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Jane Austen and North America: Fact and Fiction

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Of all English novelists, Jane Austen is the most assuredly English, the one English novelist who stayed at home, whose only sea voyage was the few miles to the Isle of Wight. She is famously the novelist who never left the territory of England, not even to visit Scotland or Wales. Her writing carries this insularity to the last degree. Not a page takes us outside her native country. Abroad is sometimes talked about but never travelled to. The foreigner is an absent species. Her scenes and characters are set firmly in the country houses and small towns of Southern England, with occasional visits to London and Bath, and one trip North, to Derbyshire, when Elizabeth Bennet pays her fateful visit to Darcy's home at Pemberly, in the Peak district, not two hundred miles from London.

It may seem bizarre, therefore, to connect Jane Austen with North America. Exactly the same question arose five years ago when the Society held an earlier Conference in Bermuda. What had Jane Austen to do with these places? The connecting link, of course, is in the travels of her sailor brothers, Francis and Charles. Between them, they sailed much of the world. For Charles in particular, the Bermuda-Halifax connection covers perhaps the most important phase of his life. In 1804, at the age of 25, Charles was promoted to the rank of Commander to captain a small vessel, the *Indian*, then being built in Bermuda, and in the following year it was in this ship that he made his first voyage to Halifax. This was the beginning of his six-and-a-half years' service in the North America Command, a tour of duty which was to bring him to Halifax at least once a year, sometimes more, staying there for weeks at a time, sometimes a couple of months;[1] a tour of duty which also saw him promoted to Captain and married to a Bermuda bride. Francis, too, had his connections with North America and the North America Command. So while Halifax and Bermuda were geographically remote from Jane Austen's England, they were brought home to her through the experiences of the sailor brothers, experiences which she drew upon in writing her 'naval' novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion.*

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Although the first biography of Jane Austen - the *Memoir of Jane Austen*, published in 1870 - does not have anything at all to say on these matters (neither Halifax or Bermuda is mentioned), it is quite invaluable in giving us an insider's view, coming as it does from someone who knew Jane Austen personally, a nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh. One of the things

that strikes the reader immediately is the emphasis that Austen-Leigh places on the naval aspect of her writing and her affection for the service. This is a subject which he places, very deliberately, in the early pages of the book, referring there to what he calls his Aunt's 'partiality for the Navy', the 'readiness and accuracy with which she wrote about it'; 'with ships and sailors', he says, 'she felt herself at home'.[2] Austen-Leigh was able to say this with the confidence of personal knowledge. He could also have said that his aunt was very knowledgeable about the naval events of this period. Her principal source of information - we would call it inside information - came in the letters of the sailor brothers, who wrote home with some regularity and regarded their sister Jane as their principal point of contact with the family. The broader picture she would have picked up from the daily and weekly newspapers, in which news of the war at sea featured prominently. Added to this, the Austens had a wide circle of naval connections, many of them friends of the sailor brothers and relations of the family through marriage. For example, Jane Cooper, one of Jane Austen's closest childhood friends, in 1792 married Captain Thomas Williams, who was to be an Admiral; and amongst the remoter cousinage there was a scattering of Admirals and senior Admiralty officials. This was the naval network that kept the Austens well-informed over the years with which we are particularly concerned – that is, the eleven years from the time of Charles's arrival at Bermuda in 1804, and Halifax a year later, until mid-1816, when Jane Austen finished writing *Persuasion*. These years saw the growing tension between Britain and the United States, leading to the War of 1812, a war which began as a war at sea, a conflict in which the naval stations at Halifax and Bermuda played a vital role as the only fortified naval bases securing British interests in the entire Western hemisphere.

Whereas Bermuda was a recent establishment, the Halifax base went back to 1749. It was the most heavily fortified overseas base in the British Empire, valuable for its extremely large natural harbour, capable of providing a secure and sheltered anchorage for a naval squadron and more. Strategically, too, it was of great importance in its command of the North Atlantic and the Gulf of St Lawrence. And with the coming of American Independence Halifax was the lone British naval base from the Arctic North down to the West Indies, a sweep of ocean upwards of four thousand miles.

Bermuda was a different case entirely. Since the time of its first settlement in the 1600's, as far as the Navy was concerned, it was thought to be of no value at all. It was remote from land and judged virtually unapproachable on account of the surrounding shoals and barriers of coral reef. According to the charts, nothing larger than a fishing boat could get through to the harbour of the main island. But that view changed in 1794 when a naval survey revealed a channel that was navigable by larger vessels. An anchorage was recommended to the Admiralty and a site proposed for a naval dockyard. A year later, it was realized that Bermuda could serve as a winter base for the North America Squadron. Fifteen hundred miles to the south of Halifax, it could provide a southern rendezvous for naval forces and could also be used as a staging point for convoys and their escorts continuing further southwards to the West Indies. In 1805, the Halifax Squadron began to winter at Bermuda for six or seven months, from November to May or June. headed by the Commander-in-Chief in his Flagship, and his Headquarters staff.

