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Abstract
Claudia Johnson has remarked that "Mansfield Park is noticeably more allusive than Austen's other novels," and the work's explicit references to Cowper, Inchbald, and Shakespeare would seem to corroborate her hunch. Yet Mansfield Park's allusions may be distinguished less by how frequently they appear than by how insistently they call attention to themselves, how "noticeable" they are. My subject in this article is the slippery, hard-to-see allusiveness of Sense and Sensibility -- in particular, a heretofore unremarked allusion to John Dryden's "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" in volume 1, chapter 12. If, as Irvin Ehrenpreis asserts, "Austen deserves minute attention because ... few authors conceal their opinions on subjects of controversy so well," then careful scrutiny of this subtle allusion may provide an interesting interpretive context for the novel, one that promises to shed light on the critical controversy concerning how thoroughly Austen differentiates the two Dashwood sisters, whether she defines alternative spheres of value through them, and where her sympathies lie. On the other hand, the allusion's unobtrusiveness, its proximity to Austen's better-known—if no less subtle—invocation of Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock, and its location at exactly the point where the novel begins to explore problems of evidence, detection, and interpretation suggest that the invocation of Dryden may function less as a key to the resolution of interpretive quandaries than as an interpretive trap, a reminder that one's perspective determines the meaning of the evidence and not the reverse. Thus, while John Halperin maintains that Austen teaches the reader in Sense and Sensibility "to see what is there, and not just what one wishes to see," Austen also experiments with what we now call standpoint epistemology by questioning whether it is possible to "see what is there" uncoloured by one's wishes and experiences. Moreover, by treating Pope and Dryden not as Augustan artifacts but as vital participants in contemporary debates about sensibility and sexual politics, Austen casts a different shade on them, one that challenges traditional, too-easy distinctions between Austen's debt to an Augustan poetics of knowledge and her obligations to a sentimental and Romantic poetics of feeling.

Keywords
Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility, allusion, interpretation, John Dryden, To the Memory of Mr. Oldham, Cowper, Inchbald, Shakespeare, Pope, spheres of value, perspective

Cover page footnote
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"The setting always casts a different shade on it": Allusion and Interpretation in *Sense and Sensibility*

Mark Blackwell

> The Austen novel consistently tends to define its vision of life in relation to literature … . The "borrowings" from the common stock are often implicit invitations to the reader to see relationships and make comparisons between her works and what they resemble.—Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion*[1]

Claudia Johnson has remarked that "*Mansfield Park* is noticeably more allusive than Austen's other novels," and the work's explicit references to Cowper, Inchbald, and Shakespeare would seem to corroborate her hunch.[2] Yet *Mansfield Park*'s allusions may be distinguished less by how frequently they appear than by how insistently they call attention to themselves, how "noticeable" they are. My subject in this article is the slippery, hard-to-see allusiveness of *Sense and Sensibility*—in particular, a heretofore unremarked allusion to John Dryden's "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" in volume 1, chapter 12. If, as Irvin Ehrenpreis asserts, "Austen deserves minute attention because ... few authors conceal their opinions on subjects of controversy so well," then careful scrutiny of this subtle allusion may provide an interesting interpretive context for the novel, one that promises to shed light on the critical controversy concerning how

1 Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 1–2.

2 Claudia Johnson, introduction, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia Johnson (New York: Norton, 1998), xiii.

thoroughly Austen differentiates the two Dashwood sisters, whether she defines alternative spheres of value through them, and where her sympathies lie.[3] On the other hand, the allusion's unobtrusiveness, its proximity to Austen's better-known—if no less subtle—invocation of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, and its location at exactly the point where the novel begins to explore problems of evidence, detection, and interpretation suggest that the invocation of Dryden may function less as a key to the resolution of interpretive quandaries than as an interpretive trap, a reminder that one's perspective determines the meaning of the evidence and not the reverse. Thus, while John Halperin maintains that Austen teaches the reader in *Sense and Sensibility* "to see what is there, and not just what one wishes to see," Austen also experiments with what we now call standpoint epistemology by questioning whether it is possible to "see what is there" uncoloured by one's wishes and experiences.[4] Moreover, by treating Pope and Dryden not as Augustan artifacts but as vital participants in contemporary debates about sensibility and sexual politics, Austen casts a different shade on them, one that challenges traditional, too-easy distinctions between Austen's debt to an Augustan poetics of knowledge and her obligations to a sentimental and Romantic poetics of feeling.[5]

