

4-2018

Re-Painting the Lion: Female Transgression and Authorial Reincarnation in the Works of Marie de France and Jane Austen

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Marie de France and Jane Austen**



Honors Thesis

Katherine Rachel McCaffery

Department: English

Advisor: Miriamne Ara Krummel, Ph.D.

April 2018

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Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that Marie de France and Jane Austen transgress social and gender norms in their writings and participate in a process of female authorial reincarnation; through using their voices, these female authors challenge the dominant patriarchal temporal narrative. In Chapter One I explore the *Lais* of Marie de France, focusing on her anonymity as an author and the implications of her stories as a rejection of the role of women in traditional chivalric romance. Chapter Two deals with Jane Austen's life, specifically how little we really know about it, and the often overlooked, transgressive aspects of her writings. I conclude with Chapter Three, in which I further define my argument for female authorial reincarnation as it relates to both queer theory and temporality.



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Acknowledgements

There does not seem to be anyone better suited to the considerable undertaking that was being my Honors Thesis mentor than Dr. Miriamne A. Krummel. Her class first introduced me to Marie de France and temporality studies. In addition to her valuable insights on my research and writing, she also passed on her incredible passion and personal guidance. I have enjoyed (and will surely miss) our Wednesday meetings and our conversations in the English department hallway. I have grown so much under her guidance and I admire her exceedingly.

Dr. David Fine deserves recognition for his wise counsel, and for challenging me to never stop improving. Particular thanks are due to his assistance with my interpretation and analysis of the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adrienne Rich in Chapter Three. In addition, I thank him for always being available to chat when I pop by his office unannounced, and for helping me view literature, and the world, in new ways.

I would also like to thank Dr. Laura Vorachek for sharing and fostering my love for Jane Austen; many of the ideas in Chapter Two are thanks to information I gained in her class. I have immensely enjoyed working with her over the past four years as both my advisor and mentor.

Thanks also to Dr. Diane Purkiss, a fellow of Keble College at the University of Oxford, who helped shape and mold my beginning research for this project, and offered support in other areas of my life through writing a recommendation letter for me.

I thank the University of Dayton Honors Program for both supporting my thesis work and funding my research trip to the University of Oxford. I had a wonderful experience there, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity; my thesis project was forever changed because of it.

No one knows better the struggles I endured during this process than Kylie A. Thompson, my roommate (and fellow ‘crazy feminist’) who through her own thesis writing experienced those struggles right alongside me. From being random roommates freshman year to becoming practically sisters, we have been through a lot in four years. I have learned so much from her, and I admire her for her unparalleled dedication and unwavering passion.

Thanks to my parents, for their unending support and love. And to my brother, Kyle, for his continual assistance and guidance, and for making me laugh—I would not be the person I am today without him. I truly love them to “a galaxy far, far away” and back.

To my roommates and friends, who put up with my stressful moods, my strange ramblings, and particularly the piles of books and papers I left in my wake throughout the house, thank you.

Thanks to The Blend, Heritage Coffee House, George Street Café, Greens Café, Roesch Library, and Tastefully Roasted for nourishing me with caffeine and delicious treats during the past year and a half. I wrote a majority of this work under their roofs, so they also deserve my gratitude.

Honorable mentions include: popcorn, Twining’s tea, pizza, coffee of any kind, my trusty electric kettle, Colin Firth in a damp white shirt, and Charles Shaw Cabernet Sauvignon.

The two women nod and smile at each other.

Though they *are* in this moment, they *are* in many other moments very far apart.

To speak to each other would be whispering into a canyon at once cavernous and cramped.

To touch each other would be rebelling against Time itself; and yet, the women still reach out their hands to one another, compelling the space around them to readjust.

Their reach forces molecules to shuffle, forcing other molecules to shuffle, and so a new picture of the universe begins to take shape.

This is not the first time this has happened . . . nor will it be the last.

In the contact between these two women something *irreparably* changes.

Preface

The Mythology of Judith Shakespeare

*“When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, or a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highway crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to.” –Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, p. 48*

Because legends and mythology are largely how humans make sense of the world, I will preface my discussion of female authorial reincarnation with the mythology of Judith Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf imagines William Shakespeare’s sister into existence.

Judith Shakespeare was there in the beginning; she has always been there. However, women lost their voice to the muting powers of the world and were relegated to the role of homemaker and mother. Judith Shakespeare had the same genius as her brother Will; it is no surprise, however, that she was incapable of expressing it. She was refused education, opportunity, and employment, but she wanted desperately to write and express herself on stage. An actor manager took advantage of her body, and thus her prospects ended with her pregnancy. So, Judith “killed herself one winter’s night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle” (Woolf 48). Judith Shakespeare was consigned to oblivion.

What else could she have done? As Woolf exclaims, “Who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet’s heart when caught and trapped in a woman’s body?” (48). A mind unable to express itself becomes warped and tired. Exhausted from the strain of

being suppressed, Judith Shakespeare's mind eventually gave up. It is no exaggeration to say that many women experienced the same fate.

The mythology of Judith Shakespeare is representative of the narrative of female writing. The past struggles of Marie de France and Jane Austen, and other female writers, bring us to today—it is a continuous female drama of fighting for our voices to be heard. The reality of our world is so entrenched in patriarchal notions of female powerlessness that a separation from that history seems impossible. I would actually argue against any conception of the world that ignores or represses the many histories of gender and racial oppression. What makes up a woman today has so much to do with what the women before us have championed. I can vote because a group of women banded together and fought for suffrage; I can have employment and education because women before me have fought for that right. The struggle today is to ensure *all* women have the same rights and opportunities to flourish.

Both a history of oppression and a future of new possibilities converge in every woman living, meaning that each woman has in her a queer temporal dimension. Through women we can clearly see the fluidity of time, how it weaves in and out of our day-to-day lives—like the wind, it does not blow in one direction. As a woman, when I write my temporality joins with the temporalities of female writers past and present, both famous and unknown, who wanted to use their voice. Judith Shakespeare reincarnates herself in me, and through me she makes her voice known. And through her, I can understand the struggles and triumphs of female writers of the past to better combat the obstacles women still face today.

Introduction

“The woman arriving over and over again does not stand still; she’s everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that-gives . . . She comes in, comes-in-between herself and me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit; she thrills in our becoming.” –Hélène Cixous, “Laugh of the Medusa”

In the Wife of Bath’s Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, the Wife asks, “who painted the lion, tell me who?” in reference to an Aesopian fable about a man and a lion. In the story, the man claims that humans are stronger than lions because they are looking at a painting of a human killing a lion; however, the lion asks the man, ‘who painted the lion?’ to demonstrate the complications of perspective. It was a human, of course, who painted the lion. The lion then brings the man to an execution where another lion very easily kills the man on trial. The Wife of Bath’s reference to this fable signifies an acknowledgment that women have always been defined by, and painted by, men. As Jane Austen would state a few hundred years later, “the pen has been in their hands” (*Persuasion*). Because men had the advantage of education for so long, they were able to present women however they saw fit. Marie de France and Jane Austen, as well as other female authors, engage in this patriarchal discourse through “re-painting the lion.” They take the brush into their own hands and paint a new picture of life. Through the words of these women writers, readers can see a different world with their own eyes—and view things from a perspective outside patriarchal and heteronormative social structures.