But the full strategic value of Bermuda only was revealed a few years later, with the War of 1812. For in its isolation and difficulty of access, it provided an extremely secure base, and it commanded the entire Eastern seaboard of the United States, including some of the vital waterways, Chesapeake Bay for example, exposing Baltimore and Washington to naval attack. It was for very good reason that Bermuda was famed as 'The Gibraltar of the West', just as

Kipling was to call Halifax 'The Warden of the North'.[3] As history reminds us, these were titles well deserved.

With an eye to the future importance of Bermuda, a shore establishment and yards were developed. Bermudan sloops were admired for their fast-sailing and an increasing number of vessels for naval use were built locally in the well-established shipyards. In this development Halifax was vital since Bermuda's native wood was cedar, which was expensive and only available in limited quantities. The Bermuda ship-building and repair yards turned increasingly to the timber resources of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and elsewhere in Upper and Lower Canada, and these shipments came to Bermuda via Halifax. Similarly, as the Bermuda naval base grew in size, it was from Halifax that the supplies of building materials were organized and shipped, also the meat and other provisions needed for ships that were out at sea for months on end.

It happens that the first of Bermuda's locally-built naval vessels - the *Indian* - was Charles Austen's. To muster his crew, Charles put an advertisement on the front page of *The Bermuda Gazette* for 13 April 1805. His description of the ship was cast in handsome, even extravagant, terms for a sloop of only four hundred tons and twenty tons. But in referring to its 'fast sailing' as a quality of its 'construction', Charles was trumpeting no more than the truth:

'The Indian is the finest and most beautiful Man of War ever built, and her construction puts fast sailing beyond a doubt. Therefor plenty of Spanish DOUBLOONS and DOLLARS will fall to the lot of all those spirited Young Men who come forward without delay …Grog and Fresh Beef every day at twelve o'clock. GOD SAVE THE KING, AND success to the TIGHT LITTLE ISLAND.'

The promised rewards were forthcoming. Thanks to Sheila Kindred we know that in the next three years Charles was successful in capturing, on his own, or in company with other vessels, no fewer than thirteen prizes.[4]

Charles was also involved in the Squadron's routine duties, routine but essential. These included maintaining the blockade at sea, preventing American trade with Napoleonic Europe; intercepting the traffic in slaves between the British West Indies and the Southern states of America; escorting British convoys between Canada and the West Indies and between Canada and Britain; and there was the business of boarding foreign vessels, mostly American ships, to remove British crewmen, many of whom were deserters from the Navy attracted by better pay and conditions. It was Britain's enforcement of this right of search - a claim rejected by the United States - and impressment, a net widely flung that enveloped thousands of Americans, some estimates run as high as 13,000, which triggered the War of 1812. These issues were more than a matter of pride for the United States since they imperilled the success of its merchant fleet, second only to the British in size and activity.

But service on the Bermuda station was not always so demanding. Charles was a warm and easy-going man of considerable charm. Between his duties at sea, he found time to lead an active life in the upper circles of Bermuda society. He joined the select Freemason's Lodge at St George's, the 'naval' end of 'the tight little island' and mixed with the best families. A personable and successful young naval officer in his late twenties, and unmarried, he was regarded as a good catch. Fond of parties and dancing, to the matrons of Bermuda he must have seemed one of those single men who 'must be in want of a wife' (as Jane Austen opens *Pride and Prejudice*). In the event, Charles married Fanny Palmer, a well-connected young lady of

17, the youngest daughter of the island's former Attorney-General and sister-in-law to the island's Chief Justice. Charles was equally successful in his naval career. Promoted Captain in 1810, he commanded the Flagship of Admiral Sir John Warren, the Commander-in-Chief of the North America Station. The two men were on very good terms and Lady Warren and Fanny became firm friends, travelling together when the Admiral moved his Headquarters between Bermuda and Halifax.

Back in England, the Austen family was able to follow Charles's promotion and his appointment to the Admiral's Flagship. Service promotions and appointments were announced regularly in the newspapers; and more detailed news was to be found in the monthly *Naval Chronicle.* And then there were the letters home from the sailor brothers themselves. Although only few have survived, we know that both Francis and Charles were regular correspondents[5] and that most of their letters were addressed to their sister Jane. Her practice was to circulate their news around the family. We see an example of this early in 1809 when she wrote to Cassandra, then staying in Kent with their brother Edward. This was to tell her the news that Charles had taken 'a small prize…a French schooner laden with Sugar, but Bad weather parted them, & she had not yet been heard of…'. Charles feared that as the vessel and its cargo were lost, there was no prize-money to be shared out. However, the 'real misfortune' (as he wrote to Cassandra) was not this financial loss but losing 'the lives of twelve of my people' - the sailors he put on board as the prize-crew, to bring the ship back to Bermuda - 'two of them mids', meaning midshipmen, who were only youngsters.[6]