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3 Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Acts of Implication: Suggestion and Covert Meaning in the Works of Dryden, Swift, Pope, and Austen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 112.

4 John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 90.

5 My selective survey of *Sense and Sensibility*'s critical fortunes would begin with Ian Watt's "On *Sense and Sensibility*," *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), which locates the novel's primary significance in the way it "articulated the conflict ... between being sensible and being sensitive" (51). Like Watt, Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) contends that the work's "entire action is organized to represent Elinor and Marianne in terms of rival value-systems" (184). Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) challenges not the binary starkness of these readings, but their claim that the novel's sympathies are with Elinor: "Many readers have found Marianne's 'spirit' more appealing than Elinor's cautious, prim, and even repressive reserve" (185). Susan Morgan's *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) does not dispute Eleanor's ascendancy but does complicate the terms often used to distinguish the Dashwood sisters by associating Marianne, not Elinor, with conservatism (119). Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) directly controverts Butler's claim that the Dashwood sisters embody polarized values. Like Morgan, Johnson

The Illusion of Crude Antitheses: Allusion and Self-Delusion

The Dryden allusion in question appears during Elinor and Marianne Dashwood's conversation immediately following Marianne's announcement that Willoughby has given her a horse. Parts of this conversation are represented through direct speech, while others are translated into free indirect discourse or abridged by the narrator's summary. It is Elinor, presumably, who alludes to Dryden, but her words are transformed by free indirect speech into those of the narrator: "Elinor then ventured to doubt the propriety of her receiving such a present from a man so little, or at least so lately known to her."[6] These words evoke the well-known first line of Dryden's elegy for Oldham, "Farewel, too little and too lately known," and I think they do so deliberately.[7] "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" is a poem of affiliation in which a mature, successful, established poet, Dryden, claims his young contemporary, Oldham, as one "Whom I began to think and call my own; / For sure our Souls were near ally'd; and thine / Cast in the same Poetick mould with mine" (ll. 2–4). Though Dryden quickly sketches the two poets' likeness—"One *common* Note on either Lyre did strike, / And Knaves and Fools we both abhorr'd *alike*: / To the *same* Goal did both our Studies drive" (ll. 5–7; emphasis added)—he also takes pains to distinguish Oldham's brash, tart, "early ripe" satires from the "mellow[ed] ... dull sweets" produced by accomplished poets of "advancing Age," such as Dryden himself:

> O early ripe! to thy abundant store
> What could advancing Age have added more?
> It might (what Nature never gives the young)
> Have taught the numbers of thy native Tongue.
> But Satyr needs not those, and Wit will shine
> Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line:
> A noble Error, and but seldom made,

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aligns Marianne with conventionality and conservatism, not with independence of mind (50).

6 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3rd ed., rev., 6 vols. (1933; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1:58. References are to this edition.

7 John Dryden, "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham," *Poems 1681–1684*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, H.T. Swedenberg, Jr, et al., 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–2000), 2:175. References are to this edition.

