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Faire silence
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Apophatic Austen: Speaking about Silence in Austen's Fiction

ANNE TONER

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Résumés

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Cet article examine l'intérêt d'Austen pour la figure rhétorique de la prétérition, qui se produit lorsqu'un locuteur annonce qu'il ne dit pas quelque chose tout en le disant. Adolescente, Austen s'était moquée de l'utilisation de ce procédé, notamment dans « Jack and Alice », court texte de fiction inclus dans la collection du premier tome de ses manuscrits. À ce stade très précoce de sa carrière d'écrivaine, Austen explore les manières conventionnelles de rester faussement silencieux. Si le contexte dans lequel furent écrits ses textes de jeunesse est explicité ici, il est aussi montré que cette figure joue un rôle dans l'innovation technique la plus célèbre des textes de sa maturité, le développement du discours indirect libre, qui se structure pareillement autour des paradoxes de dire et ne pas dire.

In this essay I examine Austen's interest in the rhetorical figure of apophasis, which occurs when a speaker claims not to say something but, in fact, says it. As a teenager, Austen burlesqued apophatic language, most emphatically in "Jack and Alice," a short fiction included in her manuscript collection, Volume the First. At this very early stage of her writing career, Austen was scrutinizing conventionally disingenuous claims to silence. As well as providing contexts for Austen's early satire of apophasis, I will suggest that in Austen's mature fiction, apophasis plays a role in her most famed technical innovation, that is, her development of free indirect discourse which is also structured around paradoxes of telling and not telling.

Texte intégral

- 1 Silence, reticence and omission permeate the work of Jane Austen. Historically, Austen has sometimes been criticised for her restraint – for her pared-back, decorous style – and for her political silences, omitting, or submerging, an engagement with the most momentous or fraught political contexts of the day. More often, however, she has been praised for her powers of selection, the tactful and ingenious evasions in her fiction and her turning of narrative towards the silently complex inner lives of her characters.¹
- 2 My purpose in this essay is to examine a very specific aspect of Austen's silence. That is, her interest in a particular figure of silence, apophasis, which occurs when a speaker *tells* what they ostensibly are *not* telling. In fact, I would like to propose an evolution to Austen's writing of silence by means of this figure. In the early 1790s, as a teenager, Austen was composing ostentatious burlesques of apophatic language in the short fiction that she collected together in three manuscript volumes. At this very early stage of her writing career, then, Austen was scrutinising ordinarily disingenuous claims to silence. As well as providing contexts for Austen's early satire of apophasis, I will suggest that in Austen's mature fiction apophasis plays a key role in what is her most famed technical innovation, shaping – and being shaped by – her development of free indirect discourse. In other words, apophasis is instrumental in Austen's development of the representation of the mind.

What is apophasis?

- 3 Apophasis is the means "whereby an Orator seems to wa[i]ve what he would plainly insinuate" (Bailey). This is a common dictionary definition of apophasis in the eighteenth century following Nathan Bailey's much reprinted *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* of 1721.² In his 1706 *Rhetorick*, Charles Bland gives the following

example of apophasis: "I say nothing of your Roguery, your Vices and your Ill Manners; but if I should, they are known to the whole World" (49).