This letter gives us a valuable insight on Charles's character - his essential humanity. We know from his log books and from other official papers that he valued the lives of his men above money - not, at that time, an altogether common attitude among naval officers; and it was something his crews understood and appreciated. Not surprisingly, Charles was able to keep discipline on his ships with an exceptionally low level of punishment. Francis was entirely different, a strict disciplinarian. In July 1813, the Admiralty administered an official rebuke for the excessive levels of flogging in one of his ships. This contrast between the two men belongs to a general pattern. Charles was open and forthcoming and, despite all the sorrows and horrors of war, held a cheerful view of life, whereas Francis was a man who found it difficult to share his feelings, whose manner and outlook were stern and unbending. Like their sister Jane, both men were devout Christians. But we know from their family letters that while Charles found God a god of love, for Francis, God was above all a lawgiver and the source of divine justice, a being who demanded obedience and delivered punishment to the sinner. These differences were expressed in the character of the ships they commanded. Francis, in particular, found no popularity as the captain of what was known as a 'praying' ship. On these vessels, the sailors had to watch their language, keep their disorder and drunkenness well out of sight, drop to their knees at the Sunday service and join in the hymns. It is worth considering these differences since they help us to understand how these men were seen and regarded by their contemporaries; how, for example, Charles and his wife moved easily in Halifax society and were made welcome, just as they were popular throughout the Squadron. By contrast, during his spell as Commander-in-Chief, in 1845-48, Francis was regarded as stiff and unapproachable.

Sometimes news of the sailor brothers travelled informally, by word of mouth, which is how Jane Austen was alerted in the Spring of 1811 to the possibility that Charles was on his way back to England. She duly sent this report on to her sister (again, Cassandra was staying with their brother Edward): '…Capt. Simpson told us, on the authority of some other Capt^{n} just arrived from Halifax that Charles was bringing the Cleopatra home, & that she was probably

by this time in the Channel -'. But this communication was made late in the evening, at the end of one of Henry Austen's convivial parties, with everyone in high spirits. Jane, somewhat dubious about the accuracy of the Captain's news, added a note of warning: 'as Capt. S. was certainly in liquor, we must not quite depend on it.'[7] As it turned out, her doubts were well grounded; Captains 'in liquor' were to be treated with caution; Charles was not back in England for another three or four months. But by the Autumn he and his family were home, regaling the Austens with stories of Bermuda and Halifax, his successes in the *Indian* and his experiences as Captain of Admiral Warren's Flagship.

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Charles's return to England, and the interest of his account, may well have suggested to Jane Austen the idea of introducing naval characters to her current work*, Mansfield Park*, a novel she had begun in early in 1811, around the time of meeting the drunken Captain Simpson; and we know that she consulted both Francis and Charles while she was writing the novel, seeking their permission to use the names of their ships, including the *Cleopatra*, the very ship in which Charles returned from Halifax. This leads me to believe that the portrait of the young Midshipman, William Price – eager, enthusiastic and open – owes much to Charles's own boyishness and charm. A further detail, of some historical significance, was suggested by Charles's service in the North America Command. This comes in Chapter 12, the scene in which Tom Bertram glances at a newspaper and remarks to Dr Grant: 'A strange business this in America, Dr Grant! - What is your opinion? I always come to you to know what I am to think of public matters.'[8] In the calendar of *Mansfield Park*, this scene takes place in the Autumn of 1812. So the 'strange business in America' must refer to the early events of the War, America having made its declaration in mid-June. These early events were dominated by the humiliation, totally unexpected, suffered by the British Navy at the hands of the Navy of the United States.

British historians often speak of the War of 1812 as a mere sideshow. But that was certainly not how it was seen in North America. The aim of the Republican 'war hawks' was no less than the conquest of Canada. Optimistically, they saw themselves before long dictating the terms of peace in Quebec or Halifax. On the British side, the War was initially regarded as no more than a contest at sea, its outcome a foregone conclusion. The British people entered the War thinking of themselves as lords of the ocean, and the Americans as no more than disobedient children to be taught a lesson. Trafalgar had fed the British presumption of success. But in 1812, things turned out very differently. The British ships sailed, one-by-one, to disaster. They found themselves out-sailed, out-manoeuvred and out-gunned. First, in August 1812, HMS *Guerriere*, a frigate sailing to Halifax for a refit, was captured by the USS *Constitution*. *The Times* was scathing, quite carried away in its indignation: 'Never before in the history of the world did an English frigate strike' (ie strike its flag, lower its colours in surrender) 'to an American…Good God !'.[9] Two months later, in October, the *Macedonian* was shot to pieces, also suffering humiliation, surrendering to its American victor, the USS *United States*; and on 29 November, the USS *Constitution* struck again, capturing HMS *Java*.