> When Poets are by too much force betray'd.
> Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime
> Still shew'd a quickness; and maturing time
> But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of Rime. (ll. 11–21)

Oldham is associated with energy, exuberance, vitality—with the combination of life force and impulsive speed nicely captured in the word "quickness." His youthful vigour is depicted as a natural endowment that has the virtue of force, but his surplus of poetic force results in harsh, rugged, unpolished verse, verse not tamed, smoothed, and mellowed by poetic arts, which must be learned. Nonetheless, Dryden remains ambivalent about the benefits of such taming, as suggested by his emphasis on the nobility of Oldham's error, on the one hand, and on the dullness of the sweets brought by maturity, on the other. In "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham," Dryden assesses the gains and losses that experience brings, yet leaves the reader unsure whether he is lamenting the sad passing of a poet before his prime or his own loss of the unseasoned genius that poet is made to represent.

Austen enthusiasts will quickly see the relevance of Dryden's poem to the large, structuring dichotomies of *Sense and Sensibility*: youth versus age, quickness and vitality versus a dull and plodding correctness, nature versus culture. Indeed, the poem may comment not only on what A. Walton Litz terms the "crude antitheses" of the novel's structure but also on what he regards as a tension between the early and late—or immature and mature—stages of its composition: "The sum of the evidence is that we must regard *Sense and Sensibility* as a youthful work patched up at a later date, in which the crude antitheses of the original structure were never successfully overcome."[8] What matters here is that Dryden's poem addresses the main issue in Elinor's disagreement with Marianne. Marianne has accepted Willoughby's present "without hesitation," "without considering" the consequences, financial and otherwise, for the family, and Elinor considers her sister's "raptur[ous]" response to the gift as "extravagant testimony" of "Marianne's imprudence and want of thought" (58). Elinor objects to the impulsiveness of Marianne's decision, merely one symptom of her too-quick attachment to Willoughby and of the headlong pace of their relationship, and she

8 A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 73.

uses Dryden's poem to encode that objection to Marianne's sparse and recent—too little and too late— acquaintance with her beau. Austen's invocation of the poem in chapter 12 is also appropriate in the context of the preceding chapter, in which Elinor complains of Marianne's "young and ardent mind," "romantic" notions, and "enthusiasm," expressing the hope that "a few years will ... settle her opinions on the reasonable basis of common sense and observation" (54, 56). Elinor's interlocutor, Colonel Brandon, against whom Willoughby and Marianne are prejudiced because he is "neither lively nor young," nonetheless comes to Marianne's defence: "there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is sorry to see them give way to the reception of more general opinions" (50, 56). Marianne is made here to occupy the Oldham position, representing youth, biting force, and quickness, while Elinor champions the mellowing of "early ripe" enthusiasm that comes with "maturing time." Like "Oldham"'s Dryden, Brandon speaks "from experience," but unlike Elinor, he questions the advantage gained "when the romantic refinements of a young mind are obliged to give way" to "such opinions as are but too common, and too dangerous!" (56–57).

Colonel Brandon's words anticipate the tragic story of his beloved Eliza, only disclosed later in the novel. Yet the invocation of her tale just before the allusion to Dryden suggests another role played by the poem. The story of Eliza casts a threatening shadow over *Sense and Sensibility*, reminding readers of one possible future for Marianne: disgrace and early death. Austen's use of Dryden's verses to Oldham reinforces that threat, especially insofar as Marianne is linked to an excessively and unconventionally forceful poet who meets an untimely demise. If, as Claudia Johnson argues, Austen teases readers with the possibility of an all-too-conventional finish for Marianne, then the allusion to "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" functions as part of that narrative tease, inciting elegiac desires that readers expect to satisfy via Marianne's tragic end.[9]

The way Dryden poses youthful vigour against mellow maturity rein-

9 "Women abused in love are expected to die. This is what conventionally happens in sentimental novels, and this is what everyone, with stunning matter-of-factness, expects from Marianne." Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 64–65. Austen displays her familiarity with the convention in *Emma*: "Goldsmith tells us, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die." *Emma*, in *The Novels,* 4:387. References are to this edition.

