Reviews

Jane Austen, in collaboration with Anna Austen and others. *Sir Charles Grandison*. Edited by Lesley Peterson and Sylvia Hunt, assisted by Catherine Jones, Laurel Charron, Stephanie Leblanc, Laurie Morin, Ann Vanderaa, and Katarina Valentic. Illustrated by Juliet McMaster. Juvenilia Press, 2022.

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JANE AUSTEN'S "Sir Charles Grandison" is, on one level, a youthful prank. How do you transform Samuel Richardson's seven-volume epistolary novel into a five-act play written in a mere 52 manuscript pages? The very attempt speaks to the young author's recognition that the exciting portion of Richardson's plot—the abduction of Harriet Byron by Sir Hargrave Pollexfen in volume one—would make a delightful vehicle for performance in the Austen family's private, home theatricals. At the same time, the play anticipates the mature author's craft as an artist who would hone and edit the fiction for which she is known. Family tradition of Jane Austen's fondness for *Sir Charles Grandison*, underscored by James Austen-Leigh's memoir of his Aunt Jane, fails to recognise that she might have loved Richardson's least popular work while recognising its limitations as a novel: epistolary narratives can make for wordy and inefficient storytelling; Richardson's perfect, upright hero—a contrast to the rakes of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*—is hardly a model for Jane Austen's faulty and vulnerable male characters; and Richardson's Harriet falls short of Austen's bold women. "No Austen heroine," Lesley Peterson writes, "ever faints at the prospect of marriage to her beloved" (xxxvi).

"Sir Charles Grandison" is also a literary mystery. It was not available to the public before Brian Southam's 1980 Oxford edition, which includes a manuscript transcription showing changes and corrections as well as the reading text. Southam dared to reject the family tradition that "Sir Charles Grandison" was the creation not of Jane Austen but of her niece, Anna. Scholars followed, divided between those who

dismissed any claims that Jane Austen had a hand in the text and those who argued that Anna's contributions were minor, even if her memory was that she authored the play as a child.

Lesley Peterson and Sylvia Hunt's new edition of Jane Austen's "Sir Charles Grandison" provides an outstanding overview of the arguments about the text, taking a multi-pronged approach to questions about its authorship, the dating of various parts of the manuscript, its value as a work of juvenilia, and the extent to which "Sir Charles Grandison" reflects Austen's interest in drama as a genre. Peterson and Hunt do not make a definitive claim about authorship—this mystery is not entirely solvable—but they make a very strong case for what Peterson calls Anna's role as a "junior collaborator" (xxxix) rather than an "author." They work from the manuscript, not a transcription, a scholarly task not performed by some of the "Anna as author" camp, and they carefully review handwriting, watermarks on the paper, ink and pencil markings, as well as the criticism that addresses such material study. Peterson reflects, for example, on the scholarship that claims Jane Austen was merely Anna's amanuensis. The editors identify three hands in the manuscript—Austen's predominates—and pair that analysis with biographical details. Peterson observes that Anna would not have been available as a co-writer after the Austens left Stevenson for Bath upon Reverend Austen's retirement, and she reasonably asserts that those who feel the full play was written by 1800 must imagine a very precocious seven-year-old author if Anna is responsible for the play's invention and composition.

The Peterson-Hunt edition of Jane Austen's "Sir Charles Grandison" offers a number of improvements on Brian Southam's edition, and it will be of value even for those whose bookshelves already house Southam's volume. Like Southam, the editors provide both a reader's text and a transcript of the manuscript. Peterson and Hunt conveniently set their notes on the physical properties of the manuscript as footnotes, but add interpretive notes after the play. Their explanatory notes are more reader-friendly than Southam's. Both observe, for example, that the words "in 6 acts" on the title page were added in pencil in a different, childish handwriting (the play has only 5 acts). But Peterson and Hunt address a modern reader's inevitable curiosity, suggesting that the "sixth" act could be a joking reference to the anticlimactic volume Richardson adds to his novel *after* the volume in which the long-delayed marriage of Harriet Byron and Sir Charles Grandison takes place. Or, they speculate, a niece or nephew of Jane Austen might have planned a continuation on the blank sheets attached to the final manuscript pages (54). In her notes on "Invention" in Appendix A, Sylvia Hunt points out the significance of the play's elevation of the character Charlotte Grandison over the heroine, Harriet Byron (whom Charlotte makes a point of sending off stage to drink broth or to "gape" in private). Charlotte has more "Austenesque" qualities: she is a quick wit, enjoys lively repartee, and makes suggestive remarks in both Richardson's novel and Austen's play. Just as Elizabeth Bennet shocks Miss Darcy by teasing her brother, Charlotte refuses to idealise her intended husband, Lord G, before her "perfect" brother, Sir Charles.