The pages of the *Naval Chronicle* were filled with these disasters. One correspondent described them as no less than 'a national disgrace'.[10] Indignant voices were raised in Parliament. Canning lamented that the British Navy's 'sacred spell of invincibility has been broken' and in the House of Lords the Earl of Darnley followed Canning with a further outburst

of eloquent dismay: 'The charm of invincibility had now been broken' and the 'consecrated standard' of Great Britain 'no longer floated victorious on the main'.[11]

Alongside these triumphs of the U S Navy, American privateers came out in their hundreds. Many of these were merchant-ships. Finding themselves prevented from their normal shipping trade by the British blockade, they turned to privateering. Equipping themselves with naval guns, and licensed by the US Government with letters of marque, effectively they became private men-of-war, preying on Britain's merchant shipping. They ranged far into European waters, enabling Francis to score a minor triumph. At the end of December 1812, following a chase of eleven hours off the Azores, he captured the *Swordfish*, a schooner-privateer out of Boston. As successes in the American war were then so few and far between, the Admiralty made a great song and dance with his report. His official letter, describing the engagement, was made public and printed, first in the *London Gazette* and then in the *Naval Chronicle*.[12] And Jane Austen was herself able to add to the celebration in her own quiet way, bringing his ship's name, the *Elephant*, into *Mansfield Park*.

But this was a rare success. Early in 1813, American privateers were along the coast of Portugal, harassing and capturing troopships and supply vessels. These losses led Wellington to complain bitterly at the state of the Navy, and gave the Army a chance to crow over its rival service, an opportunity seized with delight, since hitherto the Navy had treated the Army with contempt. Wellington's complaint was well founded. Since Trafalgar a mood of complacency had taken over. Naval efficiency declined – efficiency not of the spit and polish variety, but the effective discipline of a fighting force, measured, for example, by the speed with which ships could be brought to action stations, the speed of loading and firing the guns and their accuracy – all of these operations requiring constant practice and drilling but remaining neglected while the Navy rested on its laurels. And this was as true of the North America Squadron as anywhere else in the Navy. Added to which, the Squadron had suffered by its very distance from European waters which the Admiralty regarded as the vital centre of operations. The consequence was neglect. The Squadron remained small and, for the most part, its vessels were elderly. It suffered badly from desertions and was undermanned, so badly undermanned that there were times when the full Squadron was unable to put to sea. Overall, it was in poor shape. Successive Commanders-in-Chief, Warren as far back as 1810, had brought this to the Admiralty's notice, but with no success.[13] This left the Squadron incapable of carrying out its essential duties of maintaining a close blockade of American ports, guarding the convoys of British and Canadian merchantmen, and protecting Canadian coastal towns from American raiders. There were even times when Halifax itself was vulnerable to a sudden strike from the sea.

These problems lasted until 1812-13. With the War increasing in intensity, the intervention of France was feared and it was this threat that persuaded the Admiralty that reinforcement was called for. Between July 1812 and July 1813 the Squadron's one ship-of-the-line (what we would call a battleship, with upwards of 64 guns) was joined by another ten; the frigate numbers were increased from six to eighteen; and the smaller vessels-of-war from sixteen to twenty-eight; and as the War continued the Squadron's strength was to rise even more.

But the first British victory at sea, in June 1813, owed nothing to the reinforcement of the Squadron, nor to a general improvement in fighting effectiveness. It owed everything to the drive and deep pocket of a single English Captain, Philip Broke, commanding HMS *Shannon*. Broke ended the succession of British defeats, capturing the hitherto all-conquering USS *Chesapeake* and towing the American vessel into Halifax harbour. It was a victory gained

within the space of eleven minutes, thanks to Broke's expert gunnery, his highly-trained crew, and gunsights of great accuracy paid for by Broke out of his own pocket. Grasping at this first opportunity to salvage professional and national pride, the *Naval Chronicle* hailed it as 'the most brilliant act of heroism ever performed'. This was a success, it claimed, that put an end to America's 'short career of maritime glory'.[14] It was a success, moreover, in which the Austens had a particular interest. Twenty years earlier they had known of Broke as one of Charles' closest boyhood friends when they had trained together at the Royal Naval Academy, Portsmouth, and their paths had crossed several times in the intervening years. In fact, Broke had vivid memories of Charles and wrote to him in 1824, recollecting him as 'such a good tempered sociable little fellow in our *evening tea party* at the Academy - that I always recollect you with pleasure'.[15]