forces similar antitheses embodied in Marianne and Elinor and initially set out as early as the first chapter (6). However, this contrastive reading simplifies not only *Sense and Sensibility* but also Austen's use of Dryden in the novel. It may, for example, seem altogether appropriate that Elinor cites Dryden and not Cowper or Scott in her rebuke to Marianne. If Marianne, like Willoughby, "admir[es] Pope no more than is proper" (47), Elinor presumably ranks Pope and Dryden among those writers she esteems, traditionally associated as they are with the decorum, control, and understanding of occasion and audience that Elinor herself displays in social interactions. Indeed, Samuel Johnson's famous characterization of Dryden seems to underscore the very tensions that the Dashwood sisters personify:

> The power that predominated in his intellectual operations was rather strong reason than quick sensibility. Upon all occasions that were presented he studied rather than felt, and produced sentiments not such as Nature enforces, but meditation supplies. With the simple and elemental passions, as they spring separate in the mind, he seems not much acquainted, and seldom describes them but as they are complicated by the various relations of society, and confused in the tumults and agitations of life.[10]

Samuel Johnson depicts Dryden as a poet moved by "strong reason" rather than feeling, by sense rather than "quick sensibility," by study rather than nature, as someone for whom passions only have meaning in the varied social environment that shapes and complicates them. Johnson's final sentence above might still serve as a fair description of Austen's own artistic predilections. Yet his characterization should also give us pause, for its emphasis on Dryden's studied, meditated responses recalls not so much the Elinor of *Sense and Sensibility* as the pedantic Mary Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*, whose transformation of sister Lydia's disappearance with Wickham into a "useful lesson" in female virtue is chillingly unfeeling.[11] Elinor's "feelings were strong," Austen assures the reader, even if "she knew how to govern them" (6).

Elinor's alignment with Dryden is problematic in other ways as well.

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10 Samuel Johnson, *The Life of Dryden*, *Lives of the Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Norman Hill and Harold Spencer Scott, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), 1:457. The passage is also cited in *James Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill and L.F. Powell, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934), 4:45.

11 Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, in *The Novels,* 2:289.

After all, though she invokes Dryden's poem, she cites it against the grain of its intention. Dryden laments that he has come to know Oldham "too little and too lately," but his brief acquaintance with the younger man does not keep him from avowing that their "Souls were near ally'd" and "cast in the same ... mould." Elinor uses Dryden to suggest the inappropriateness of the quick bond that Marianne has formed with Willoughby, but "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" celebrates just the sort of spiritual connection that Marianne claims, an affinity indifferent to time and custom. Ironically, given Marianne's enthusiasm for contemporary poets and her presumed dislike of dusty Dryden, it is Marianne who, wittingly or unwittingly, paraphrases his poem in her response to Elinor:

> "You are mistaken, Elinor," said she warmly, "in supposing I know but little of Willoughby. I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him, than I am with any other creature in the world, except yourself and mama. It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy;—it is disposition alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others." (58–59)

Marianne's notion that some bonds of intimacy transcend the time of acquaintance is in keeping with the spirit of Dryden's poem, which affirms a kinship between Oldham and Dryden out of all proportion with their knowledge of each other. While Elinor invokes a poetic tradition that contradicts the traditional social customs she is anxious to enforce, Marianne's own flouting of social conventions is exposed as precedented, customary, and highly conventional indeed.[12] The

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12 In the words of Tony Tanner, "Jane Austen perceived that it was often those people who claimed to be impatient with forms who were in some ways most reliant on them." *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 85. See also Claudia Johnson, who makes a related point: "*Sense and Sensibility*, then, criticizes, not the unseemliness or the rebelliousness of Marianne's emotionality, but rather its horrifying conformity to the social context she lives within. Her unconventionality turns out to be all too conventional after all, and instead of defying dangerously common expectations, she comes close to capitulating to them." *Jane Austen*, 69. Deidre Shauna Lynch notes in a similar vein, "Despite her best intentions, Marianne copies." *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 229. All three critics build on the observation of Everett Zimmerman, who writes, "Marianne despises the verbal cliché, but she has actualized the patterns of literature and turned her life into a cliché." "Admiring Pope no more than is proper: *Sense and Sensibility*," *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 117.