In this thesis, I will argue that Marie de France and Jane Austen transgress social and gender norms in their writings and participate in a process of female authorial reincarnation; through using their voice, these female authors challenge the dominant

patriarchal temporal narrative. In Chapter One I explore the *Lais* of Marie de France, focusing on her anonymity as an author and the implications of her stories as a rejection of the role of women in traditional chivalric romance. Chapter Two deals with Jane Austen's life, specifically how little we really know about it, and the often overlooked, transgressive aspects of her writings. I conclude with Chapter Three, in which I further explain and give evidence from the works of Marie de France and Jane Austen to support my argument for female authorial reincarnation as it relates to both queer theory and temporality.

* * *

Linguist Dale Spender theorizes that language has been made by and for the use of men, and therefore women's meanings have been largely left out of the formulated language: "Because women have not been involved in the production of the legitimated language, they have been unable to give weight to their own symbolic meanings" (Spender 52). This leaves women writers in a peculiar predicament, requiring them to manipulate the masculine language to give voice to stories in a female voice. Spender writes, "Women have 'made' just as much 'history' as men but it has not been codified and transmitted; women have probably done just as much writing as men but it has not been preserved" (53). The issue is not that women have not had the ability to become accomplished writers, but their writing has largely been unacknowledged and trivialized.

Jean-Paul Sartre posits in his article "What is Literature," that "the operation of writing implies that of reading as it dialectical correlative and these two connected acts necessitate two distinct agents" (1202). If a writer needs a reader to 'make' literature, then women's literature necessitates their entrance into the public sphere. This,

obviously, is problematic for patriarchal powers that seek to limit women's roles to the private sphere of house and childcare. The issue of female authorship is inexorably linked to the struggle for gender equality; throughout much of recorded history, a woman writing marked a stark transgression from the norm. Sappho, Marie de France, Christine de Pizan, Aemilia Lanyer, Aphra Behn, Francis Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf are only a few names of these female transgressors. In writing, they break into the public sphere in a way they could not otherwise have done—for much of this time, women could not even vote or participate in academia. The nature of literature, its ability to spread thoughts without the need for physical presence, is what allowed these women to publish. Because their physical bodies were controlled by social norms, they used literature to overcome their cultural imprisonment.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar document the “Metaphor of Literary Paternity.” They argue that the pen is “a metaphorical penis,” representing not only authorship but also the power of creation (3). In this metaphor, “the poet, like God the Father, is a paternalistic ruler of the fictive world he has created” (Gilbert 5). This idea of authorship inexorably links men to the act of literary creation by virtue of being of the male sex. Therefore, since as Gilbert and Gubar state, “the pen has been defined as not just accidentally but essentially a male ‘tool’,” it is “not only inappropriate but actually alien to women” (8). Following their theory of literary paternity, woman's very act of writing is transgressive because in using a pen they must trespass onto a male-dominated space. With all these obstacles, how, then, are women supposed to write?

Hélène Cixous answers, “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (279). She also states that “It is by writing . . . that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence” (285). Spender concurs that language was made by and for male use; therefore, to escape this dilemma Cixous proposes that women must write themselves—they must put their selves into the texts they produce and thus triumph over the agents that would silence them; through writing as such, female authors challenge their silencing by the overwhelmingly male literary perspective. However, scholarship that surrounds women’s literature often strives to create a narrative of conformity to social and gender norms, especially in the case of Marie de France and Jane Austen.

The writings of these women have obviously lived on, but with the survival of their works we have lost some of their selves. The realities of these women’s lives have been invented, overlooked, and rewritten to conform more to traditional aspects of society. In this thesis, I aim to bring attention to the uncertainty and mystery that surrounds Marie de France and Jane Austen, to examine how they use their writings as revelations of their selves, and to challenge the ways that the dominant narrative has presented these women. In addition, the queer nature of the themes in their works reveals their double transgression in queering writing that was already by nature transgressive because of their sex. The culmination of this research has brought me to the conclusion that Marie de France and Jane Austen occupy a queer temporality because they touch

each other in significant ways across the temporal divide that seems to separate them. They achieve a queer kind of immortality through their works, which points to their ability to deconstruct social and temporal structures.

The idea of ‘female authorial reincarnation’ that I posit in this thesis deals with the tradition of female writing. Cixous states,

Because she arrives, vibrant, over and again, we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another. As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places . . . In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. (286)

I argue that as women writers, Marie de France and Jane Austen participate in a lineage of female authorship that presents a queering of temporality. Beginning with the first woman to put quill to vellum and continuing on to the present day, women who write queer their temporality because in their writing all the activity of female authors throughout time converges; “personal history blends together with the history of all women” (286). As Gilbert and Gubar argue, women writers must seek a “female precursor who . . . proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible” (49). Coming from a history of struggle, each woman who writes evokes both her own experiences and the experiences of all women. Thus, Marie de France and Jane Austen touch each other, and all the other women writers who proceeded and would follow them, across the temporal divide.

Chapter One

Marie de France: “The Voice that Broke the Silence of the Forest”

Part I

R. Howard Bloch begins the introduction to *The Anonymous Marie de France* with a quote from Virginia Woolf: “The voice that broke the silence of the forest was the voice of Anon” (Bloch 1). Anonymity, as Woolf declares, has been a marker of women’s literary history: “Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” (49). However, Marie de France, an 11th century Anglo-French woman writer, declares “Marie ai nun, si sui de France,” to definitively claim ownership of her works (Hanning). Woolf recognizes that female writers have continually been forced to the margins of literature—“Anonymity runs in their blood”—so Marie’s declaration establishes her as a transgressor (50).

The biography of Marie de France is barely even that—we only know of her name because she wrote it down in her works. Everything else about her life, and many scholars have attempted to construct a life narrative for her, is supposition. Bloch notes, “[her] name, rather than providing clarity, produces instead a desire for more information” (3). If it were true that she indeed existed and was a woman, she would be the first female poet of the Anglo-French tradition. But why are we so obsessed with creating a biography for Marie? I believe it is because her anonymity disturbs us. Too often, readers look to authors’ biographies to define their work. While historical context is important, as I explore later we cannot wholly rely on the accuracy of historical narratives. Some academics have proposed that Marie was the abbess of a convent or even the half-sister of Henry II.¹ I, however, reject any attempt to define or constrain

Marie de France, or to “reduc[e] her works to such an elusive category as the person” (Bloch 18). Instead, I propose that if one really wants to know Marie, they must seek her out through her writings.

Scholars can definitively credit Marie de France with three different texts: *Fables*, based on the work of Aesop; *Lais*, a collection of stories purportedly of Celtic origin; and *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, about the life of St. Patrick. The *Lais* are her most popular work, incorporating Arthurian legends and tales of courtly romance. In the twelve *lais*, she explores the intricacies of love, gender, and identity in ways that upset medieval normative culture.