- 4 The rhetorical figure of apophasis is closely related to a number of other figures, most particularly paralipsis (also known as paralepsis or paraleipsis, or in its Latin name, *occupatio*).³ The distinction between these two figures is fine. While the apophasis *denies* what it does in fact declare, the paralipsis *claims to pass by* what it declares.⁴ The narrowness of this distinction means that the two figures were often acknowledged as near-identical in eighteenth-century grammars and guides to rhetoric. In his *Mystery of Rhetoric Unveiled*, first published in 1657 and reprinted in the early eighteenth century, John Smith claims that the two figures are "the same in the Matter and Sence" [sic] (124).⁵ The common terms of definition across other grammars and rhetorics often made the figures indistinguishable.⁶ Apophasis is the term I will adopt in this essay, for ease of reference, but also because the *denial* of expression is the effect that I most commonly explore.⁷
- 5 So what are the uses of such "pretended omission" (Fisher 125)? Writing on oratory in 1759, John Ward called on the second-century rhetoric of Hermogenes to explain the uses of such fake silences. Paralipsis (in this case) is used "either when things are small, but yet necessary to be mentioned; or well known, and need not be enlarged on; or ungrateful, and therefore should be introduced with caution, and not set in too strong a light" (2:84). Other eighteenth-century writers on language recognised the subterfuge or even the spiteful uses to which such figures could be put: "[i]t is a sly way of speaking or making a *Reflection* upon a Person" (Bland 50).⁸ In this respect, as well as others, apophatic language is a perennial political strategy, alive and certainly kicking to the current day.⁹
- 6 At the earliest stages of her writing career, Jane Austen saw the contradictory and sneaky nature of apophasis and exploited its comic potential. It is plausible to assume, as Margaret Anne Doody does, that Austen was well versed in the formal tradition of rhetorical tropes (165), but in any case, from a very young age, her ear was highly attuned to linguistic construction, formulation and absurdity.¹⁰ Jane Austen was a precocious writer in her childhood and teenage years. The extant writing that Austen composed between 1787 and 1793, that is from about the age of 11 to that of 17, is often surprising and even shocking for those who enjoy Austen's fiction for its decorum and restraint. The juvenile writing consists largely of burlesque pieces narrating outrageous characters and circumstances, including murder, theft, bigamy and drunkenness.
- 7 Austen's interest in apophasis can be seen in one of the earliest pieces in *Volume the First*. This is in "Jack and Alice," composed probably in 1790 when Austen was about 14.¹¹ In this story, the young Alice Johnson, like the rest of her family, has a fondness for drinking. After asking Lady Williams to tell her life story, Alice takes exception to Lady William's suggestion that a Mrs Watkins had too red a complexion. Alice, who is drunk, evidently feels that this is a personal insinuation and, after losing her temper, becomes violent.
- 8 A few days later, Lady Williams generously wishes to resume her life-story, but does so by using increasingly explicit apophatic language (here, and in the quotations that follow, I provide emphasis for apophatic constructions):

"I have as yet forborn my dear Alice to continue the narrative of my Life from an unwillingness of recalling to your Memory a scene which (since it reflects on you rather disgrace than credit) had better be forgot than remembered," Alice had already begun to colour up and was beginning to speak, when her Ladyship perceiving her displeasure continued thus.

"I am afraid my dear Girl that I have offended you by what I have just said; I assure you I do not mean to distress you by a retrospection of what cannot now be helped; considering all things I do not think you so much to blame as many People do; for when a person is in Liquor, there is no answering for what they may do."

"Madam, this is not to be borne, I insist—"

"My dear Girl don't vex yourself about the matter [...] I will now pursue my story; but I must insist upon not giving you any description of Mrs. Watkins; it would only be reviving old stories and as you never saw her, it can be nothing to you, if her forehead was too high, her eyes were too small, or if she had too much colour." (*Juvenilia* 21, underlining mine, unless otherwise noted)

Apophasis here suggests invidiousness, even maliciousness, to Lady Williams's purpose. She makes sure to remind Alice of her drunken behaviour, while denying that she would ever do such a thing; and she goes on to reiterate the originally offensive topic, though she insists upon never doing so. It is equally plausible that Austen may be wishing to show little more than Lady Williams's obliviousness to the contradictions of this common figure of speech. Rather than being malicious, in this reading, Lady Williams is obtusely insensitive.

- 9 Jane Austen becomes famed for her use of irony in her mature novels, for quietly highlighting the frictions that occur between what is said and what may be meant. Apophasis, it was repeatedly pointed out in the rhetorical tradition, was a figure of irony.¹² Samuel Johnson, whom Austen so admired,¹³ added to Nathan Bailey's standard description of apophasis: it is used by an orator "speaking ironically" (Johnson, under "apophasis"). But there may be other reasons why Austen was interested in this figure.
- 10 Thomas Gibbons's *Rhetoric; or a View of its principal tropes and figures*, published in 1767, gives us insights into the ways in which apophasis was being appreciated in the second half of the eighteenth century. Gibbons gives an extended and thorough discussion of the figure of speech and he pays attention to its *affective* power. Apophasis, Gibbons writes, is a figure of compression and evasion that paradoxically allows a more direct route to a reader's apprehension and emotive response:

By this Figure we may crowd abundance of sentiment into a small compass, and arm our discourses as with an invincible strength, by collecting and compacting our ideas; and how much is such a method to be preferred to a tedious and minute detail of circumstances, which grows languid upon the hearer by a weak and subtil diffusion? (162)

- 11 Austen is also celebrated for her compact and economic style. Gibbons's description of apophasis as allowing an abundance of sentiment to exist within "a small compass" even compares with Austen's description of her own work as "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush" (*Letters* 323, to James Edward Austen, Monday 16-Tuesday 17 December 1816). The combination of concision and affective force may well have appealed to a novelist such as Austen who wrote to entertain, but also sought to deliver moral example without tedious didacticism. This is Gibbons again on apophasis:

While they [our audience] hear us saying, *We omit such and such things, or we shall not touch upon them, or we shall not mention them*, we appear to them as if we thought the things which we pretend to wave were light and inconsiderable; when, to their astonishment (and astonishment will always be attended with a strong impression) they are evidently very weighty and momentous. Arguments delivered in this unexpected manner, fall like accidental fire from heaven, which strikes much more powerfully than the regular expanded lusters of the day. (162)

- 12 This passage resonates with the end of *Mansfield Park* when Austen dispenses quickly with Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford's adultery to concentrate on the more happy event of the betrothal of Fanny and Edmund:

Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest. (3.17, 533)

Apophatic language is subtly in play here as the narrator in fact does "dwell" on the subject she ostensibly rejects, with the hard-hitting emphasis of not only "guilt" but "misery," and the "odious" nature of the adultery plot that dispels it from the narrative.¹⁴

Austen and *The Loiterer*

- 13 Returning to the 1790s, we may discern some further possibilities for Austen's formative interest in apophysis, in particular, in her eldest brother's student publication *The Loiterer*. While at Oxford, James Austen set up a weekly periodical, starting in January 1789 and ending in March 1790. James was the principal writer, but there were other contributors from among his circle at Oxford. These included his younger brother Henry, and possibly in the 9th issue, in a satirical letter sent by a female reader named "Sophia Sentiment," his 13-year-old sister Jane.¹⁵ Whether she was directly involved or not, Jane must have known her brothers' publishing venture intimately. The periodical must have been read and much discussed in the Austen household. Austen was already writing her own fiction at this period, and *The Loiterer* may have influenced her, and she may well have influenced the composition of *The Loiterer*.

- 14 The second issue of the periodical is a case in point. *Loiterer* 2 bears comparison with many of Austen's interests. Its subject is the minimal adherence between language and truth. The issue begins in a sharply satirical style, as the writer seems to endorse the banishment of "that absurd custom" of using language to express ideas. Instead it is proposed that "Language be entitled the Art of concealing our Ideas" (*Loiterer* 2, 4; Saturday 7 February 1789). The ethical implications of such satire culminate in the essay's closing section, which imagines a modern Gazette printing the actual, self-interested views of those in political and religious authority. But in the central part of the essay, dissembling is also seen more sympathetically as a form of basic politeness and even compassion in "the common intercourse of life" (4). Apophysis initiates this part of the discussion:

[...] I shall say nothing of the numerous tribes, whose situation authorises and in some measure obliges them to a continual breach of veracity; (such as foreign ministers, ladies' maids, lawyers, and physicians; to which list I may also add lovers and their mistresses, who can claim so many precedents in favour of this practice, that they may be said to lie by prescriptive right) and only consider how little attention we all of us pay to truth in the common intercourse of life. (*Loiterer* 2, 4)

The essay is here, and elsewhere, comically self-conscious of its own forms of concealment.¹⁶ The flamboyant apophysis ("I shall say nothing of [...] foreign ministers, ladies' maids, lawyers, and physicians; [...] lovers and their mistresses") implicates its speaker in that which he criticises: not telling the truth. Dissembling is a familiar conversational play. In this case, apophysis ushers in a discussion of benign deception, leading the reader from the large-scale dissembling of foreign ministers to lovers, and to common, domestic untruths.