Marianne who admits that the modish "admiration of landscape scenery is become a mere jargon," who claims to "detest jargon of every kind," and who professes sometimes "to have kept feelings to myself, because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning" (97) unconsciously paraphrases the sentiments of another nevertheless.

Like *Mansfield Park*, which, as Joseph Litvak argues, reveals Fanny Price's anti-theatricality to be its own sort of performance and which explores "the incursion of public values upon private experience," *Sense and Sensibility* discloses how convention-bound and how scripted anti-conventional behaviour can be, how much subjective feelings are shaped by public discourses and unacknowledged social conditioning.[13] Yet, through the example of Elinor's misapplication of Dryden's poem, the novel also shows how "worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning" allusions to authoritative texts can become, how public iteration can misconstrue private intention, and thus how fraught with hazards is the frontier between event and interpretation, between personal expression and the social construction of meaning. Each Dashwood sister is confused about literary history—Marianne because she ignores the precedent for her modishly Romantic comportment disclosed by the allusion to Dryden and Elinor because she is unreflectively applying a simplistic model of literary historical continuity to the poem, one that reifies Augustan poetic conservatism as a value with universal application. Marianne believes her world more distinct from Dryden's than it is, while Elinor treats the literary past as a repository of timeless values that may be applied to a wayward present, blind like Marianne to how that past is more like the present than she recognizes. The subtle reference to Dryden in this particular exchange between Elinor and Marianne thus reveals that the dialogue between them sometimes presents us not with "alternatives distinctly defined," but with a "blur."[14] Ironically, the allusion demonstrates how similarly deluded both Marianne and Elinor

13 Joseph Litvak, "The Infection of Acting: Theatricals and Theatricality in *Mansfield Park*," *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 5.

14 I am repeating, with a difference, Reuben Brower's assertion that "in the dialogue of Jane Austen, one finds not a blur, but alternatives distinctly defined." *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 200.

are, both of whom alternately resist and affirm the power of social and literary traditions. It also discloses that, as Samuel Johnson puts it in the *Life of Dryden*, "We do not always know our own motives."[15]

Unlocking Clues: Allusion and the Elusion of Meaning

Both Marianne, Edward, and Elinor's conversation about the cant of picturesque description and Marianne and Elinor's evocation of "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" immediately precede scenes in which locks of hair play a crucial role. These teasing proximities intimate Austen's interest in the relationship between text and experience, citation and originality, stories and the events—the evidence—which secure them credit. They also betray her interest in literary history—that is, in the way that the reception and application of human utterances change over time. That interest takes one form in, for example, *Northanger Abbey*, which sketches a heroine, Catherine Morland, whose vision of the people and events around her has been coloured by her reading of Gothic fiction, and another form in *Pride and Prejudice*, where different but related epistemological questions are raised as Elizabeth Bennet learns from a letter both to see with different eyes and to evaluate how she has seen—in other words, how she has weighed the evidence of her senses and the testimony of others. In *Sense and Sensibility*, scenes involving locks of hair remind the reader that human experience is always mediated through texts, be they social or literary, texts that both provide glosses and incite interpretation. For the locks, like the allusion to Dryden's poem or the critical vocabulary of the picturesque, provide answers, furnish explanations, and frame ways of seeing things while simultaneously provoking questions, raising doubts, and calling into question easy assumptions.

