not by rant or rhapsody but by hearing a girl sing old songs to herself as she rocks in the branches of a tree; by watching the moor sheep crop the turf; by listening to the soft wind breathing through the grass. The life at the farm with all its absurdities and its improbability is laid open to us. We are given every opportunity of comparing *Wuthering Heights* with a real farm and Heathcliff with a real man. How, we are allowed to ask, can there be truth or insight or the finer shades of

emotion in men and women who so little resemble what we have seen ourselves? But even as we ask it we see in Heathcliff the brother that a sister of genius might have seen; he is impossible we say, but nevertheless no boy in literature has a more vivid existence than his. So it is with the two Catherines; never could women feel as they do or act in their manner, we say. All the same, they are the most lovable women in English fiction. It is as if she could tear up all that we know human beings by, and fill these unrecognisable transparencies with such a gust of life that they transcend reality. Hers, then, is the rarest of all powers. She could free life from its dependence on facts, with a few touches indicate the spirit of a face so that it needs no body; by speaking of the moor make the wind blow and the thunder roar.

NOTES

The notes that follow here are not exhaustive. Primarily they set out to locate the sources of Virginia Woolf's quotations, a subject upon which she was almost as reticent as is the author of *Nemo's Almanac*. They establish the provenance of the individual essays (in so doing they draw upon B. J. Kirkpatrick's classic bibliography) but they do not generally perform elementary biographical tasks, except where elucidation on some point has seemed essential, convenient or, it is hoped, amusing. Where common or garden matters are adequately coped with in the *DNB*, as for instance in connection with the Pastons, or with such personages as Dr Bentley and Archbishop Thomson, they have been largely left to that work. Again, where Virginia Woolf quotes *passim* from a work of biography, it has generally been assumed that to identify the volume concerned and not to cite chapter and verse should meet the needs of the majority of readers.

The task of tracking down references has been greatly facilitated by those whose help is acknowledged in the preliminary pages and by consulting, in conjunction with the Monks House Papers at Sussex University Library, a draft of Brenda Silver's study of Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks (Princeton University Press, 1983), a work of formidable scholarship.

Abbreviations: *CR*: *The Common Reader*; *DNB*: *Dictionary of National Biography*; *N & A*: *Nation & Athenaeum*; *TLS*: *Times Literary Supplement*; *VW*: Virginia Woolf.

'THE PASTONS AND CHAUCER'

This essay was written specifically for *CR*. VW read James Gairdner's edition of *The Paston Letters . . .* (3 vols., Edward Arber, 1872–5, and 6 vols., Chatto & Windus, 1904). Her quotations are here located in Norman Davis's edition (2 vols., Oxford University Press, 1971–6).

Notes

For Chaucer, unless otherwise stated, VW's source was Walter W. Skeat's edition of *The Complete Works* (7 vols., Clarendon Press, 1894–7); line references here are to the second edition of F. N. Robinson (Houghton Mifflin and OUP, 1957). VW occasionally modernises or incorrectly mediaevalises her Chaucer spellings but there has seemed to be nothing to gain here from pointing out where she does so.

- 1 William Paston in 1427 bought Gresham Manor from Thomas Chaucer, a son of the poet.
- 2 These details derive from the 'Inventory of Sir John Fastolf's Goods', A.D. 1459, reproduced in Gairdner but not in Davis.
- 3 Davis, letter 300
- 4 Ibid., letter 332
- 5 Ibid., letter 72
- 6 Ibid., letter 236
- 7 Ibid., letter 199
- 8 Ibid., letter 212
- 9 David Garnett (1892–1981), one of the younger generation in Bloomsbury, had by 1925 published two novels in his own name: *Lady into Fox* (1922), and *A Man in the Zoo* (1924); John Masefield (1878–1967): his famous narrative poem, *Reynard the Fox*, was published in 1919.
- 10 *Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII. 3202; (Globe edition, 1898)
- 11 *General Prologue*, 151–6
- 12 *Knight's Tale*, I. 2307–10
- 13 *Physician's Tale*, VI. 48–9 and 51–4; line 49 is garbled and line 50 omitted; together they should read: 'Though she were as wys as Pallas, dar I seyn,/ Hir facound eek ful wommanly and pleyn.'
- 14 *Ulysses* was published in 1922.
- 15 *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, III. 469–73
- 16 *Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII. 2830–1
- 17 Ibid. VII. 2847–8
- 18 *Merchant's Tale*, IV. 1824–5
- 19 Ibid. IV. 1849–50
- 20 1387: the year commonly associated with the composition of the *General Prologue*.
- 21 *Knight's Tale*, I. 1323–4
- 22 Ibid. I. 2777–9