Marie takes firm ownership of her writings: “[she] names herself at the beginning of the first *lai*, at the end of *Purgatory*, and at the end of the *Fables*” (Hanning 6). Marie’s authorial possession points to her desire to be immortalized with her works: she says in the Epilogue to the *Fables*, “It’s possible the work I’ve done / some clerics might claim for their own— / I wish no one to make that claim! / A fool lets others steal his fame” (“Epilogue” 5-8). Marie’s authorial voice is courageous and assertive. In her language, she presents an awareness of the struggles of female writing, and in particular, the danger of false attribution. If she had not named herself, it is doubtful a record of her name in connection with her writings would exist. She would have remained truly anonymous.

Part II

In her stories, Marie presents representations of love that are far from idyllic, and challenges both religious and social norms. This kind of storytelling takes courage because it subverts the idealized version of the world readers often want to see in

literature. In one lai, “Laüstic,” the speaker expresses no condemnation of the lovers’ extramarital affair, and the hero of the story helps the lady escape from her abusive husband. Marie is not interested in casting judgements or creating borders. Rather, she is occupied by telling stories that transcend normative culture. In particular, her works mark a diversion from the guidelines for love posited in *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus. Though scholars debate the sincerity of Andreas’ treatise, it “had tremendous influence on the depiction of love in the literature of the day” (Webb). Marie denaturalizes these kinds of chivalric romances by inverting the ideas of chivalry, gender, and identity. She places these transgressive themes in settings that closely resemble the fictional and romanticized world of traditional courtly love literature, highlighting the contrast between the two, and yet also demonstrating their compatibility.

The female characters in Marie de France’s works are multifaceted. Unlike other works of the time, “women in Marie de France’s writing are the characters who *see*, the ones from whose perspective we view the world of the *Lais* and the problematic actions of men” (Schneider 27). They are not simply reflections of idealized female traits; they are real women with desires and faults. Marie challenges the androcentric romance present in chivalric literature of the time through lais such as “Lanval” and “Deus Amanz.” In these stories, women play a prominent role and contribute to Marie’s questioning of the traditional roles for women in courtly romances.

In both “Lanval” and “Deus Amanz,” the female characters save the men, and this reversal is significant because it flips the male-centred idea of chivalry on its head. Marie presents inverted gender roles in these lais to challenge the use of female characters as mirrors. As Virginia Woolf would describe many years later: “Women have served all

these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (Woolf 35). In literature and life, women have served as the complement to men. The act of professing love for a lady in chivalric romances is meant to prove the dedication and love of the man—the woman is merely a plot device, a way for the man to demonstrate his chivalry. In Marie’s work, however, the role of female characters is unique in that they do not function to ‘reflect’ the male characters’ bravery; they themselves have significant autonomy within the stories and “define and resolve the conflict in each lay” (Guthrie, ii).

In “Lanval,” the knight Lanval embodies the more traditionally feminine role. The fairy woman with whom he falls in love is the one to initially seek him out and the one to offer her love to him, taking the male role in courtly romance. The lady’s first words to him are, “Lanval . . . for you I have come out of my own land . . . for I love you more than anything” (“Lanval” 110-116). Lanval is a passive agent in this tale, only required to keep their love a secret in order to maintain their connection, which he fails to do. The fairy lady establishes the rules in their courtship and demands fealty, mirroring the relationship between a king and his vassal. As another departure from traditional depictions of courtly love, men more than women are presented as inconstant; when accused of homosexuality by the queen (“People have often told me / that you have no desire for women. / You have shapely young men / and take your pleasure with them”), Lanval exclaims, “I love and am the beloved of / one who should be valued more highly / than all the women I know,” thus betraying his lover’s request of secrecy (“Lanval” 279-282, 293-295). In the end, it is the fairy lady who saves Lanval from the queen’s false allegations against him. When she rides away, Lanval must leap on to the back of *her*

horse in order to accompany her to Avalon: “When the maiden went out the gate, / with one leap Lanval / jumped on the palfrey, behind her. / With her he goes to Avalon” (“Lanval” 639-641). In “Lanval,” the female character is the model of chivalry, and an active agent in the story, demonstrating how Marie challenges traditional gender roles of chivalric romances in her writing.

Through “Deus Amanz,” Marie deconstructs elements of traditional gender roles in courtly romances and posits a more gynocentric representation of love. In “Deus Amanz,” a young woman suffers and starves herself in order for her suitor to more easily carry her up a mountain, a requirement set by her father for any male suitors. In this lai, the young man seems to be merely a figure in the story; the plot is propelled further only by the young woman’s actions. She resolves on a solution to their problem, and directs him to a medicine woman to obtain a magic potion that will renew his strength during the climb. However, the young man is too proud to drink the potion when he needs it, despite the pleas of the young woman, and so when he finally reaches the top he collapses and dies. His stubbornness also leads to the young woman’s death, “sorrow for him touches her heart. / There the damsel died, / who was so worthy and wise and beautiful” (“Deus” 226-228). As in “Lanval,” the young woman does not merely reflect and magnify the noble qualities of her suitor—she herself possesses distinct values and catalyses the action in the lai. Additionally, the young woman also physically challenges herself for her lover: “The damsel prepared herself: / she deprived herself greatly and fasted strictly / at her meals to grow lighter, / for she wanted to go with her beloved” (“Deus” 164-166). While courtly romances traditionally present men as the victims of love, in this story the young woman is the ultimate victim of her lover’s pride.

In “Bisclavret” and “Yö nec,” Marie de France uses ambiguous human-animal transformations and relationships to transgress and deconstruct normative identity markers. As Roberta L. Krueger asserts, Marie’s varied interpretations of love in her *Lais* demonstrate how “she observed human nature and social institutions from the perspective of a woman who was both ‘on the margins’ and inside medieval domestic culture” (58). The examples of ‘transgressive’ and ‘queer’ love in her stories “convey empathy for those who find themselves as outsiders” (Krueger 59). I argue that, as a transgressor herself, Marie acknowledges the outsider through her varying representations of love, and creates space for the denaturalization of strict identity markers. In general, as Salisbury surmises “humans are uncomfortable with ambiguity. The way we use language (which of course reflects the way we think) shows that we define things as much in terms of what they are not as what they are” (Salisbury 137).