- 15 We dissemble, according to *Loiterer* 2, for the purposes of basic civility:

When my friend Jack Saunter enters my room on a fine day, and catches me with my hat in my hand, and one glove on, just ready to enjoy my morning's walk; he would have a strange opinion of my politeness, did I not meet him with a smile, entreat him to sit down, and express myself so wonderfully happy in his company, that one would imagine I thought myself obliged to him for depriving me of my favourite amusement; and my old acquaintance Capt. Prolix would think me a brute did I not express myself highly delighted with the account of the battle of Bunker's Hill, though he well knows I have not heard it on the most moderate computation less than two hundred times— (*Loiterer* 2, 4-5)

- 16 Some of the ideas expressed in *Loiterer* 2 are dramatised in Austen's fiction, most vividly in *Sense and Sensibility*, which was itself first composed in the 1790s though not published until 1811. Marianne Dashwood, who prides herself on being "sincere" rather than "deceitful," would have as little time for Captain Prolix as she has for the prosy Mrs Jennings or Sir John Middleton (1.10, 57). For Marianne, "it was impossible [...] to say what she did not feel" – another version of *The Loiterer*'s depiction of transparent minds. But such an idealistic commitment to veracity is not necessarily condoned. It is with Marianne's sister Elinor that the novel's moral authority largely rests, and it is Elinor who always has the "whole task of telling lies when politeness required it" (1.21, 141).¹⁷

Apophysis and inexpressibility

- 17 My next example of apophysis in Austen's early writing occurs in *A Collection of Letters*, written in 1792 and included in *Volume the Second*. In the fifth and last of the letters, Henrietta Harlton writes to her friend of a conversation she had with Lady Scudamore who tells her that Tom Musgrove is in love with her. This is Lady Scudamore speaking, in Henrietta's letter:

"In short my Love it was the work of some hours for me to persuade the poor despairing Youth that you had really a preference for him; but when at last he could no longer deny the force of my arguments, or discredit what I told him, his transports, his Raptures, his Extacies are beyond my power to describe."
'Oh! the dear Creature, cried I, how passionately he loves me! [...]' (*Juvenilia* 213)

This example suggests that in Austen's mind declarations of non-expressibility are apophatic. Lady Scudamore uses three increasingly dramatic nouns, "transports, Raptures, Extacies," to describe Tom Musgrove's response, and in doing so she makes Musgrove seem ridiculous and possibly insincere. But the tricolon also undermines ostentatiously Lady Scudamore's statement that the qualities of his reaction "are beyond my power to describe." In fact, she describes that reaction accumulatively and thrice over.

- 18 To state that an emotional experience is indescribable is a commonplace of the eighteenth century emerging out of the traditions of the sentimental and the sublime. To declare that something is indescribable is essentially apophatic: in denying expression, that which is denied is expressed. The denial intensifies the object described and thus proves descriptive. The declaration that feelings are beyond expression becomes, paradoxically then, the most affective and efficient way of expressing them. Ironically, this attempt to express the ineffable nature of an individual human

response becomes reified and reiterated in the form of *cliché*. In the year that Austen wrote a *Collection of Letters* (1792) alone, Lady Scudamore's modest expression – “beyond my power to describe” – is one that recurs in novels published by Charlotte Smith (*Desmond* 3:57), Robert Bage (*Man as he is* 1:174), and the anonymous author of *The Child of Providence* (2:120).¹⁸ Such examples are indicative of a significantly widespread practice.

- 19 Lady Scudamore's apophysis also recalls earlier satires upon the figure. *The Female Quixote* (1752), a novel which Austen read more than once, is a satire on the extravagances of seventeenth-century romances.¹⁹ Sir George Bellmour, attempting to win over the heroine Arabella, describes seeing the eyes of his first beloved, by imitating the hyperbolic style of the stories that she adores. Like Lady Scudamore's phrasing, Sir George employs a triple iteration within a structure of non-expression:

But what Words shall I find to express the Wonder, the Astonishment, and Rapture which the Sight of those bright Stars inspired me with? (*The Female Quixote* 6.1, 214)

- 20 Even in Austen's last work, the uncompleted *Sanditon*, which she was composing in 1817, the year in which she died, she continues to make explicit the apophatic paradox, characterising Sir Edward Denham as employing “all the usual Phrases [...] descriptive of the undescribable Emotions” (*Later Manuscripts* 471, underlining Austen's own).