Another sailor deeply involved in the American war and familiar to the Austens was Charles's old boss, Admiral Warren. He had left the North America command in 1811 but was re-appointed in August 1812 and returned to Halifax for a second spell, this time heading the newly-consolidated command of North America and the West Indies. Francis also knew Warren, having served under him some years earlier in the Channel Fleet. He was not a man to be forgotten. Whereas over ninety per cent of naval officers were virtually uneducated (in the formal sense), having gone to sea at eleven or twelve, Warren was remarkable in having been at Cambridge, where he enjoyed a reputation as a 'dandy', a 'young buck' and a gambler, and was described, disapprovingly, as a man of fashion with an 'extravagant lifestyle'.[16] But Warren had settled to a successful naval career during which he won a reputation for tact and diplomacy and served as British Ambassador to Russia. Judging that he might now be effective in agreeing terms of peace with the United States, the Government sent him out to Halifax for a second term as naval Commander-in-Chief, with full authority, as 'Negociator', to treat with the United States. However, it was an impossible mission. His two roles, as naval chief and peace envoy were wholly contradictory. While he was instructed 'to attack, take or sink, burn or destroy, all ships or vessels belonging to the United States or the citizens thereof' (so including privateers), he was also required, in the interests of his peace mission, 'to direct the commanders of His Majesty's ships to exercise all possible forbearance towards the United States'. In the event, it suited Warren's nature to choose the quieter path. But the enemy was not interested in 'forbearance' and the Parliamentary opposition was quick to seize on the weakness of Warren's position. In the House of Commons, Canning complained 'that the arm which should have launched the thunderbolt, was occupied in guiding the pen: that admiral Warren was busied in negociating, when he ought to have been sinking, burning, and destroying'.[17]

In the event, peace was some way off. The war continued inconclusively for a further two years, with engagements along the Atlantic coast and on the Great Lakes, and a series of British raids aimed at destroying coastal towns. These attacks included the capture of Washington and the infamous burning of the White House and other historic buildings, a vengeful policy which embittered the Americans and caused dismay in Britain. Eventually, neither side could see any benefit in continuing the conflict. On the British side, it was a drain on military resources to little purpose, since the threat to Canada had proved empty and the British Government had no interest in territorial gain. On the American side, the British blockade was crippling economically, and the Government was unable to sustain the nation on a war footing. And both Governments had to face vocal and ever-growing opposition. War weariness had set in and both sides were ready to see an end to the conflict. Peace negociations began in August 1814. These the Austens watched with particular interest since leading the

three British Commissioners was a distant cousin, Francis' long-term naval patron, Admiral Lord Gambier.

Nonetheless, even in the Autumn of 1814, there was an undercurrent of anxiety that the American war would grind on for years, and on a larger scale than ever before. These were the gloomy predictions that Jane Austen heard when she came to stay in London with her brother Henry, a banker. The duration of the war was a burning issue for the Austens, as it was for all naval families. For with the American navy quadrupled in size, they feared that Francis, now safe at home on half-pay with his family, would be recalled to active service. So Jane Austen was attentive to the discussions she heard among Henry and his circle and she attached some weight to this pessimistic line of thought. His visitors included City merchants and fellow-bankers, was well-informed. Some of them held Army and Navy Agencies (as indeed Henry did himself, in partnership with Francis), managing the financial and personal affairs of officers serving on the American front. These were opinions to be taken seriously and Jane Austen set down her own thinking in a letter to Martha Lloyd, a family friend (who was to become Francis' second wife in 1828). In this, she reported the depressing outlook:

'*His* veiw, & the veiw of those he mixes with, of Politics, is not cheerful – with regard to an American war I mean; - they consider it as certain, & as what is to ruin us. The [?Americans] cannot be conquered, & we shall only be teaching them the skill in War which they may now want. We are to make them good Sailors & Soldiers, & [?gain] nothing ourselves. – If we *are* to be ruined, it cannot be helped – but I place my hope of better things on a claim to the protection of Heaven, as a Religious Nation, a Nation inspite of much Evil improving in Religion, which I cannot beleive the Americans to possess.' [18]

The 'teaching them the skill in War' and making 'them good Sailors & Soldiers' refers to the British claim that the backbone of the US Navy was composed of deserters from the British Navy, deserters who were already trained seamen and marines attracted by the better pay and conditions and who, so it was argued, provided the skilled core of the American fleet. But Jane Austen was prepared to take the long view. Whatever might happen in the short term, she was ready to place the outcome of the War in the hands of God. Believing Britain to be 'a Religious Nation', she trusted, ultimately, that its 'claim to the protection of Heaven' would be answered.

Jane Austen set this down at the beginning of September 1814. Only a week later she was writing quite breezily to a young niece who was attempting a novel herself. '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on', was Jane Austen's advice; 'such a spot as is the delight of my life',[19] as indeed it was. For at this very moment Jane Austen was deep in the writing of *Emma*, of all her novels the most sunny, peaceful and idyllic, its mood of good humour and high comedy as far from the shadows of war as could be. What we see here is Jane Austen's capacity to insulate her writing from her innermost anxieties. Nowhere in *Emma* is there even the faintest hint of the 'ruin' that the American conflict might bring, nor any suggestion of the profound religious reflections which the threat of war could awaken. On this last point, the same can be said of *Mansfield Park*. The war is referred to, and the sailor brothers' ships are named, reminding us of the North America Squadron. The penetration of American privateers into European waters is also mentioned. Sir Thomas Bertram's return to England from the West Indies, in the Autumn of 1813, is across Atlantic waters infested with privateers as well as French vessels of war. Yet Jane Austen makes no attempt to depict the dangers of the voyage. Quite the opposite. When Sir Thomas sits down to tell the assembled household about 'the most interesting moment of his passage to England, when the alarm of a French privateer