The lai of “Bisclavret” presents an interesting look at ambiguity and queer relationships in Marie’s works. The protagonist of the story, Bisclavret, transforms into a werewolf three days a week, and during that time he lives in the woods. His wife and her lover hatch a plot to betray him, stealing his clothes so he is forced to remain in werewolf form permanently. Though he is stuck in wolf form, the baron retains his human traits, which is clear in his encounter with the king’s hunting party in the woods. The hounds are ready to tear Bisclavret to pieces, but he kisses the boot of the king in order to beg for mercy. The king is astounded: “Look at this wonder, / how this beast humbles itself! / It has human understanding, it begs mercy” (“Bisclavret” 152-154). Bisclavret by no means demonstrates the ferocity or animalism usually associated with werewolves, making this story transgressive in its representation of human and animal relationships, as well as its

breakdown of clear identity markers. In medieval society, Giacopasi notes, “the werewolf would have been universally acknowledged as ‘queer’ . . . that is, as an unusual, unfamiliar, ambiguous creature that does not conform to the laws of beast *or* man” (1). Normally, characters that transform into animals become ferocious and lose their reason, but Bisclavret remains very much himself. Furthermore, the king allows Bisclavret to sleep by his side and accompany him everywhere, demonstrating an uncommon emotional connection. Animals, as Roger Ames recounts, were believed to be unintelligent and thus a shared emotional connection with them was impossible (Ames). In this lai, Marie blurs the lines between Bisclavret’s human and animal identities, which transforms his relationship with the king.

In the resolution of the lai, Bisclavret gets revenge on his wife and her lover, and is rewarded by the king for his loyalty. The relationship between the baron and the king lends an opportunity to look at “Bisclavret” through a queer lens. The possibly homoerotic undertones of their relationship is apparent in these verses, when the king discovers Bisclavret transformed back into human form:

The king ran to embrace him;
 more than a hundred times he hugs and kisses him.
 As soon as he could get an opportunity,
 he returned all his lands to him;
 he gave him more than I can say (“Bisclavret” 299-304)

The love of a king for his faithful servant and a lover for his beloved is muddled here. The speaker states that “more he [the king] bestowed than I can tell,” which could insinuate a sexual relationship that accompanies the king’s reward for the baron’s loyalty,

which would be inappropriate for the speaker to recount. In this view, the baron undergoes another transformation: that from heterosexual to homosexual love. “Same sex desire,” writes Caitlin Giacomasi, “has been cited more than once as the driving force behind “Bisclavret,” in which a king takes the place of his knight’s wife. The knight does not reject the replacement” (16). Even if the relationship between Bisclavret and the king is not homosexual, there are still transgressive homosocial implications to this vassal-king relationship.

“Yö nec,” another story of animal transformation, recounts the tale of a knight, Muldumarec, who turns into a hawk in order to rescue the lady he loves. His transformations, unlike Bisclavret’s, are intentional and controlled; he may become a hawk whenever he likes, which deconstructs the wildness that is usually associated with animals, and the unpredictability of human-animal transformations in particular. The knight is able to navigate between his identities in order to avoid detection by the lady’s husband, furthering Marie’s deconstruction of identity markers in giving agency to the knight. Because he has power over his transformations, and utilizes that power, it implies that he accepts his ambiguity. As in “Bisclavret,” the line between Muldumarec’s hawk-self and human-self is blurred in the story. When the lovers first meet, he claims “in the goshawk you have a noble bird,” but he is also referring to his own nobility in this statement (“Yö nec” 122). David Salter states in *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature*, “one of the crucial ways in which human beings define their own humanity is in opposition to the animal kingdom” (6). In Yö nec, however, Marie combines and disassembles these relationships. Through this lai she challenges the

perceived solidity of humanity nature, queering the distinction between the ‘human’ world and the ‘natural’ world.

Importantly, the lady makes no objections to granting her love to this hawk-man, only requiring that he is a Christian: “She replied to the knight / and said that she would make him her lover, / if he believed in God and things were such / that their love could exist” (“Yö nec” 137-140). Muldumarec’s ambiguous human-hawk identity is no obstacle; the lady’s relationship with the knight is transgressive in that it paints a more transcendent picture of love between two people, which demonstrates that, for Marie, identity markers have little to do with love. The Christian ideology that prevailed in the Middle Ages stressed the dominion of humans over the natural world (Pluskowski). Marie challenges this perspective in “Yö nec” through presenting a union between the animal and human world; the lady’s relationship with Muldumarec is a physical and symbolic representation of this juncture.

Part III

Marie de France’s writing explores the intricacies of love, gender, and identity in ways that upset normative culture. The transgressive themes of her *Lais* in particular represent a challenge to traditional notions of gender and identity in courtly romance. Her works lead one to question the importance of strict identity markers and present possibilities for transcending those limiting categorizations. While not overtly, her writing disturbs hegemonic social codes. Pushing against anonymity by claiming ownership of her works, Marie declares, “Oez, seignurs, ke dit Marie, / Ki en sun tens pas ne s’oblie” (“Listen, lords, to what Marie says, / who does not forget her duty in her time”) at the beginning of the first lai (“Guigemar” 3). This act of establishing herself as

an author represents her rebellion against the marginalization of female writers. She further reveals herself as a transgressor through how her literature denaturalizes and challenges established cultural norms. Feminist writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous writes, “Woman must write herself,” and that is precisely what Marie does. In the ambiguous and queer identities represented in her *Lais*, Marie reveals that her self is tied to the breakdown of these boundaries and norms; she, like her characters, exists outside normative culture. Though we may never discover precisely who the woman behind the *Lais* was, if we look closely at her works, Marie reveals a small part of herself to us.

Chapter Two

Jane Austen: “The Prettiest, Silliest, Most Affected, Husband Hunting Butterfly”

Part I

I carry around my very own pocket Jane Austen. She often whispers suggestions in my ear, such as the idea for this chapter’s title. The quote refers to a description of the young Jane Austen by a family friend, Mrs Mitford. It is delightfully ironic, especially since the most common piece of knowledge about Jane Austen’s life is that she never married. A more appropriate title might have been, “Jane Austen: ‘A poker of whom everybody is afraid’,” which refers to a comment made about Austen as a seemingly quiet member of social gatherings, but with the revelation of her authorship people realized that she was in fact silently undressing, not always figuratively as I will later examine, everyone in her sight (Carson 259). While the thoughts I attribute to my pocket Jane Austen are really my own, I cannot resist the temptation of inventing a relationship between the two of us. If you love Jane Austen, you want to know her opinions on everything. Because there is really so little known about her life save what we have in letters, we fans must create our own version of the author. This is perfectly fine (asking myself WWJD, *what would Jane do*, has solved many problems in my own life after all), but at times our ideas about Jane Austen obscure the real author. In this chapter, I aim to focus on the lesser-known aspects of her life, and look to her letters and writing in order to uncover a brief glimpse of the real author.

Jane Austen's life has been described as uneventful, but Claire Tomalin's biography challenges this assertion. Austen's life was far from uneventful, and her experiences in society factor significantly in the content and characters of her works. Through them she reflects her own dissatisfaction with the limited role of women in her society and presents interesting moral dilemmas that are still relevant to readers today. She also includes risqué humour and challenges the Victorian notion of propriety and gender norms in many of her works, a consequence of her interesting upbringing.