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- 23 Ibid. I. 1303-8
- 24 First line, penultimate stanza, of Wordsworth's *Elegiac Stanzas. Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle . . . 1805*
- 25 Coleridge, *Ancient Mariner*, 647-8
- 26 *Clerk's Tale*, IV. 862-6
- 27 Ibid. IV. 290-1; Skeat has: 'And she sette doun hir water pot anoon/ Bisyde the threshfold in an oxes stall.'
- 28 Davis, letter 291
- 29 Ibid., letter 228
- 30 Ibid., letter 23
- 31 Ibid., letter 753
- 32 Ibid., letters 190, 216, 209

'ON NOT KNOWING GREEK'

This essay was written specifically for *CR*. The Sophocles is quoted from Sir Richard C. Jebb's *Electra*, (Cambridge University Press, 1894), and *Oedipus Coloneus*, (CUP, 1885), and is here identified in those editions. For the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the edition referred to here is that of Eduard Fraenkel (OUP, 1950).

- 1 Sophocles, *Electra*, 1-2 (Jebb's translation)
- 2 Ibid., 674: 'Oh, miserable that I am! I am lost this day!'
- 3 "Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr Knightley. / She hesitated a moment, and then replied, "With you, if you will ask me." Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816); ed. Ronald Blythe (Penguin, 1966), pp. 327-8.
- 4 *Electra*, 618
- 5 Ibid., 770, and Jebb's translation
- 6 Presumably ibid., 1415
- 7 Ibid., 149-52, as translated by Jebb
- 8 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 418-9. The precise meaning of this passage has exercised all scholars; Fraenkel translates it: 'And when the eyes are starved, all charm of love is gone.'
- 9 Ibid., 1072-3; translated in Fraenkel as 'O woe, woe, woe! alas! Apollo, Apollo!' - on which ominous note Cassandra makes her first appearance.
- 10 Compare with this account of the Socratic method VW's descrip-

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- tion of discussions at 46 Gordon Square in 'Old Bloomsbury', *Moments of Being*, (The Hogarth Press, 1976), pp. 167ff.
- 11 VW quotes from Shelley's 'The Banquet. Translated from Plato' - see *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* by Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Mrs Shelley (2 vols., 1852). The original in fact has 'the wonderful head of this fellow', p. 124.
 - 12 Ibid., p. 129
 - 13 Part of an epitaph by Simonides (99), from *The Greek Anthology* in the translation of J. W. Mackail, *Select Greek Epigrams*, 3rd edn (Longman's, 1911). The complete epitaph reads: 'These men having set a crown of imperishable glory on their own land were folded in the dark cloud of death; yet being dead they have not died, since from on high their excellence raises them gloriously out of the house of Hades.'
 - 14 Simonides (100), quoted in full from Mackail.
 - 15 Cf Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus*, 670-7. Jebb has: 'Colonus, where the nightingale, a constant guest, trills her clear note in the covert of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy and the god's inviolate bowers, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, un vexed by wind of any storm.' ἄβατον does mean 'untrodden', or rather 'not to be trodden.'
 - 16 Shelley, 'The Banquet', op. cit. p. 97, Agathon's discourse
 - 17 The words are: sea, death, flower, star, moon
 - 18 John William Mackail (1859-1945), classicist, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, biographer of William Morris and husband of Burne-Jones's daughter Margaret. (See also note 13 above.)
 - 19 Sophocles, *Electra*, 151-2; Jebb's translation cannot strictly be faulted.

'THE ELIZABETHAN LUMBER ROOM'

This essay was first published in *CR*. The volumes referred to in the introductory sentence are the five in the edition from R. H. Evans of Hakluyt's *Collection of the Early Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1809-12).