was at the height,' any hint of anxiety is dissolved into comedy: at this very moment, Mrs Norris 'burst through his recital with the proposal of soup'.[20] Very soon afterwards, William Price arrives at Mansfield, the young sailor home from the war at sea. In the recital of his war experiences, Jane Austen shields us from the raw truth; all graphic and horrifying detail is excluded. Her reporting is indirect, kept at a remove. We penetrate no further than the 'horrors' of shipwrecks and engagements, 'the imminent hazards, or terrific scenes', 'every variety of danger which sea and war together could offer.'[21] And once again Jane Austen dispels any lingering shadows with a comic touch: 'and even Lady Bertram could not hear of such horrors unmoved, or without sometimes lifting her eyes from her work to say, "Dear me! how disagreeable. – I wonder any body can ever go to sea." '[22]

The War of 1812 was formally brought to a close at the end of 1814 with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. But the news travelled slowly and small outbreaks of fighting continued sporadically for several months, coming to a slow end just as Jane Austen was completing *Emma* in the Spring of 1815. In June came Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. In July, he surrendered to a British naval officer and was carried back to British waters until a decision was reached about his future. On the 8th of August 1815, the very day that the London newspapers announced Napoleon's departure for exile on St Helena, Jane Austen began *Persuasion*. It was designed to be a morale-boosting novel, showing the Navy in its best light, recalling the glorious days of Trafalgar and St Domingo, those high points in the careers of Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth. (St Domingo was a victory in which Francis had taken part). Such an uplift was badly needed. Since those early successes of the American Navy, in 1812 and 13, there had sounded a continuous litany of complaint about the lamentable state of the British Navy, criticisms that resounded in Parliament, in the press and in the correspondence pages of the *Naval Chronicle*: morale at a low ebb; discipline in decline; desertion a growing problem; the old fighting spirit lost; war-weariness throughout the service. So the complaints went on. One officer concluded that British 'ships of the line were…unequal to contend with a disciplined enemy; they would have beat a French or Spanish ship, who were worse than themselves; but I will stake my existence, had an American line of battle ship fallen in with one half of them, they would have been taken…'.[23]

As well as morale-boosting, Jane Austen also used *Persuasion* to show sailors in peacetime, naval men now in a civilian setting. She arranges these naval themes around the heart of the novel, the story of Anne Elliot. After much suffering and endurance, her heroine can at last glory, as Jane Austen puts it, in the very last lines of the novel, 'in being a sailor's wife'.[24]

The connection of this novel to the North Atlantic is three-fold. We learn that Mrs Croft has accompanied Admiral Croft on his overseas postings, and these have involved her in crossing 'the Atlantic four times', and 'never' to 'the West Indies', as she says emphatically. This makes her destination North America and its naval surroundings, presumably Halifax or Bermuda, to which she refers.[25] And Jane Austen may have modelled her portraits of Admiral and Mrs Croft on Admiral and Lady Warren, in particular the scene in which Mrs Croft gently guides the Admiral's hand as they drive, a little uncertainly, along a country lane. In naval circles it was said that Admiral Warren's wife held the reins in more than domestic matters - gossip that even got into the American newspapers, which reported 'upon good authority' that

Lady Warren was 'expected…to supersede him in command'.[26] And perhaps most significantly of all, no less than three times Jane Austen raises the possibility of *a future* war, a prospect that Admiral Croft looks forward to as a piece of 'good luck'.[27] Charles Musgrove

sees it as a golden opportunity for Wentworth, a chance for him to add to the fortune he has already made in prize money, room to 'distinguish' himself even more.[28] But it is upon her heroine that Jane Austen makes the possibility of war work its most dramatic effect. In the concluding paragraph to *Persuasion* we are told that 'the dread of a future war' was 'all that could dim' the 'sunshine' of Anne Elliot, now the newly-married Mrs Captain Wentworth. 'She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm…'.[29] Jane Austen's connection with the North Atlantic comes to a close on this sombre note, reminding us of the author's deepest anxieties about the continuation of the American War.