Austen grew up in an unusually literate family, and her father supported her reading whatever she could get her hands on. Their house in the English countryside village of Steventon would have rarely been quiet given that Austen was the sixth of seven children. Additionally, her father ran a boys' school in their house to supplement his income as a rector (Tomalin). Austen had a good relationship with her brothers; in fact, given that she was often surrounded by boys, she seems to have resembled her character in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland, who is "fond of all boys' play" (Tomalin). Tomalin also states that Austen "was a tough and unsentimental child, drawn to rude, anarchic imaginings and black jokes" (30). As a result, Austen developed an interesting sense of humour that aligned more with what young boys would consider funny: her juvenilia reflects this in the use of drunkenness, violence, and food as elements of humour. While she does use risqué sexual humour in some of her works, it is distinct from the bawdy jokes of Shakespeare in that it is more subvert and subversive; instead of being forthwith all the time, Austen relies on subtle innuendos.

Throughout Austen's life, her sister Cassandra was her confidant and closest friend. When Austen died, Cassandra wrote to their niece Fanny on 20 July 1817, "it is as

if I had lost a part of myself” (Le Faye). Except for the occasional separation for travel, these women spent a majority of their lives together. After Austen’s death, Cassandra burned many of the letters they exchanged, leaving us with a fragmented collection of letters that reveal only glimpses of the real author.

Austen’s nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, wrote a biography about her in which he describes her in the first sentence of chapter one as “dear Aunt Jane,” and in the memoir he paints a picture of a young woman who was quiet, who got along wonderfully with her young nieces and nephews, and whose needlework would “have put a sewing machine to shame” (Austen-Leigh). Vincent Quinn writes that “post-Romantic reading practices generate authorial images, and that these images in turn condition interpretation;” thus, the traditional view of Jane Austen as a maiden and a spinster affect our interpretation of her novels (66). I argue that this depiction of Austen is an erasure of her self: to describe the woman who wrote with such a biting pen as “dear Aunt Jane” falsely domesticizes her.

As with Marie de France, biography factors significantly into scholarship on Jane Austen. She lived during a turbulent time period, the peak of revolution and colonization, and yet none of those significant events appear in her novels. For an author of such renown, it is remarkable how little we really know about her. She is rather more obscured by the different, often competing accounts of her life in the numerous biographies, movies, and TV series that have been produced since her death. Everyone wants to uncover the “real” Jane Austen. While these re-imaginings are doubtless very fun, as I suggested we do with Marie, we must look to Austen’s writing to uncover her.

Part II

Jane Austen's biting wit, ironic humour, and social satire are well known in the literary world. But behind the pen, most casual observers have failed to see how transgressive her humour really was. In letters to her sister Cassandra, Austen ridicules family members and friends, employs playful sarcasm, and alludes to sexual humour. In a letter dated 14 January 1796, Austen writes, "I am very much flattered by your commendation of my last Letter, for I write only for Fame, and without any view to pecuniary Emolument" (Le Faye). Though the contents of her previous letter are unknown, we can see the clear sarcasm Austen places on her sister's compliments of her letter. That she writes her letters for "Fame," is an amusing concept, as its only reader would have been Cassandra. In another dated 21 April 1805 Austen writes, "Poor Mrs Stent! it has been her lot to be always in the way," insulting this woman by indicating her presence in society is unwanted; however, in characteristic fashion she continues, "but we must be merciful, for perhaps in time we may come to be Mrs Stents ourselves" (Le Faye). Austen expresses her knowingness in this line about the perceptions of women in her time. As unmarried women, Jane and Cassandra Austen could potentially become women who are "in the way," who have no function in society because they are not wives and mothers, and who become in turn a financial burden on their family.

Jan Fergus' study of Austen's letters yields an amusing observation: in describing a schoolroom to her sister Cassandra, Austen remarks, "It was full of all the modern Elegancies--& if it had not been for some naked Cupids over the Mantelpiece, which must be a fine study for Girls, one should never have Smelt Instruction" (Fergus 18). The aside "which must be a fine study for Girls" is in reference to the statues' exposed male genitalia, and Austen jokes that these would capture the girls' attention much better and

‘teach’ them more than any “Instruction” that went on in the room. Through this line, “Austen shows her ease both with the body and with young girls’ intense curiosity about male bodies” (Fergus 18). Her playful acknowledgment of the body transforms in reference to women’s bodies in childbirth. Fergus notes that Austen treats her female friend’s laying-ins (pregnancies) with a humour that turns to anger as she witnesses the cost to women that childbirth causes. She suggests in a letter to her niece “the simple regimen of separate rooms” (20 February 1817) to a woman who had just given birth to her 18th child at age 45 (Fergus 19). While this comment is playful, in a later letter she laments, “Poor Animal, she will be worn out before she is thirty” (23-25 March 1817) in reference to another woman who finds herself pregnant yet again (Fergus 19). The use of the word “Animal” points to Austen’s acknowledgement that women’s bodies were treated like reproductive machines, and as with work horses, were used up for that one purpose and discarded when no longer useful. These lines from her letters challenge the traditional notion of Austen as ‘dear Aunt Jane,’ which biographies and superficial readings of her works seem to support.

In addition to sarcasm and humour, Austen is very aware of scandal in her writings. In one of her letters she boasts, “I am proud to say that I have a very good eye at an Adulteress” (12 May 1801) in reference to her ability to pick out a woman who has had an affair at a particular social gathering; her own time was known as the “Age of Scandal” because of the numerous affairs in the royal family (Fullerton). *Lady Susan*, Austen’s epistolary novella, deals directly with adultery. Lady Susan Vernon, the anti-heroine, engages in an affair with Mr Mainwaring, whose family she has been visiting. Recently widowed and eager to get her daughter married well, she also engages in a

flirtation with the man she wants her daughter to marry, Sir James Martin. She also procures the affections of Reginald De Courcy, who initially considered her a “very distinguished flirt” and states that she furthermore “aspires to the more delicious gratification of making a whole family miserable” (*Lady Susan* Letter IV). However, after Lady Susan comes to visit the Vernons, Mr De Courcy’s opinion undergoes a dramatic change. Lady Susan is a master at manipulating the feelings and actions of those around her while also maintaining an air of absolute innocence. In her final letter, when her flirtation with Mr De Courcy has ended and Mr Mainwaring has returned to her, she tells her friend, “I never was more at ease, or better satisfied with myself,” showing her complete lack of remorse for the pain and suffering her actions have caused (*Lady Susan* Letter XXXIX). Though Lady Susan’s plans do not succeed as she wishes, she is still able to survive through marrying Sir James Martin. Though she is an unlikable character, out of all Austen’s heroines she demonstrates the most knowingness about the true nature of society. She is hated, but we must also admire her a little for her disregard for the strict rules of Regency England, which made it almost impossible for a woman to survive without a husband. Through her, Austen is making a clear commentary on the status of women in her time.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen plays with the theme of female powerlessness and the threat of rape present in the tropes of Gothic novels, which the heroine Catherine Morland reads. In using these scandalous images in her writing, Austen certainly ridicules the tropes of Gothic fiction, and yet she also makes one aware of the very real danger powerful men pose to young women.² When Catherine leaves for Bath, the narrator recounts, “Cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as

delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house, must, as such a moment, relieve the fulness of her [mother's] heart," yet Catherine's mother is so unaware of the danger that she makes no warning of the kind (Austen *Northanger Abbey* 13). While in Bath, Catherine becomes friends with a young woman named Isabella Thorpe, whose brother, John, is friends with Catherine's brother, James. Isabella and James share an attachment, and she encourages Catherine to spend time with her brother John in the hope of seeing them married. When John Thorpe calls unexpectedly and presses Catherine to ride with him to see Blaize Castle, Catherine submits because she feels slighted by the Tilney's, who were supposed to call on her that day and did not show. When she sees them walking in the street, however, she entreats Mr Thorpe to stop the carriage, but he continues; as a result, Catherine, "angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit" (*Northanger Abbey* 71). In this scene, Austen highlights Mr Thorpe's abuse of his power over Catherine, and alludes to the real powerlessness of women in society: a woman must constantly "give up the point and submit."