But the greatest contribution this edition of "Sir Charles Grandison" makes is its serious approach to the play's dramatic qualities. Scholars broadly recognise Jane Austen's theatricality in her fiction, beyond her descriptions of performance (*Lovers' Vows* in *Mansfield Park*) and reading (even Fanny Price warms to Henry Crawford upon hearing him read Shakespeare; and a volume of *Hamlet* pricks Marianne Dashwood's longing for the absent Willoughby). Jane Austen's mature narrative style is most frequently associated with free indirect discourse, but her novels also display her genius for dialogue. The rhetorical duel between Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourgh could be extracted from *Pride and Prejudice* and performed as a short play.

Peterson's scholarship in drama as well as Austen pushes our reading of "Sir Charles Grandison" to recognise Austen's creativity as a writer who transforms source material, in the manner of Shakespeare's invention in his history plays. Like Shakespeare, Austen takes dramatic liberty with the "truth" of her source text, invoking Richardson's details with a few compressed and efficient lines. "Sir Charles Grandison" includes (and dispenses with) Richardson's three volumes about "The Italians" and Lady Clementina della Porretta, for example, in two lines at the start of act 5. But Peterson further guides the reader in considering Austen's theatricality in this early work in terms of availability of props, actors, and space for a stage in family theatricals. Examining handwriting and maturity of style, most scholars conclude that act 1 of "Grandison" was composed considerably earlier than the other four acts. Peterson adds to this analysis by demonstrating, in the manner of a dramaturg, why a curtain (explicitly mentioned in the play's stage directions in later acts) would not have been used in act 1. Further, in reading the manuscript's two cancelled openings of act 2, Peterson notes that the final version is not only more dramatic than Harriet narrating her traumatic abduction (as Richardson and the first cancelled opening have it) but also more adapted to technical problems like performance space. The second cancelation would have been more dramatic than the third and final version, with Sir Hargrave dragging Harriet into the farmhouse and wrapping her in a cloak, suggesting that the author needed to consider performance perhaps even more than spectacle. In Appendix B, Peterson provides detailed notes for staging Austen's play, including the frequency of characters' appearance on stage, and opportunities—like those employed by the Austen family child actors—for double-casting and quick costume changes.

I am impressed, as well, by the way the Peterson-Hunt "Sir Charles Grandison" contributes to academic studies beyond Austen. This edition is a model for students of literature to think about the process of scholarship. By approaching a small work of juvenilia with a full set of literary tools, Peterson and Hunt demonstrate how critics develop knowledge about a text through dialogue with other scholars, careful examination of a manuscript, deep reading of biographical and historical contexts, detailed annotations, and thoughtful analysis of genre. It is a volume that is simultaneously accessible and academic.

But it's also a volume for Austen fans. Those familiar with the Juvenilia Press's other editions of Jane Austen's early works will be delighted to find the "Readers' Edition" of "Sir Charles Grandison" (pp. 1–24) beautifully illustrated by Juliet McMaster. A few facsimile illustrations show some of Austen's changes and corrections on the manuscript, and places where the manuscript sections have been pinned and unpinned. And the transcript, which Peterson and Hunt call the "Diplomatic Edition," will draw readers of Jane Austen into her family gatherings, where Richardson's well-known novel inspired the voice of a young comic writer and the young actors who brought her words to life.

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Timothy Gao. *Virtual Play and the Victorian Novel: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Fictional Experience*. Cambridge UP, 2021.

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WITH THE phrase *virtual play,* Timothy Gao does not aim to describe the wide world of gaming and ludic practices that are so influential a part of twenty-first-century cultural production; nor does he have scholarly ambitions to tell the whole story of Victorian games and play, as cards and dice were supplanted by an increasing category of board games, and new mechanical gadgets and phantasmagoric optical illusion devices of the magic lantern and zoetrope variety. Although that proliferation is perhaps an implicit backdrop to his analysis, the crux of *Virtual Play and the Victorian Novel* is a particular kind of world invention that Gao sees as a crucial—perhaps even indispensable—backdrop to the elevation of canonical Victorian fiction traditionally classed as realist.