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Twelve months after writing the final lines of *Persuasion*, Jane Austen was dead, the novelist cut off in her prime. Her sailor brothers, however, lived on into ripe old age, Charles until he was 73, dying on active service, leading the British naval forces in the Second Burmese War, Francis until he was 91: seventy-nine years in the Navy, at the time of his death he was its highest ranking officer, the Senior Admiral of the Fleet. In the years between, the sailor brothers travelled again to these parts. In 1826, Charles was appointed to the Jamaica station, within the North America and West Indies Command. Travelling out, he called in at Bermuda accompanied by his second wife and eldest daughter, staying there for a month, renewing old friendships. In the Caribbean, he was proud to record, he was 'most successful' 'in crushing the slave trade' and in flying the British flag in support of the newly-emerging states of South America, Columbia especially, where he gave assistance to Bolivar.[30] As for Francis, arriving at Halifax and Bermuda in 1845, in the *Vindictive,* as Vice-Admiral and naval Commander-in-Chief, it was very much a family affair. George, his third son, was the ship's Chaplain; Herbert Grey, his fourth son, was his Flag Lieutenant, and he would have brought his eldest son, Francis junior, as Flag Captain, had not the Admiralty forbidden it. As it was, when Herbert Grey left the ship, his place as Flag Lieutenant was taken by Charles Austen's eldest son, Charles Austen Junior. This family entourage also included Francis' two unmarried daughters, Cassandra and Fanny, to assist in official entertaining. It was an explosive mixture. Thanks to a sharp-eyed young Lieutenant who kept a secret diary, we know that the 'atmosphere' on the ship was 'dangerous'. Cassandra, the elder daughter, bore the ship's name, 'Miss Vindictive'; and by the time they reached Halifax Cassandra had become 'the Mistress of the ship, influences the Adl. in every way, and in fact, I *imagine* will soon be Commander-in-Chief'. Such, he commented, were the 'evils of a Family Ship'.[31]

Once away from the family enclosure Francis could be fiery. He had an unflattering view of the Americans he met at Saratoga Springs. He thought the men 'had some vile habits, especially that of frequent discharges of saliva, and that without much regard to where they may be'. And amongst American women he found 'a sort of flippant air…which seemed rather at variance with the retiring modesty so pleasing in the generality of English women'.[32] Equally, the people of Saratoga, having encountered this peppery English Admiral, might have observed, in the words of Randall Jarrell, that 'To Americans, English manners are far more frightening than none at all'. It must be said, however, that Francis made no pretense of socializing, either in Halifax or Bermuda or anywhere else. Where he felt at home was in the *Vindictive,* directing operations against slave traders and conducting gun-boat diplomacy along the coasts of Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Nonetheless, on the dry land of Halifax the 'evils of a Family Ship' proved to have a silver lining. For it was at Admiralty House, Francis' official residence, that Charles Austen's son, Charles junior, met and fell in love with a local girl, Emma Sophia de Blois, the daughter of a prominent Halifax family of Huguenot descent. Their marriage took place in 1848 and in the Austen tradition of large families, they had five daughters and a son, this last baptised Charles John, in honour of his grandfather, the younger of the sailor brothers. Remarkably, when this lecture was originally given, there were with us in the room two of Charles Austen's descendants: one, a lady, born Margaret Bernadette de Blois Stokes, and her brother, Patrick Stokes, the organizer of the Conference and Chairman of the Jane Austen Society: both of them great-grandchildren of the 1848 marriage, and great-great-grandchildren of sailor brother Charles, one of the principal characters in this account of Jane Austen and the North Atlantic.

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One person, sadly, is missing from the picture – Captain Frederick Marryat, the founding father in the great line of English naval novelists. As a petty officer of eighteen, soon to become a Lieutenant, he arrived on the North America Station in 1811, calling in at Bermuda and Halifax, a town which delighted him. Twenty years later, he set down his impressions in *Peter Simple* (1833-34), the book that made him famous: 'All sailors agree in asserting that Halifax is one of the most delightful ports in which a ship can anchor. Every body is hospitable, cheerful, and willing to amuse and be amused'. When the time came for departure, the ship's Captain was too ill to sail, a misfortune that had its rewards. 'But we consoled ourselves: if we did not make prize-money, at all events we were very happy, and the major part of the officers very much in love'.[33] In September 1812, Marryat travelled back to England in the *Indian*, Charles's beloved Bermudian sloop, his first command. Did these two sailors ever meet - in Halifax or Bermuda, or later, in England ? Unfortunately, there are no letters or records to help us, only the likelihoods of chance or probability. What we do know is that Marryat admired Jane Austen. His first novel, *The Naval Officer*, published in 1829, was hastily written, with some obvious faults. But he thought well of it and four years later set down his hope that 'The Naval Officer, when corrected, will be so improved that he may be permitted to stand on the same shelf as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*'.[34] Perhaps wisely, Marryat never attempted such an improvement. He was not a writer for correction or revision. Rather, as Conrad put it, his gift lay in the realm of 'youthful glamour' and 'headlong vitality', achieved in the 'completely successful expression of an unartistic nature'.[35] This is writing that stand at a distance from the finely-wrought surfaces of Jane Austen, the artist supreme. But a later novelist found a point of contact between the two. In 'The Captain's Death Bed', an essay devoted to Marryat, Virginia Woolf expressed her admiration. While she found no masterpiece among his works, she recognized his particular genius: he 'can create a world; he has the power to set us in the midst of ships and men and sea and sky all vivid, credible, authentic, as we are suddenly made aware when Peter quotes a letter from home and the other side of the scene appears; the solid land, England, the England of Jane Austen, with its parsonages, its country house, its young women staying at home, its young men gone to sea; and for a moment the two worlds, that are so opposite and yet so closely allied, come together.'[36]

It is tempting to imagine that the coming together of their worlds was more than a figure of speech – that one day back in England, Charles introduced Marryat to his sister, the anonymous author of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, and that the two of them

were able to exchange views on novels, the Navy, and the North American War. Could it be that the 'youthful glamour' and 'headlong vitality' of William Price transmit energies that Jane Austen found first in the young Lieutenant Marryat ?