Austen's sexually risqué humour transforms our modern conception of her: she is certainly no 'dear Aunt Jane.' In "Slipping into the Ha-Ha: Bawdy Humour and Body Politics in Jane Austen's Novels," Jill Heydt-Stevenson points out the numerous instances of risqué sexual humour in Austen's fiction. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Miss Bingley offers to mend Mr Darcy's pen, a phallic innuendo, to which Darcy replies, "I always mend my own" (Stevenson 309). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny warns Maria Bertram of tearing her gown and "slipping into the ha-ha," a foreshadowing of her lost sexual virtue (Stevenson 311). At one point, Mary Crawford states, "of Rears and Vices I saw

enough,” an allusion to sodomy in the navy which Austen acknowledges with her next line, “Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun” (Stevenson 314). Heydt-Stevenson points out that “In using bawdy humour, Austen announces her ‘knowingness,’ since laughter, like sexuality, is associated with agency” (312). Women were not, and sometimes still are not, considered capable of being funny; in using sexual humour and acknowledging it, Austen transgresses the boundaries of women’s writing then and now. I would argue that this transgression is also queer because it distorts a traditional view of Jane Austen as a writer who operates against societal structures. In fact, her sexual humour seems to undermine the traditionally conservative Victorian sensibility.

Jane Austen’s writing gave her pleasure that derived from the sole use of her own faculties, and furthermore, a pleasure that did not necessitate her own subordination to a man. While there is certainly some pushback against these kinds of ‘queer’ or transgressive readings of Jane Austen’s works, I find these readings especially revelatory for my study of women’s writing. In looking at Austen through a queer lens, I can better ignore the normative intrusions that obscure her true meanings. In her article, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick posits that there are autoerotic undertones to Marianne and Elinor Dashwood’s relationship in *Sense and Sensibility*. This reading generated scandal inside and outside the academic community; while the subject of Jane Austen was not the main reason for people’s outrage about the article, the words “Jane Austen” and “masturbating” in the same sentence give most people, including myself, a strange feeling. Sedgwick explains, “the proposal to begin an exploration of literary aspects of autoeroticism seemed to leave many people gasping” (819).³

The most compelling point in Sedgwick's article for my study of Jane Austen is not the detailed exploration of autoeroticism in *Sense and Sensibility*, though that is an interesting argument, but rather the idea that Austen's writing provided her with autoerotic fulfilment. Writing gives women "solitary pleasure and adventure," and so, women writers engage in a kind of autoeroticism (Sedgwick 820). According to Sedgwick, "masturbation can seem to offer—not least as an analogy to writing—a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection" (821). By "abjection" Sedgwick refers to the power relationship that is present in all political and personal interactions. Furthermore, this pleasure is very distinct from that which derives from heterosexual encounters: [Masturbation] escapes both the narrative of reproduction and (when practiced solo) even the creation of any interpersonal trace" (Sedgwick 821). Austen's writing enabled her to elude the patriarchal relationship that would exist in a traditional marriage, and gave her personal satisfaction and fulfilment.

Most believe, as I used to, that Austen's character reincarnation is Elizabeth Bennet, but actually, as Vincent Quinn states, "Mr Knightly is Austen's representative," which, "not only introduces a transgender element to a text that is often thought of as Austen's most conformist, it also means that underneath the costumes Emma is making love to another woman" (59). If one accepts this interpretation, then it means that Austen experimented with the queering of her own gender; she essentially masquerades as a man and makes love to a woman through writing *Emma*. Austen had a particular soft spot for Emma, describing her as "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." It is no

surprise, then, that Mr Knightly is always correct and seems to know Emma better than she knows herself. In transgender-ing herself Austen embodies, and subverts, what Gilbert and Gubar call the tradition of “literary paternity.” They posit in their book *Madwoman in the Attic* that writing is a male activity; the pen represents a metaphorical phallus, which gives them the power of creation. The phallus-pen in the hands of a woman writer, however, becomes transgressive, and transgendered, because she uses it not as a man, but as a woman. In *Emma*, Austen takes the pen (which Mr Darcy always mends for himself) and transforms it into a queer tool. Austen’s, and indeed all women’s, writing destabilizes the notion of literary paternity.

Part III

Jane Austen had the alarming talent of making what happens to a young woman in a small English village in the 19th century revelatory of universal truths. The narrative of “dear Aunt Jane” began by her nephew, and supported over the years, has led many readers to consider Austen’s works socially conforming—and if they did acknowledge her satire of society, they considered it a harmless, playful poking. But Austen has long been transgressive. As I recount in my analysis, Austen’s works undermine and uproot social structures in very real and important ways. By examining her letters, the sexual and scandalous elements in many of her works, and the insertion of herself as Mr Knightly in *Emma*, I find that Austen demonstrates an awareness of the social and sexual politics of her time, and transgresses them: “Austen’s gaze is so penetrating that it sees the bodies that underlie polite society” (Quinn 65). Jane Austen is still widely read today because she reveals “truth[s] universally acknowledged,” (*Pride and Prejudice*) and yet she also

reveals truths we often do not recognize in ourselves. When we read her work, we feel like she understands us. She is so close to us, she is practically in our pocket.

Chapter Three

*“Fugit Inreparible Tempus”*⁴

Part I – “It’s Woman’s Time Now”

Time functions differently in different situations; this might seem strange given that time is usually measured in equal intervals without cessation or interruption.

However, time is not just increments of seconds, minutes, and hours that pass, but one’s individual experience *in* time. Sitting in my thesis mentor’s office, an hour and fifteen minutes passes by much more quickly than it does hungrily waiting for a table to be ready at a restaurant. Time also varies cross-culturally: the Pirahã and Hopi tribes actually have no language that indicates tense or temporality. So, we gather that those cultures have a dramatically different relationship to temporality (Anderson Inst.). Today, the clock rules our measurement of time, but before humans had clocks they relied on the position of the sun and planets to measure the progression of time.