Apophysis and the published novels

- 21 Throughout her mature fiction, Austen dramatises apophysis in the language of her characters. But alongside comic contradictions that persist from the juvenilia, Austen is also inclined to investigate the possible validity of statements of non-expressibility, even at their most conventional. It is striking that in *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, in the scene that at least seems partially to redeem Willoughby – when he describes to Elinor the reasons for his cruel behaviour to Marianne and his continuing feelings for her – he reaches for most “common” phrases of unutterability: “When the first of her's [Marianne's notes] reached me, [...] what I felt is – in the common phrase, not to be expressed” (3. 8, 368). It is as if Willoughby finally finds relief and truthfulness in “common phrase” and then “hackneyed metaphor [...] Thunderbolts and daggers!” (368), though his instinctive recourse to the overtly superficial and hyperbolic may also keep alive some scepticism about him.

- 22 It is through a particular stylistic recurrence, however, that I mean to trace Austen's deepening interest in apophysis. By comparing the comic apophysis of Lady Scudamore, in *A Collection of Letters*, with other apophatic utterances from the mature fiction that echo almost exactly its rhetorical and syntactic construction, I would like to suggest the evolution of apophysis in Austen's fiction into a means of accessing an unspoken consciousness.

- 23 There is a direct resemblance between Lady Scudamore's apophatic account of Tom Musgrove (“his transports, his Raptures, his Extacies are beyond my power to describe”) and a declaration made by Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. Crawford is telling Fanny Price of his success in securing her brother William's promotion in the navy. In doing so, he hopes that he will secure Fanny's heart:

The post was late this morning, but there has not been since, a moment's delay. How impatient, how anxious, how wild I have been on the subject, I will not attempt to describe: [...] (2.13, 346)

Henry's apophysis, just like Lady Scudamore's, is constructed by an emotionally accumulative tricolon – impatient, anxious, wild – which perfectly describes the impatience and anxiety that he deems beyond expression.

- 24 Henry Crawford – with some parallels with Willoughby – is a morally equivocal character in *Mansfield Park*, who seems genuinely to fall in love with Fanny. Much narrative drama lies in how we judge Henry in this section of the novel, where he seems close to being recuperated by his love for Fanny. The novel seriously entertains the possibility of their marriage. But Henry's apophysis also proves to be equivocal at this point. The enthusiasm and giddy excitement Henry expresses in being able to promote the interests of William Price may testify endearingly to the intensity of his feelings. At the same time, and certainly in retrospect, the phrasing is itself perhaps worryingly “wild” and illogical. This is a character who later reveals himself to have a shocking absence of self-command.

- 25 *Mansfield Park* of all the published novels is the most overtly concerned with the language of non-expression. The heroine, the shy and reticent Fanny Price, is frequently at a loss for words: “I feel much more than I can possibly express” (2.9, 304), she says. At one point, the narrator tells us with simple factuality: “her delight [in the horse that Edmund gave to her] and the addition it was ever receiving in the consideration of that kindness from which her pleasure sprung, was beyond all her words to express” (1. 4, 43). By contrast, the narrator gives an ironic edge to the apophatic language of Mary Crawford, Fanny's rival for the affections of Edmund Bertram. At one point, Mary says of Edmund: “I honour him beyond expression.” And she looked around as if longing to tell him so” (2. 10, 319).

- 26 This is brilliantly ambivalent. Mary may here express sincere admiration for Edmund. Like her brother, she uses apophysis as an impetuous gesture of affection. But the narrator also hints at thoughtlessness, even blatant insincerity in Mary, who is often reckless in the way she uses language.²⁰ More damningly, in a letter to Fanny, Mary falls back on the *clichés* of non-expression to be charming, but also to absolve herself of the effort of trying to get at some more meaningful communication for Fanny, anxious for news from her old friends: “[...] it is impossible to put an hundredth part of my great mind on paper, so I will abstain altogether, and leave you to guess what you like” (3.12, 482).