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All references to the novels are to the Oxford University Press edition, edited by R.W.Chapman, 1923 etc.

Sailor Brothers
John H. & Edith C. Hubback, *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers* (London: John Lane), 1906.

Letters
Jane Austen's Letters (Oxford: Oxford University Press) third edn, 1995, 1997, ed. Deirdre Le Faye.

Southam
Jane Austen and the Navy (Greenwich: National Maritime Museum) 2000, 2nd edn, 2005.

Notes

[1] I have to thank Sheila Kindred for letting me have the precise dates for Charles's visits to Halifax.

[2] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870,1871), ed.R.W.Chapman, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926,1951, pp.15-16.

[3] In the four-line poem 'Halifax', Kipling treats the town and port together as a pillar of Canada's naval strength, with its 'guardian prows' and 'virgin ramparts' – the military Citadel which dominated the town and harbour and which no enemy ever penetrated. The poem ends 'The Warden of the Honour of the North,/Sleepless and veiled am I': in 'The Song of the Cities', *The Seven Seas* (London: Methuen), 1896, p. 13.

[4] Sheila Kindred, 'Charles Austen: Prize Chaser and Prize Taker on the North American Station 1805-1808', *Persuasions* (published by the Jane Austen Society of North America), No.26 (2004), pp.188-194.

[5] Although few letters have survived, based on the evidence of Jane Austen's letters it seems that while the sailor brothers were away on service there was a regular exchange of correspondence with their sister: from Francis a letter came every three or four weeks; from Charles somewhat less frequently.

[6] Letter of 24 January 1809 (Letters, p.80); Letter of 24 December 1808 (*Sailor Brothers*, p.209).

[7] Letter to Cassandra at Godmersham, 25 April 1811 (Letters, p.184). Captain Simpson is almost certainly John, born 1766. He would have known Charles since he served in the North America Command at the same time, was Captain of the Cleopatra (1807-08) and known to have been in Halifax in 1809.

[8] *Mansfield Park*, p.119.

[9] Quoted in G.J. Marcus, *A Naval History of England* (London: Longmans), 1961, vol.1, p.460.

[10] *Naval Chronicle* (January-June 1813), xxix.12.

[11] Henry C.Wilkinson, *Bermuda From Sail to Steam: The History of the Island from 1784 to 1901* (London: Oxford University Press), 1973, i.313; *Hansard* (18 February 1813), vol.xxiv, col.643; *Hansard* (14 May 1813), vol.xxvi, col.182.

[12] *Naval Chronicle* (January-June 1813), xxix.80.

[13] The condition of the Squadron and the correspondence of the Commanders-in-Chief with the Admiralty are referred to in chapters 11 and 12 of Gerald S.Graham, *Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1950, sec edn 1958. All quotations are taken from these two chapters.

[14] *Naval Chronicle* (July-December 1813), xxx.41-42.

[15] Letter of 11 December 1824, quoted in Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1987, rev edn 1997, p.378.

[16] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2005, vol.57, pp.486, 488.

[17] Debate of 18 February 1813, *Hansard*, vol.xxi, col.642.

[18] Letter to Martha Lloyd, 2 September 1814 (*Letters*, pp.273-74).

[19] Letter to Anna Austen, 9-18 September 1814 *(Letters*, p.275).

[20] *Mansfield Park*, p.180.

[21] *Mansfield Park*, pp.235,236, 232.

[22] *Mansfield Park*, p.236.

[23] Quoted in Southam (2005), p.270.

[24] *Persuasion*, p.252.

[25] *Persuasion*, p.70.

[26] Quoted in Julian Gwyn*, Frigates and Foremasts: The North American Squadron in Nova Scotia Waters, 1745-1815* (Toronto: University of British Columbia Press), 2003, p.142.

[27] *Persuasion*, p.70.

[28] *Persuasion,* p.75.

[29] *Persuasion*, p.252.

[30] *Sailor Brothers*, p.114.

[31] Quoted in Southam (2005), p.320.

[32] Quoted in David Hopkinson, 'The Later Life of Sir Francis Austen', *The Jane Austen Society Report for the year 1983*, reprinted in *Jane Austen Society Collected Reports 1976-1985* (Overton: Jane Austen Society), 1989, p.256.

[33] Vol.2, ch.18.

[34] Quoted in Christopher Lloyd, *Captain Marryat and the Old Navy* (London: Longmans), 1939, p.239.

[35] *Tales of the Sea* (London: Printed for Joseph Conrad), 1919, pp.10, [5].

[36] First published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 September 1935, pp.585-86; reprinted in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth), 1950. The quotation is on p.44.