In this elegant and thought-provoking first book, students of juvenilia will likely be especially interested in the connections that Gao draws between the canonised De Quincey and Brontë publications and their earlier creative works; likewise the category of "paracosmic creation" as a way of historically differentiating the

childhood imaginative episteme of the Romantic and Victorian eras from preceding eras. Gao proposes, for example, that "at the heart of the jarring or comical unrealism of the Brontë juvenilia is not its adoption of the 'purely imaginative' over 'real occurrence' … [and] not the violent, hyperbolic and fantastical conceptions of play—but its conception of reading and writing as a form of action between two separate realities" (49). Gao makes an effort to locate the juvenile play as foundational DNA for a consciously metaleptic impulse he sees running through the adult works of child world-creators.

By Gao's account, "what developmental psychologists now neologise as *paracosmic play* or *worldplay,* a practice of extended make-believe premised on the creation and documentation of imaginary lands or worlds … appear[s] ... to have begun with a loose generation of late Romantics and early Victorians: with Hartley Coleridge, Anna Jameson, Thomas Malkin, Anthony Trollope, the De Quincey brothers and the Brontë siblings" (16). Linking that rise to British colonialism and also to an intriguing version of Turner's frontier hypothesis (as the world's explorable limits are exhausted, the pressure to fabricate nonmundane worlds increases), Gao's body chapters focus on Charlotte Brontë, Trollope, Thackeray, and Dickens, as well as Thomas De Quincey. A fascinating and provocative claim that deserves more unpacking: I would have welcomed further discussion of how historically widespread the practice was in the era Gao studies. Was it, in his view, confined to a few breakthrough writers as proof of their brilliance, or pervasive, thus indicating a epistemic drift towards world-making?

The study's core concerns are with the critical contours of a canonical realist tradition. Gao has a bone to pick with Catherine Gallagher's influential notion of realist fiction's cultural dominance in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as "believable stories that do not solicit belief." Such a fictional genealogy by way of "counterfactuals" might be supplemented or even replaced, Gao proposes, in favour of the idea of fiction as "extra-factual"—meaning that fiction is invented and lives *beyond* the boundaries of the known world. Although Tolkien's notion of secondary worlds or subcreation gets invoked explicitly only once, it clearly colours much of Gao's thinking.

That linkage, fascinating in its particulars, only makes clearer the gap between the sweep of Gao's title and the deep narrow focus of the book: paracosmic play, in which childhood fantasy leads on to adult fiction that is less realist than it at first appears. I was not always persuaded. Dickens's choice to situate his characters and events within actual prisons or on the actual London streets strikes me as a reason for classing his impulse as not extrafactual but, if you will, *intra*factual—invention ensconced within actuality. It's for that reason I was disappointed Thomas Hardy does not even appear in the book: his Wessex, actual and invented at once like a palimpsested map, might have been another logical site of investigation.

Although Alex Woloch is not explicitly discussed in Gao's book, behind his commitment to the paracosmic roots of realist fiction can be seen the immense

influence of Woloch's distinction, in *The One Versus the Many*, between "character-space" (presuming characters are persons) and "character-structure (presuming characters are pieces within an artist's elaboration and construction of a fiction as work of art). I understand Gao's interest in what he calls the "fictional" (which is explicitly juxtaposed against the literary or the aesthetic) as a preference for the pleasures of a created world as *space* over the novel's formal dependence on aesthetic *structure*. Indeed, at times I suspected that what he meant by "play" was simply the novelist's taking pleasure in inventing a world that characters could live in and reader could visit. I was not sure what Gao's response was to Woloch's productive emphasis on the inevitable structuring tension between seeing the novel as space or as system: perhaps Gao turns to juvenile imagination and world-creation as a way to avoid the mimetic and realist claims lodged by realist fiction entirely.

Given the vigour of recent work by scholars such as Amanda Shubert on the greater realm of play and games of the Victorian era itself (optical illusions, board games, card games, and all the other forms of play that might also be leisure alternatives to reading a novel), there did seem space for Gao to present an understanding of the childhood-invented worlds as leading into (or even it seems bleeding into) contiguous fictional objects that vied with other imaginative spaces as occupations for readers of their own day. Thus for Trollope, hunting and the various archaic games of the Barchester books would make illuminating comparisons; for Thackeray, gambling and cards are often explicitly thematised as akin to love, to war, and to life itself. Notwithstanding such might-have-beens, Gao's work is a welcome contribution to the field of Victorian fiction, building helpful linkages to formative juvenile acts of imagination.

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