This year, 2018, is an arbitrary number, and many cultures follow different calendars and thus measure time in different ways. The Western Christian calendar (A.D.) has prevailed, however, as the normative structure of time and so other ways of ‘being’ in time have largely been pushed to the margins (Krummel). The result is a silencing of other ways of being in time: a delegitimizing of those who do not conform to the traditional, in this case heteronormative and patriarchal, structures of time. Because this narrative is so firmly established, a reconstruction of temporality needs to be forceful. Thankfully, as my thesis advisor Dr. Miriamne Krummel states, “Dominant temporality cannot completely contain subversive slippage. The voice of the temporally colonized speaks and resists silence” (Krummel 154). Women writers are “temporally

colonized” by the patriarchal literary canon because their voices have historically been drowned out by male ones. There were certainly more accomplished women writers than we have record of: “women have probably done just as much writing as men but it has not been preserved” (Spender 53). The voices of women have been temporally drowned out so that assembling a ‘tradition’ of female writing becomes an almost impossible task.

In this final chapter, I will discuss how what I call *female authorial reincarnation* symbolizes the idea that women writers, who must struggle with a lack of tradition to refer to, must necessarily reincarnate themselves in their works, breaking temporal boundaries, in an effort to establish themselves. Marie de France and Jane Austen transgress social boundaries in their writing and exist on the margins of temporality; they resist being completely obliterated, but they and their works are threatened by being absorbed into the normative ideology. Finally, I will examine how my interpretation of female writing relates to the theories of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adrienne Rich.

To preface my understanding of queer temporality I will employ the help of queer theorist Carolyn Dinshaw’s book *How Soon Is Now?* in which she defines queer temporality as “forms of desirous, embodied being that are out of sync with the ordinary linear measurements of everyday life, that engage heterogeneous temporalities or that precipitate out of time altogether—forms of being that . . . are queer by virtue of their particular engagements with time” (4). In “Chaucer Touches a Queer,” she distinguishes her use of the word “queer” to mean “not a determinate thing but a relation to existent structures of power” (77). For me, “queer” signifies that which challenges the norm, and through experiencing time outside its homogenous structures, one experiences queer temporality.

Marie de France and Jane Austen enact this queer temporality in their works. Marie's *Lais* demonstrate examples of queer time, such as the timeless Eden to which the fairy lady carries Lanval, called Avalon. Though not explicitly stated in the tale, the fairy lady's rescuing of Lanval and their destination of Avalon implies that the inverted gender roles in this lai will continue in perpetuity. Time as queering is also present in Marie's works, such as in "Bisclavret," when the baron's time as a werewolf creates a possibly homoerotic relationship between him and the king. Through his ambiguous human/animal and hetero/homosexual identities, Bisclavret is not completely entrenched in normative time. Likewise, Jane Austen, in writing herself into *Emma* as a man, queers her own temporality through entering into a male temporality. In transgender-ing herself in the novel, Austen is able to experience time simultaneously as a woman and a man. Her novel *Persuasions* includes a long span of time between the main characters' initial engagement, its breaking, and their reunion; but time has a very different effect on the two of them. Captain Wentworth becomes more eligible through his success in the navy, but Anne's experience of that time is quite the opposite—she becomes *less* attractive and *less* eligible, demonstrating the contrasting effect of time on women. Outside their works, as female authors Marie de France and Jane Austen also transgress a strictly heteronormative temporality.

Queer temporality is essentially a threat to normative time because it does not have the potential for reproduction, or it at least does not reproduce the narrative of normative time. Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* introduces the term "reproductive futurism," which refers to "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable . . . the possibility of a queer resistance to the

organizing principle of communal relations” (2). Democracy, he argues, is based on the principle that the future is for the ‘Child,’ and thus those who do not participate in this reproductive futurism exist outside, and perhaps in contradiction to, the politics of society: “the battle against queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of the Child whose ruin is pursued by feminist, queers, and those who support the legal availability of abortion” (Edelman 22). The idea of the future, according to Edelman, is rooted in the reproductive process. The Child represents that which will live on after we have died, and so it is necessary for the survival of society itself. This discourse, as Edelman points out, preserves “the absolute privilege of heteronormativity;” as a result, it seems that heteronormative society, with the Child as its beacon, will continue in perpetuity (2).

Those who do not participate in this process, like Jane Austen, live outside society and even perhaps outside time. For heteronormativity, the future is based on the reproductive process—by refusing to complete this process, Austen occupies space in a queer temporality. If the Child is what propels one into the future, what does it mean to remain childless? We know nothing about Marie de France’s life so we cannot conjecture as to her childlessness, but both Marie and Austen reproduce themselves in their works. Do they then participate in reproductive futurism through their writing? I argue that they do not, because what they reproduce challenges rather than reinforces the dominant social structures. The goal of heteronormativity is to reproduce itself in perpetuity, but Austen and Marie challenge this position through their lives and works. Though they do not completely subvert normative time, they do create cracks in it. These cracks provide individuals who also live outside or in contradiction to established social norms a space to reside and breathe within a culture that often violently rejects their very existence.

In “Perverting the Past” Clayton Fordhal reminds us that the chronicle of history is subject to varying interpretations. “History is constantly being recreated—always by the present,” and so our ideas of the medieval and 18th century worlds are in reality tied very closely to our existence in the ‘now’ (Fordhal 8). There is undoubtedly a meta-narrative of progress in which we view past worlds as less progressive and less permissive than our own. Fordhal looks specifically at Marie’s *Lais* to challenge this assumption: “a close examination . . . reveals a society not obsessed with the classification of sexual opposites (male, female) but fascinated with the fluidity and often anarchistic nature of sexuality and gender” (2). While Marie does invert the gender roles of medieval chivalric romances, she actually enlightens our view as to the true nature of medieval society. This implies that we are, today, much more closely tied to the conservative and traditional social structures of Victorian society than the medieval was, meaning Jane Austen likely operated in a less progressive society than did Marie.

For Austen, her historical revision comes in the form of her nephew’s biography; that work grossly domesticates her and transforms Austen into a heroine with soft edges rather than the woman with a sharp and cutting personality, which is evident in her works and letters. This ‘re-writing’ of history supports my argument that Marie de France and Jane Austen have been subject to normalizing forces that distort their true selves. Though patriarchy and heteronormativity were significant forces in the medieval and 18th century worlds, Fordhal’s theory reminds us that history is subject to contemporary intrusions. Marie’s “gay werewolf story” and Austen’s risqué sexual humor complicate the idea of temporality as a linear narrative of progress. The question that arises from this concept of

queer temporality is that, if time has essentially been patriarchal and heteronormative, what, for example, would a female temporality look like?

Part II – “Repair and Reclaim”

My idea of *female authorial reincarnation* was inspired by Virginia Woolf’s exploration of Judith Shakespeare. As I explore in the preface, the “mythology” of Judith Shakespeare is an analogy for the majority of women who wrote. Like Judith, they were never allowed to give voice to the contents of their mind. Perhaps they wrote in a journal, but no one would think to preserve the private thoughts of a woman. As evidenced through Marie de France and Jane Austen, women must put themselves into their works because external forces seek to marginalize and distort them; this authorial reincarnation queers their temporality, as literature is an immortalizer. Women do not have the luxury that men do of complete objectivity and separation from their works. As an ‘othered’ population, female authors must always write subjectively. As I quoted in the introduction, “In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women,” and so in the act of writing female authors touch each other in unique ways—in their writing is converged all the activity of female authors throughout time (Cixous 286). Their commonality goes further than that they write poems or stories: they share the experience of being a part of a population that is othered and subordinated, and so the difficulties they face and the triumphs they gain are all women writer’s difficulties and triumphs. This is female authorial reincarnation. Marie de France and Jane Austen specifically touch each other in this way, even though a large temporal divide separates the two authors.