In the first such scene, Elinor convinces Marianne that accepting a horse would inconvenience their mother and then looks on as Marianne declines the gift. In her sister's polite refusal and Willoughby's warm response, Elinor "instantly saw an intimacy so decided, a meaning so direct, as marked a perfect agreement between them. From that moment she doubted not of their being engaged to each other." Elinor considers her suspicion confirmed when, the next day, she learns from

15 Samuel Johnson, *Life of Dryden*, 458.

her sister Margaret that Willoughby "has got a lock of [Marianne's] hair." Elinor subjects this evidence to what seems appropriate scrutiny, expressing doubts about the testimony of a sister who has already mistaken a miniature of their great-uncle worn around Marianne's neck for a picture of Willoughby. But after Margaret claims to have seen him "cut it off," Elinor "could not withhold her credit: nor was she disposed to it, for the circumstance was in perfect unison with what she had heard and seen herself" (60–61). Elinor does not believe Margaret's story because it is indisputably factual; rather, Elinor's predisposition towards a particular circumstantial narrative leads her to credit a corroborating anecdote as unimpeachable evidence. Interpretive perspective determines the credibility of evidence here, not the reverse. In the event, Elinor has the facts right but their interpretation wrong: Willoughby has the lock, but it is the token of an imprudent and ephemeral attachment, not a covert engagement.

The second scene involves a lock of hair held not by Willoughby but by Edward Ferrars, one spied by Marianne in a ring that Edward wears on one of his fingers. After Marianne asks whether the hair is his sister's, Edward "coloured very deeply, and giving a momentary glance at Elinor, replied, 'Yes; it is my sister's hair. The setting always casts a different shade on it you know'" (98). This lock's existence is verified by sight rather than report. Both Marianne and Elinor, our principals, bear witness to the physical evidence, yet that evidence once again becomes the occasion for varied misreadings: "That the hair was her own, [Elinor] instantaneously felt as well satisfied as Marianne; the only difference in their conclusions was, that what Marianne considered as a free gift from her sister, Elinor was conscious must have been procured by some theft or contrivance unknown to herself" (98). The primary error of interpretation is one in which Marianne and Elinor, however different, concur: both presume the hair to be Elinor's. They differ only in the conclusions that they derive from this presumed fact. Marianne, viewing the evidence through the lens of her own relationship with Willoughby, assumes that, like her, Elinor has dispensed with the social codes dictating that locks of hair may only be bestowed as manifest tokens of a socially recognized attachment. On the other hand, conscious that she has not freely presented a ringlet of hair to Edward, Elinor recognizes the lock not as the sign of a covert compact but as a likely breach of the social decorum she upholds. And yet, though she acknowledges the

lock "must have been procured by some theft or contrivance," she "was not in a humour ... to regard it as an affront" (98). Once again, if Marianne's and Elinor's misuse of the evidence distinguishes them, it does so in unexpected ways. Marianne's interpretation reminds us that, however independent-minded she is, even her anti-conventional acts of self-assertion depend upon socially established systems of meaning. Marianne describes her unique bond with Willoughby in terms that parrot Dryden's "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham," and she and Willoughby adopt as the emblem of their singular affection for one another the all-too-conventional token of a lock of hair, a symbol with insistent literary and social precedents. Elinor, on the other hand, reveals how our judgment "can be coloured by our self-regarding impulses" by tolerating Edward's presumed theft of the lock because it sustains her hope that he is sincerely attached to her.[16] She thus overlooks a breach of social decorum simply because it brings her some personal satisfaction. Marianne's acts of unrestricted individuality are tainted by the very social codes she affects to despise, while Elinor yet again shapes those codes to serve her emotional needs at the moment.[17]

The lock scenes thus establish the collection and interpretation of evidence as a major issue for the novel's characters, showing that, as Edward puts it, "the setting always casts a different shade on it"—that the context of the evidence and the situation of its interpreter determine its cast, its colour, the shades of meaning ascribed to it. Immediately after Elinor and Marianne spy the lock in Edward's ring, Sir John Middleton discovers "that the name of Ferrars began with an F.," itself a reference to the guessing game about Elinor's "particular favourite" that follows hard upon the allusion to Dryden and the tale of Marianne's plait of hair in chapter 12. And shortly after both Sir John's discovery and the Dashwood sisters' conjectures about Edward's lock, Edward hazards his own wild surmise concerning Marianne's beau: "I guess that Mr. Willoughby hunts." *Sense and Sensibility* is full of such puzzles, clues, and hunches, from the riddle of Colonel Brandon's business in London; to the large W. that Elinor discerns in the direction of a missive sent by Marianne; to the letter from Edward, the miniature of Edward, and the story of the lock in his ring, which