- 27 What is it then that prevents us from seeing Fanny's conventional phrases of inexpressibility as similarly problematic or contradictory? The answer, I believe, lies in Austen's narrator's taking on and sharing the burden of expression. Though Fanny says that she cannot express what she feels, the narrator will tend to express it for her, dramatising the conscientious work of Fanny's mind through free indirect discourse. The narrator explains Fanny's tendency to silence in a very interesting passage in which Fanny learns that she is to return to her family in Portsmouth:

[...] though never a great talker, she [Fanny] was always more inclined to silence when feeling most strongly. At the moment she could only thank and accept. Afterwards when familiarised with the visions of enjoyment so suddenly opened, she could speak more largely to William and Edmund of what she felt; but still there were emotions of tenderness that could not be clothed in words – The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again, would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation. To be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before, to feel affection without fear or restraint, to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her, to be at peace from all mention of the Crawfords, safe from every look

which could be fancied a reproach on their account! — This was a prospect to be dwelt on with a fondness that could be but half acknowledged. (3. 6, 426-27)

This passage evolves into free indirect discourse, in which we are given access to Fanny's thoughts. The unfolding emotional intensity of these thoughts is signalled by repetitions: "To be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many [...] loved by all [...] to feel affection [...] to feel herself the equal [...] to be at peace [...] safe." But fascinatingly, free indirect discourse is itself presented as part of an apophatic construction. The narrator claims that there existed in Fanny "emotions of tenderness that could not be clothed in words," and yet immediately goes on to clothe in words those very emotions. The constituent parts of apophasis are layered between the *denial* of expression in dialogue and the narration's subsequent expression of that which has been denied: "but still there were emotions of tenderness that could not be clothed in words — The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures [...]"

28 Nevertheless, at the end of this passage the narrator continues to insist that Fanny dwelt on this prospect of domestic happiness with a fondness that could be but "half acknowledged." Are the feelings that have been clothed in words, then, a full acknowledgement of Fanny's fondness to which we are privy, or do they still remain only a "half-acknowledgement" of it? Is it that we, like William and Edmund, will only ever know a part of what she feels? This is irresolvable. Free indirect discourse (by being free of attribution as well as indirectly reported) disallows any absolute knowledge as to whether the words expressed are to be understood as quoted in any sense or whether they are to be understood only as an approximation. Akin to apophasis, then, free indirect discourse also manages, in its very essence, to be both expression and its denial.²¹

Apophasis and triple iteration

29 As we have seen, Austen more than once constructs apophasis by means of a tricolon. Such triple iteration, as used in the direct speech of Lady Scudamore and Henry Crawford, accompanies claims to inexpressibility for the purposes of comic contradiction in the first instance, and of a more complicated irony in the second. However, Austen also employs the tricolon in her mature fiction as part of an apophatic structure so as to indicate sensation and thought. A comparison of two strikingly similar passages, one from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and one from *Emma* (1816), shows how the triple emphasis, by which Austen so often constructs apophasis, becomes subtly implicated in the evolution of free indirect discourse.

30 Austen seems cautious about using apophasis in the important scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Elizabeth reads and responds to Darcy's letter. As Elizabeth's opinions begin to be overturned, we twice come close to the rhetorical figure. While wanting to point out the difficulty of defining what Elizabeth felt, the narrator seems concerned to avoid the suggestion that any such definition is *impossible*. An adverb ("scarcely") tempers inexpressibility as Elizabeth reads the letter: "Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined" (2.13, 226). Shortly after this, we learn that Elizabeth's feelings become "more difficult of definition," again falling short of the inexpressible. A tricolon is then deployed to define those feelings. Difficulty of expression is a prompt, once again, for a triple iteration:

Her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror oppressed her. She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming. "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!" (156)

What seems important at this point in *Pride and Prejudice* is the emergence of ratiocinative process, as Elizabeth has to confront her prejudices. The tricolon summarises and abstracts Elizabeth's response ("even" strongly suggests that external summary), while in its syntactic shape it suggests, through repetition, the emotional disturbance and intensity that Elizabeth experiences. Austen keeps Elizabeth's feelings abstracted while intimating something of their effect upon her. The reporting of Elizabeth's thought issues in her own direct speech, as she exclaims: "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!"²² More broadly, the value given to processes of thought in *Pride and Prejudice*, above impressions or prejudices, seems to result in some resistance to expressions of inexpressibility. Inexpressibility is later acknowledged as truistic and requiring self-consciousness, as indicated by the knowing adverb, "indeed": "She [Elizabeth] dreaded seeing Wickham again [...]. The comfort to *her*, of the regiment's approaching removal, was indeed beyond expression" (2.16, 246).