It is tempting to read Jane Austen and Marie de France through an exclusively suspicious lens, pointing out the ways they problematically reinforce certain elements of heteronormativity. In ignoring these topics I do not mean to erase their relevance, but I seek to do a more constructive reading of their works to bring the two authors together in conversation with one another. Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's suggestion in her article "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," my thesis attempts to combine paranoid and reparative reading practices. Sedgwick explains in the article that paranoid reading has completely taken over literary criticism: it enjoins that there "must be no bad surprises" (130), that everything in a text must be known in advance by the critic, and that "to make something visible as a problem [is] if not a hop, skip, and a jump from getting it solved, at least self-evidently a step in that direction" (139). The issue with this practice of exposure is that pointing out an issue does not in actuality help heal it. Additionally, it threatens a separation from the text, and therefore the issue the text addresses. Reparative reading is the practice of reading for healing, empathy, and acceptance; it helps bring us closer to texts we would otherwise criticize through an exclusively suspicious lens.

While I look at Marie's and Austen's works for evidence that supports my theory of the transgressive nature of their works, I want to do so in a way that creates and sustains rather than de-constructs and critiques. To say Austen's and Marie's work presents problematic representations of gender norms may be accurate, but how does that knowledge sustain those who still struggle to operate within a society that relies on strict gender conventions? While I do engage a paranoid reading to identify the 'queerness' in their works (i.e. not allowing myself to be surprised), I am simultaneously attempting to

create space within these authors' works for those who struggle to conform to society. If I have succeeded in this endeavor, this would be a reparative reading strategy. Perhaps selfishly, I want to make it possible for feminists and those who identify with some sort of queer identity to still derive pleasure from the literature of Jane Austen and Marie de France.

Sedgwick owns that both paranoid reading and reparative reading incorporate an element of pessimism in that they seem to only propose survival. But survival in a society that rejects one's very existence is a transgression indeed, and a victory. Under my cynical and paranoid shell I am essentially optimistic, and my optimism forces me to see reparative reading through that lens. Here I will turn to Adrienne Rich, who gives us a more hopeful outlook. Her article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" presents a way to repair the broken tradition of female authorship:

"Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in a cultural history: it is an act of survival . . . We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us." (Rich 18-19)

A feminist re-vision, reparative in its impulse, involves constructing a tradition of female writing where none exists, which is what I am trying to do with my idea of female authorial reincarnation. In looking back and establishing this temporal lineage, I seek to legitimize the female authorial voice while being careful not to equate or absorb it into the male authorial voice that dominates the literary canon. Through re-vision we can transport ourselves back in time to re-claim the voices and stories that have been

silenced. I want to look at texts by women such as Marie de France and Jane Austen through a lens that does not see them only as victims or products of a system that is built up against them, though that is certainly true. I believe the study of female writing has more to offer us than simply an exploration of the effects of patriarchy and heteronormativity—it can offer us a new vision, a new temporality, for the world.

Epilogue

“Time’s Up”

“Like Virginia Woolf, I am aware of the women who are not with us here because they are washing the dishes and looking after the children . . . And I am thinking also of women whom she left out of the picture altogether—women who are washing other people’s dishes and caring for other people’s children, not to mention the women who went on the streets last night in order to feed their children . . . Every one of us here in this room has had great luck . . . our own gifts could not have been enough, for we all know women whose gifts are buried or aborted. Our struggles can have meaning only if they can help to change the lives of women whose gifts—and whose very being—continue to be thwarted” –Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”

The effects of #MeToo and the Time’s Up movement can be felt in all areas of society. Women are taking back their voices and using them to demand justice not only for themselves, but for *all* women. In the words of Audre Lorde, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.” The time has come for all women to reclaim that which has never been given to them, which requires that we reject and dismantle the political, racial, and social structures that prevent women from flourishing. In this thesis project, though limited in its scope, I want to keep in mind that my struggles, and the struggles of Marie de France and Jane Austen, are very different from the problems women in different parts of the world face. Though the writings of two white, well-educated women are not emblematic of the struggles of all women worldwide, I do believe that my study of them can open the doors for a more inclusive movement for female equality, beginning with an idea of a female temporality.

The Time’s Up movement can perhaps be the Ground Zero, the beginning, for female temporality. We women are moving forward and looking back simultaneously to discover how to survive in a world that has not been created to accommodate us. When

we say “time’s up” it is a beckoning for a new temporality. However, it is important that we work together to create this new vision, and work carefully to ensure new power imbalances do not replace old ones. This will be slow work. Ages of subjugation and silencing cannot be overcome in one day, or with one thesis project—but I believe things *can* change in our world.

I will now turn again to the Wife of Bath’s Prologue, in which she highlights how women have always been ‘painted’ or defined by men: “Who peyntede the leon, tel me who? / By God, if wommen hadde writen stories, / As clerkes han withinne hire oratories, / They wolde han writen of men moore wikkedness / Than al the mark of Adam may redresse” (Chaucer). Hundreds of years later, Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf also comment upon the same problem. This issue persists today, but women today are also better equipped to combat it—we are getting our educations and writing; we are voting to change policies and even becoming the policy makers; and above of all we are making our voices heard. We are taking up our brushes and “re-painting the lion.”

We women writers tend to revere female authors, Marie de France and Jane Austen among them, but always in our mind should be the countless other women who did not—could not—attain the same notoriety through the expression of their genius. The Judiths of the world are as much a part of the tradition of female writing as the great authors in our anthologies. To keep their spirits alive we must keep writing. Most importantly, however, we need to amplify the voices of women who are not being heard, such as women of color, who still face inordinate amounts of discrimination; refugee women, who we now know are vulnerable to both invading and peacekeeping forces; young girls who, like Malala Yousafzai, must fight for their right to be educated; and

women everywhere whose bodies are the battlegrounds for religious and political disputes. The stories of these women need to be told.

For a long time, women have been compelled to accommodate their bodies and their selves to the world—but in this new vision of female temporality we can oblige the world to re-accommodate itself to be more habitable for those who exist on the boundaries of strict identity markers.

The time is *now* for creating a more accepting, peaceful, and loving world.

Notes

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- ¹ Most accounts also place her within the court and patronage of Elinor of Aquitaine.
- ² This threat is also present in Marie's works, specifically the *lais* "Guigemar" and "Yönc"
- ³ The pushback for Sedgwick's article originated in an article by Roger Kimball about educational corruption. For more information, see "Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick" by Macy Halford in *The New Yorker* from 13 April 2009.
- ⁴ Roughly translated as "it escapes, irretrievable time" (Virgil *Georgics*, book 3 line 284)

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