16 Watt, 45.

17 See Zimmerman: "Elinor's judgement is subjected to the same distorting tendencies as Marianne's" (119).

"formed altogether such a body of evidence, as … established as a fact, which no partiality could set aside," not only Edward's involvement with Lucy Steele but also his "ill-treatment" of Elinor (99, 61–62, 100, 139). And yet, even in the latter case, what seems incontrovertible evidence provokes further interpretive queries rather than definitively answering them. Elinor compares the facts of Lucy's case to her own sense that Edward has feelings for her and develops an alternative interpretation of those facts, which this time happens to be the right one.

Even as the novel underscores the acts of interpretation performed by its characters, it calls attention to the interpretive acts that readers engage in and to the different shades that the readers' own contexts of interpretation cast on the evidence. This is not simply because we are teased like Austen's characters by the mystery of Brandon's past or the enigma of Marianne's relationship with Willoughby. It is because we are provoked by tantalizingly indirect allusions that seem to intimate something more, something deeper. As I have tried to demonstrate, such intimations are but one effect of Austen's allusion to Dryden's "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham." They seem, however, to be the primary effect of Austen's more noticeable—if no less difficult to read— evocations of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. Readers may be inclined to believe that they descry a submerged pattern of elusive, allusive meaning when they read the lock scenes in *Sense and Sensibility* as enigmatic rewritings of Pope's poem. Coming in a novel that mentions Pope by name, and from a writer who claimed, "There has been one infallible Pope in the World," the cryptic lock scenes indeed seem designed to be read against Pope's mock-epic miniature.[18] Yet the novel's relation to Pope has always posed something of a problem for literary historians. Many ignore it, focusing primarily on Austen's connections to the prose fiction of the late eighteenth century, as in Kenneth L. Moler's *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* or the many recent accounts of Austen's relation to the political novels of the 1790s.[19] Reuben Brower, one of a number of critics who believe Austen's "literary temper ... had its natural alliances with that of the earlier eighteenth century and with the Augustans, rather than with her immediate ancestors, the senti-

18 Austen, 26 October 1813 letter to Cassandra Austen. See letter 94, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 245.

19 The best recent example is Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen*.

mental, domestic, and Gothic novelists," nonetheless points out that "There is no case, or at best a slight one, for proving direct influence of Pope or of *The Rape of the Lock* on Jane Austen."[20] And those who do pursue the Austen-Pope connection tend to err in the direction of a rococo typological parallelism, as in Catherine Bristow's "Unlocking the Rape: An Analysis of Austen's Use of Pope's Symbolism in *Sense and Sensibility*."[21] The importance of the novel's echoes of *The Rape of the Lock* lies less in their meaning than in their effects, more specifically, in the illusions of meaning, the intimations of significance that they produce.

Austen is fully aware of the profound appeal of such intimations: witness *Emma*'s Mr Knightley, convinced that there is something more than meets the eye in Frank Churchill's relationship with Jane Fairfax, reading between the lines—between the letters—of the game of anagrams that Frank, Jane, and Emma play with his nephews' alphabets, and yet troubled by the notion that he may be, "like Cowper and his fire at twilight, 'Myself creating what I saw'" (344). Consider, too, Austen's playful juvenile production, *The Mystery: An Unfinished Comedy*, the humour of which consists in its canny parody of the hackneyed strategies by which our narrative curiosity is piqued and deferred, our interpretive desires provoked by the intimation of a meaning never supplied, as in this exchange between Daphne, Fanny Elliott, and Mrs Humbug:

> *Daphne.* My dear Mrs Humbug how d'ye do? Oh! Fanny t'is all over.
> *Fanny.* Is it indeed!
> *Mrs Hum.* I'm very sorry to hear it.
> *Fanny.* Then t'was to no purpose that I….
> *Daphne.* None upon Earth.
> *Mrs Hum.* And what is to become of?…
> *Daphne.* Oh! thats [*sic*] all settled. (*whispers* Mrs Humbug)
> *Fanny.* And how is it determined?
> *Daphne.* I'll tell you (*whispers* Fanny)
> *Mrs Hum.* And is he to?…
> *Daphne.* I'll tell you all I know of the matter (*whispers* Mrs Humbug & Fanny)
> *Fanny.* Well! now I know everything about it, I'll go away.

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20 Reuben Brower, "From the *Iliad* to Jane Austen, via *The Rape of the Lock*," *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, 55.

21 Catherine Bristow, "Unlocking the Rape: An Analysis of Austen's Use of Pope's Symbolism in *Sense and Sensibility*," *Persuasions* 20 (1998), 31–37.

Mrs Hum and Daphne. And so will I.
[Exeunt][22]

Mystery here is not a secret to be divulged, a conundrum to be solved, but a structure of anticipation, a promise of meaning deliberately left unsatisfied, "unfinished," like the play itself.

Sense and Sensibility's evocations of Pope function in much the same way, not so much providing a fresh and clarifying perspective on the novel's events, a key to its locks, as inciting a particular feeling that derives from what we might term "the suspense of meaning." In this instance, then, Austen is using allusion altogether differently from Pope and Dryden. These elusive, perhaps illusive, allusions to Pope perform affective and psychological rather than epistemological work. Rather than supplying answers or providing an interpretive foothold, as in the case of an allusion to Dryden that shades the novel's seemingly stark contrasts and blurs its ostensibly dichotomous certainties, Austen's allusions to *The Rape of the Lock* generate the peculiar mood that settles upon us not when puzzles are solved but when the possibility of a solution is intimated, and not when fact and reason have been reached but when we have begun to read a pattern in what once seemed merely uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts. In short, these allusions encourage the reader to feel intimations of decipherability. Such intimations are remarkably akin to those moments in Ann Radcliffe's novels during which a character sees an inscription in a language he cannot understand, or holds a letter that she might read if only there were enough light—moments when inscrutability becomes legible, when stray marks are recognized as a system, a language, if one unknown to us nonetheless—and they produce a sensation by comparison with which the pleasures of interpretive certainty are perhaps but the "dull sweets" of a second attachment.

In *Sense and Sensibility,* Austen is acknowledging her debt to a respected Augustan tradition not merely by invoking Dryden and Pope but by doing so through an allusive practice that pays homage to one of their signal poetic achievements. Yet she is also exploring what might now be described as a peculiarly Romantic variety of allusion, one that unsettles rather than ossifies the literary historical categories—Augustan, Romantic—upon which such a description

22 Austen, *The Mystery: An Unfinished Comedy, Minor Works,* in *The Novels,* 6:56.

depends by establishing an atmosphere of interpretive possibility, not a definitive interpretation. Austen's more conventional allusion to Dryden slyly confounds the easy antitheses between Elinor and Marianne with which the novel begins, but her indirect evocations of Pope are experiments in an allusive mode that differs markedly from that of her Augustan forbears. Austen's first published novel, then, does not provide unequivocal answers to questions about Austen's literary influences (poetry or fiction, Augustan or sentimental?) or ideological commitments (conservative or progressive, sense or sensibility?) but deliberately incites them. *Sense and Sensibility* proffers not a single, clinching piece of evidence but myriad opportunities to bring our own interpretive perspectives—our own settings and shades—to bear, thereby reminding us that we cannot plainly see novels' or authors' intentions, only read them through and against both their histories and ours, and perhaps also showing that we sometimes prefer our interpretive curiosity to be stirred rather than slaked.

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