31 Remarkably close to this passage from *Pride and Prejudice* is the conclusion to the expedition to Box Hill in *Emma*, where Emma departs alone for home, having thoughtlessly humiliated Miss Bates and having been reprimanded by Mr. Knightley. Again we meet a heroine who has been shocked out of her complacencies. Again the heroine's process of thought is constructed first by reflecting upon whether her feelings *can* be expressed, followed by the employment of a tricolon which starts to express them:

She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed — almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! (3. 7, 409)

While the two passages are almost identical in some respects, there are subtle differences in presenting inner states. First of all, in *Emma*, Austen permits apophasis: Emma is "vexed beyond what could have been expressed," even if her vexation has some visible manifestation. Austen allows, in other words, as she does in *Mansfield Park*, inexpressibility to be a viable state, but only for it to be contradicted immediately by a passage of increasingly vivid internal reflection. The summary quality of the tricolon in *Pride and Prejudice* ("Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror oppressed her") is modulated. The shift from abstract nouns to adjectives, from a passive construction to an active one (with an explicit reference to what Emma "felt"), makes Emma more involved in an unfolding sequence of emotions — "Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life" — within which there are possible intimations of Emma's own verbalisation in an indirect form ("mortified," "in her life"). The passage repeats the trajectory towards exclamation, but this is an inner exclamation, in the form of free indirect discourse: "How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!"

32 The emotional extravagance of Lady Scudamore's tricolon, "transports [...] Raptures [...] Extacies", and to a lesser degree Henry Crawford's "impatient, anxious, wild," is transformed when relocated from direct speech into narration. In the narrative passages quoted above, the emotive tricolon that accompanies difficult expression is not so much hyperbole, rather a means of scrutinising and articulating acute inner states. The differences between the passages from *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* do not need to be understood necessarily as exemplifying an evolutionary paradigm. Austen has her reasons for presenting each passage as she does. However, by the time when

she composes *Emma*, free indirect discourse plays a much more extensive part in her writing. In both novels, the tricolon serves as a bridge between the narrator's and the heroine's views, but in *Emma* its formulation works much more to bring together the character's and the narrator's viewpoints, anticipating and even invoking the free indirect discourse into which the passage develops.

33

In free indirect discourse, Austen finds a middle way between absurd or indulgent attempts to vocalise extreme emotion and a reliance upon *cliché* to avoid the effort of expression. Austen endorses moments of inexpressibility in human experience, but encourages inner scrutiny to accompany them. While free indirect discourse contradicts the inexpressible, it also enforces it, as expression remains private and internal, and also removed, in the indirect form, from direct presentation of speech or thought. The comic contradictions of the early fiction are transformed into a complex narrative strategy that voices and leaves unvoiced at one and the same time. Apophasis, with its paradoxical claim for expressing that which is not expressed, provided Austen – as this sample of her uses of the figure suggests – with a structure to speak of silence and yet intimate something beyond.²³