- 1 James Anthony Froude, *English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century*, new edn (1896)
- 2 Hakluyt, vol. 1, p. 272

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- 3 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 250
- 4 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 169
- 5 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 45
- 6 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 284
- 7 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 352
- 8 Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (?1589), viii, 53–4
- 9 VW read *Memoirs of the Verney Family During the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Francis Partenope and Margaret M. Verney, 2nd edn (2 vols., Longman's, 1904).
- 10 William Harrison, *Description of England in Shakespeare's Youth*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, 1877, Chapter XV, p. 272. The full context of the passage quoted is interesting: 'Beside these things, I could in like sort set down the ways and means, whereby our ancient ladies of the court do shun and avoid idleness, some of them exercising in their fingers with the needle, others in caul work, diverse in spinning of silk, some in continuall reading either of the holie scriptures, or histories of our own or forren nations about us, and diverse in writing volumes of their own, or translating other mens into our English and Latin tongue.'
- 11 John Donne, Elegy 19, *To his Mistress Going to Bed* (c. 1593–8), line 27
- 12 Sir Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesie or The Apologie for Poetrie*, 1595; ed. J. Churton Collins, (OUP, 1907), pp. 25–6
- 13 Montaigne, *Of Vanity*
- 14 Ben Jonson, *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*, Clerimont and Truewit, I. i
- 15 Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, Part II section 11, p. 87 in vol. I, *The Works . . .*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, (Faber, 1964)
- 16 Ibid., I section 51, p. 62
- 17 Ibid., II section 4, p. 77
- 18 Ibid., I section 15, p. 24
- 19 Ibid., II section 10, p. 85
- 20 Ibid., II section 8, p. 82
- 21 'Afflictions induce callosities, miseries are slippery, or fall like snow upon us, which notwithstanding is no unhappy stupidity.' *Hydrocephalia. Urne-Burial.* Ch. V; p. 168 in Keynes, vol. I.

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'NOTES ON AN ELIZABETHAN PLAY'

This essay was revised from an article originally published in the *TLS*, 5 March 1925.

- 1 George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, II. i, spoken by Nuncius; lines 117–23, ed. Nicholas Brooke (1964).
- 2 Havelock Ellis edited and introduced in 1888 the works of John Ford in the Mermaid Series of 'The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists'. The passage quoted from Ellis's introduction, p. xvii, continues: ' . . . He was an analyst; he strained the limits of his art to the utmost; he foreboded new ways of expression. Thus he is less nearly related to the men who wrote *Othello*, and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, and *Valentinian*, than to those poets and artists of the naked human soul, the writer of *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, and the yet greater writer of *Madame Bovary*.'
- 3 John Ford, *The Broken Heart*, V. iii, spoken by Calantha; p. 279 in Ellis's edition.
- 4 John Webster, *The White Devil*, II. i, spoken by Isabella; lines 165–7, ed. David Gunby (Penguin, 1972).
- 5 Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, II. i, Aspatia's song; lines 72ff, ed. Howard B. Norland (1968).
- 6 John Webster, *The White Devil*, V. vi, spoken by Vittoria: 'My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,/ Is driven I know not whither.'; lines 246–7, ed. Gunby (Penguin, 1972)
- 7 Ibid., III. ii, 324–5, spoken by Giovanni.
- 8 Ibid., V. iii, 30–1, spoken by Brachiano.
- 9 John Ford, *The Broken Heart*, III. v, spoken by Penthea; pp. 240–1 in Ellis's edition.
- 10 Thomas Dekker, *The Witch of Edmonton*, IV, ii, spoken by Frank; p. 453 in *Thomas Dekker*, ed. Ernest Rhys (Mermaid Series, 1887).
- 11 George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, V. iii, spoken by Tamyra; lines 66–8, ed. Nicholas Brooke (1964).

'MONTAIGNE'

Reprinted from the *TLS*, 31 January 1924; VW's essay is based on *Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Charles Cotton, edited by William Carew Hazlitt, (5 vols., 1923). Privately printed for the Navarre Society. Quotations have been identified by essay (English title).