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Notes

- 1 These matters of inclusion and exclusion, silence and suggestion, have generated a vast quantity of contemporary critical literature, and have been particularly important in feminist and postcolonial studies. The failings and opportunities of reticence and silence have been fundamental, however, throughout the history of the reception of Jane Austen's fiction: from Charlotte Brontë's cataloguing, in private letters, of the passions she deemed to be *absent* from Austen's fiction *Critical Heritage* 1:126-28 and Arnold Bennett's criticism in the 1920s of Austen's "tiny world," *Critical Heritage* 2:288 to Mary Augustus Ward's suggestive praise regarding the expansiveness of "that self-restraint, that concentration, which is the larger half of style," *Critical Heritage* 2:187.
- 2 This definition is repeated in Thomas Sheridan's *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) and its later editions. See the same definition of apophasis in *A New English Dictionary*, 1759. Bailey's *Dictionary* went into twenty-eight editions before 1800 (Alston 5:16-22).
- 3 Other related figures include cataphasis and parasiopeisis.
- 4 See for instance, Green 62: "Apophasis, or a denying, which cries I do not say, when at the same time it doth: and *Paraleipsis*, or Praeterition, which cries I let it pass when at the same time it mentions."
- 5 Smith writes that the figures may only differ "in the manner of speaking" (124) and seems to understand the difference in speaking as the Preterition or Paralipsis not necessarily inflecting irony. Smith's work ran to ten editions from 1657 to 1721 (Alston 6:16-17). I refer to the tenth and last printed edition. On the closeness of the paraleipsis and apophasis, see also Shaw 252.
- 6 The characteristic of "omission" often serves to define both apophasis and paralipsis. For example, Anne Fisher's popular *A Practical New Grammar* includes the paraleipsis but not the apophasis, defining the former as "a pretended Omission of some Things purely to make an Advantage by reciting them, and implies a Design upon the Hearers" (125). Thomas Gibbons includes apophasis but not paraleipsis, describing it as "a Figure by which an Orator pretends to conceal or omit what he really and in fact declares" (157).
- 7 Furthermore, apophasis is the favoured term in the popular dictionaries with which I began this section. Neither Bailey nor Sheridan lists paraleipsis or its variants.
- 8 Stefano Guazzo writes of speakers who employ *occupatio* as able to "say the most spiteful Things their Malice can invent" (53).
- 9 The Internet provides many up-to-date examples of *ad hominem* attacks by means of "apophasis" in political rhetoric. For a broader discussion of the uses of apophatic language in contemporary American politics, see Crosby.
- 10 Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Ostade points out the uncertainty regarding the extent to which English spelling books and also, by implication, English grammars, would have been held in the Austen household, given that Austen's father would have taught his students Latin, not English (110).
- 11 Conjectural dates for the composition of individual pieces within the juvenilia mentioned in this essay are taken from *Juvenilia* xxviii-ix.
- 12 See for example, Bland 49; Smith 143; and *A New English Dictionary* (under "paralipsis").
- 13 Austen's brother, Henry, was the first to note this in his "Biographical Notice of the Author" that accompanied the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818: "Her favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse" (141).
- 14 In precise rhetorical terms, this example is closer to paralipsis in claiming to pass by what is nonetheless emphasised.
- 15 Peter Sabor provides a summary of the debate regarding the attribution of Sophia Sentiment's letter in *The Loiterer* to Jane Austen, in appendix D, *Juvenilia* 356-61.
- 16 Other instances of self-consciousness are apparent in the conventional expression "not to mention" promptly intensified by a dig at writers of prose, thus inevitably inviting a question regarding the truth status of *Loiterer* 2 itself: "not to mention Poets, who have always claimed exemption from her [Truth's] rules; even plain scribblers of prose pay so little regard to her laws [...]" (*Loiterer* 2, 5).
- 17 Li-Ping Geng makes the connection between this issue of *The Loiterer* and *Sense and Sensibility* in Elinor's shielding of Edward's and Lucy's reputations from the "morally naïve Marianne" (591).
- 18 It recurs identically in Bage and in *The Child of Providence*. Smith uses another common, near-identical formulation: "My dear Bethel, I expect your next letter with impatience, that is beyond the power of words to describe."
- 19 "'Alphonsine' did not do. [...] and we changed it for the 'Female Quixotte,' which now makes our evening amusement; to me a very high one, as I find the work quite equal to what I remembered it." (*Letters* 115-6; to Cassandra Austen, Wednesday 7 – Thursday 8 January 1807).
- 20 An example is Mary's disparagement of the sincerity of collective devotional practices within a house such as Sotherton, and her accompanying disrespect towards the clergy. Mary is unaware of Edmund's prospective ordination and fails to consider even that, as a second son, this might be his destined profession (1. 9, 101-02).
- 21 This doubleness – of speaking and not speaking – also chimes with the two distinct theories of free indirect discourse: the "dual voice" theory in which "voice" is apprehended in free indirect discourse and the "unspeakability" of free indirect discourse (or represented speech and thought) as maintained by Ann Banfield.
- 22 On thought report in fiction in relation to speech categories such as free indirect discourse, Alan Palmer is instructive (see especially chapter 3, 53-86).
- 23 I would like to acknowledge Michal Beth Dinkler's use of the same phrase, "Speaking of Silence," which I use in my title, in the title of her 2004 essay "Speaking of Silence: Speech and Silence as a Subversive Means of Power in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*."

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Auteur

Anne Toner

Anne Toner is a fellow and College lecturer in English at Trinity College, Cambridge. She is the author of *Ellipsis in English Literature: Signs of Omission* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and is currently working on a book about aspects of Jane Austen's style.
ach18[at]cam.ac.uk

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