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The Rev. Dr Patrick Delany (1685?–1768), to whom the Pilkings owed their introduction to Swift – the poem referred to is ‘Delville, the seat of the Rev. Dr Delany’ and VW quotes the first line, pp. 47–8.

The third poem referred to is entitled ‘Advice to the People of Dublin in their choice of a Recorder’, and it opens: ‘Is there a man, whose fixed and steady soul . . .’, p. 91.

13 *Memoirs . . .*, p. 184

14 Ibid., p. 350; the accusation reads: ‘Why, Madam, had I said that your father died blaspheming the Almighty and of the foul disease; had I said that he refused to see his wife’s cubs, as he called your sisters at the hour of his death; had I said that you hid Lady D— behind the arras, to see — nothing — which you said your little Tom Titmouse of a husband had, you could not have used me worse.’

15 Ibid., p. 382

16 Ibid., p. 289

17 Ibid., p. 372

18 This essay is based upon *Eleanor Ormerod, LL.D., Economic Entomologist, Autobiography and Correspondence*, ed. Robert Wallace, published by J. Murray, 1904. Eleanor Anne Ormerod (1828–1901) is described in the *DNB*, under the entry for her father, George Ormerod (1785–1873), historian of Cheshire, as ‘a distinguished entomologist’.

‘JANE AUSTEN’

This essay incorporates ‘Jane Austen at Sixty’ *N & A* (15 December 1923), a review of *The Works of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (5 vols., Clarendon Press, 1923).

1 See *Jane Austen. Her Life and Letters. A Family Record* by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh (Smith, Elder & Co., 2nd ed., 1913), pp. 58–9. The author of the remarks is Philadelphia Walter in a letter to her brother.

2 Mrs Mitford, i.e. Mary Russell Mitford’s mother; for her reported observations and those of the anonymous friend of Miss Mitford see the latter’s letter to Sir William Elford (3 April 1815).

Notes

3 From *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, by her nephew, J. E. Austen-Leigh (1870); see *Persuasion, with a Memoir . . .*, ed. D. W. Harding (Penguin, 1965) p. 388

4 See also ‘Jane Austen Practising’, VW’s review of *Love and Friendship and Other Early Works* (Chatto & Windus, 1922), in the *New Statesman* (15 July 1922).

5 See ‘Letter the 14th. Laura in continuation’, in ‘Love and Friendship’, *The Works of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (OUP, 1954), vol. VI, p. 102.

6 See ‘Letter the 13th’, ibid., pp. 100–101.

7 For Lady Greville’s conversation see ‘A Collection of Letters . . . Letter the Third . . .’ ibid., pp. 156–160.

8 See ‘The History of England’, ibid., p. 142.

9 Ibid., p. 145: ‘Oh! what must this bewitching Princess whose only friend . . .’

10 For the Brontës and the Duke of Wellington see, for example, the Rev. Patrick Brontë quoted in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857); (Penguin, 1975), pp. 93–4.

11 *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), was written 1796–7.

12 *The Watsons* was begun in c. 1804 and first published in 1871.

13 *The Watsons*, ed. Margaret Drabble (Penguin, 1974), p. 122

14 Ibid., p. 126

15 *Mansfield Park* (1814); ed. Tony Tanner (Penguin, 1966), p. 370

16 Ibid., p. 103

17 Ibid., p. 453

18 For Jane Austen, the Prince Regent and J. S. Clarke, Librarian at Carlton House, see *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, by her nephew, J. E. Austen-Leigh (1870); ed. D. W. Harding (Penguin, 1965), pp. 350–9

19 *Mansfield Park* (Penguin, 1966), p. 139

20 Dr William Whewell (1794–1866), Master of Trinity College, Cambridge; his defence of *Persuasion*, made while a young don, is recorded in J. E. Austen-Leigh’s *A Memoir . . .*, op. cit., p. 369

21 *Persuasion* (1818); (Penguin, 1965), p. 58

22 Ibid., p. 61

23 Ibid., p. 107

24 Ibid., p. 193

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25 See J. E. Austen-Leigh, op. cit., p. 348

26 Ibid., p. 387

'MODERN FICTION'

This essay is a slightly revised version of 'Modern Novels', *TLS*, 10 April 1919.

1 *The Little Review*, N.Y., March 1918–December 1920, published the first thirteen (and part of the fourteenth) episodes of *Ulysses*. VW made reading notes for those that appeared March–October 1918.

2 See Chekhov's story 'Gusev', in *The Witch and Other Stories*, trans. Constance Garnett (Chatto & Windus, 1918), p. 166: 'Sewn up in the sail cloth he looked like a carrot or a radish: broad at the head and narrow at the feet . . .'

3 See 'The Village Priest' by Elena Militsina in *The Village Priest, and Other Stories* by Elena Militsina and Mihail Saltikov. Trans. from the Russian by Beatrix L. Tollemache, with an introduction by C. Hagberg Wright (T. Fisher Unwin, 1918). VW reviewed this work under the title 'The Russian View' in the *TLS*, 19 December 1918. See also note 1 of the *CR* essay, 'The Russian Point of View'.

"JANE EYRE" AND "WUTHERING HEIGHTS"

This essay incorporates in part 'Charlotte Brontë', *TLS*, 13 April 1916.

1 *Jane Eyre* (1847); ed. Q. D. Leavis (Penguin, 1966), pp. 39–40

2 *Wuthering Heights* (1847); ed. David Daiches (Penguin, 1965), p. 89

3 *Jane Eyre* (1966 edn), p. 135

4 This reference remains unelucidated.

5 *Villette* (1853); ed. Mark Lilly (Penguin, 1979), p. 595

6 *Wuthering Heights* (1965 edn), p. 122

7 Ibid., p. 202

'GEORGE ELIOT'

This essay is reprinted from the *TLS*, 20 November 1919. VW used the 1886 'Cabinet Edition' of *George Eliot's Life. As Related in her Letters and Journals*. Arranged and edited by her husband J. W. Cross (W. Blackwood, 1884).

1 See *Letters of George Meredith*, ed. W. M. Meredith (1912), to Leslie Stephen, 18 August 1902.

Notes

2 Lord Acton, 'George Eliot's Life', *Nineteenth Century* (March 1885). See *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone*, ed. Herbert Paul (1904), 27 December 1880; also Herbert Spencer served on the London Library Committee, and opposed the acquisition of modern novels. He was an intimate friend of George Eliot, but he did not, and was not empowered to, ban fiction from the Library.

3 Edmund Gosse, 'George Eliot', *London Mercury*, November 1919.

4 Lady Ritchie (VW's 'Aunt Annie'), 'A Discourse of Modern Sibyls', Presidential Address delivered at the AGM of the English Association, 10 January 1913, in *From the Porch* (Smith, Elder, 1913).

5 The origin of this has not been discovered.

6 George Eliot's father, Robert Evans, a builder and carpenter's son, became an agent on estates in Derbyshire and Warwickshire.

7 George Eliot – or Marian Evans – was assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*, 1851–3.

8 See Cross, vol. I, p. 22

9 Marian Evans in 1844 succeeded a Miss Brabant as translator of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846).

10 See Cross, vol. I, p. 127; the passage relates to her attitude to evangelical religion.

11 Caroline Bray to Sara Hennell, 14 February 1846, in Cross

12 George Eliot to Caroline Bray, 5 June 1857, in Cross

13 In the first edition of *The Mill on the Floss*, 1860, the passage concludes: '... how should it have time or need for belief and emphasis?', and this appears to be standard in subsequent editions. See Penguin edition, ed. A. S. Byatt (1979), p. 385

14 Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816); see, 'On Not Knowing Greek' above, note 3

15 *Middlemarch* (1871–2); ed. W. J. Harvey, (Penguin, 1965), p. 427

16 George Eliot to Mrs Richard Congreve, 2 December 1870, in Cross.

'THE RUSSIAN POINT OF VIEW'

This essay was first published in *CR*.

1 See 'Modern Fiction' above, note 3.

2 See 'The First and the Last' by John Galsworthy, first published in 1914, collected in *Caravan* (Heinemann, 1925), p. 877: 'A surge of