



The Influence of Naval Captain Charles Austen's North American Experiences on *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*

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THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES of Jane Austen's naval characters sparkle with animation and authenticity. In *Persuasion* we meet Captain Frederick Wentworth, who has become very wealthy by the capture of naval prize and is known for his "great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy" (26). In company is his sister, the good-humored Mrs. Croft, who makes a strong impression as the eminently practical naval wife of the likable Rear-Admiral Croft. In *Mansfield Park* Midshipman William Price delivers spirited narratives, which are "proof of . . . [his naval] knowledge, energy, courage and cheerfulness" (236). These characterizations evince a surprising knowledge of sea-going life for someone who lived deep in the English countryside. So how did Jane Austen come by the information she needed to create these naval figures?

One of her most important sources was her brother Charles, who, as an officer in the British navy during the Napoleonic wars, was stationed in North America for over six years between 1805 and 1811. His naval expertise and exploits cruising the Atlantic Ocean and capturing prize vessels, his love match to the beautiful young Fanny Palmer of Bermuda, and his social and professional life with "brother officers" all find echoes in *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*. What Jane Austen knew about Charles Austen's distant naval world proved to be catalytic when she created her memorable portraits of Captain Wentworth, Admiral and Mrs. Croft, and Midshipman William Price.

During the six and a half years he was away from England, Charles was posted to the Royal Navy's North American station, an extensive ocean area

that stretched from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Cape Canaveral, Florida.¹ Charles wrote frequently to Jane, and she faithfully replied. Although all but one of Charles's letters home from this period are lost, there is indirect evidence from Jane's letters that he reported regularly to his family about his experiences.² For the more public details of his career, the Austen family no doubt consulted the *London Gazette*, the *Naval Chronicle*, and *Steele's Naval List*, publications brimming full of news about naval postings, promotions, and prizes.³ Given these sources of information, it is a reasonable assumption that Jane and her family were well informed about Charles's naval milieu, his personal and his professional life. Jane was especially fond of her "particular little brother," Charles (21 January 1799). She would be keen to know whom he had met, what he was doing, the nature of his disappointments, and the dimensions of his achievements.⁴

CHARLES AUSTEN AND *PERSUASION*'S CAPTAIN FREDERICK
WENTWORTH: THE PRIZE MONEY THEME

Charles Austen arrived on the North American station in January 1805. He was a keen young naval officer, full of energy and promise. He had recently been commissioned commander of the *Indian* (18 guns), a new sloop of war then building in Bermuda. Given that the Napoleonic war was still in progress, Charles's service at sea on the *Indian*, and later on the *Swiftsure* (74 guns) and the *Cleopatra* (32 guns), primarily included cruising for trade protection, transporting troops, and searching American ships for British deserters. Although much of this work was routine and even tedious, Charles and his brother officers were alert to the chances of apprehending vessels as naval prize and excited by the prospect of enriching themselves with prize money. His squadron regularly made chase and sometimes captured privateers, larger armed vessels belonging to France and her allies or neutral vessels carrying trade goods, munitions, or contraband to or from foreign ports. Should the detained vessel prove to be "good and lawful prize," and should no successful appeal reverse the initial judgment of the Vice Admiralty court, the capturing captain(s) could expect to receive three eighths share of the prize money.⁵

During 1805-1811 Charles and his co-captors brought claims against at least twelve vessels before the Vice Admiralty courts in Halifax and Bermuda.⁶ Any information relating to these prize cases, to monies earned and other profits anticipated, would have been of keen interest to the family. So it is not surprising that the luck and logistics of prize taking was material Jane would come to use in a fictional context. For example, quite early in *Persuasion*, Fred-

erick Wentworth enjoys regaling the Musgrove family with details of his exploits at sea and his consequent financial success. While commander of the “dear old *Asp*,” he served in the West Indies and, “after taking privateers enough to be very entertaining, . . . had the good luck, in [his] passage home . . . , to fall in with the very French frigate [he] wanted” (66), which he brought as prize into Plymouth, a very impressive capture for a sloop. Next came his posting into the frigate *Laconia*, a fortuitous assignment, for “[h]ow fast I made money in her,” explains the voluble Wentworth (67). With these descriptive tags, Jane Austen succinctly emphasizes that Frederick Wentworth is a confident, competent, and *rich* young naval officer.

Arguably it was Jane’s appreciation of Charles’s involvement with naval prizes during this period that inspired some features of Captain Frederick Wentworth’s professional profile. Both men initially enjoyed the pursuit of possible prize vessels as commanders of their own small sloops, “dear old *Indian*” for Charles (as he referenced her in later diaries) and “dear old *Asp*” for Wentworth. Both were on foreign stations at the time these activities began (1805–1806); both were about the same age and serving their first postings as commanding officers. Both were well liked by their officers and men. Both were eventually posted into frigates, Charles to the *Cleopatra* (32 guns) in 1810 and Wentworth to the *Laconia* in 1808. Both captured prizes in the company of fellow officers and were keen that their colleagues should also enjoy the profits. However, key to Wentworth’s persona is the fact that he acquired great riches in prize money. In the real world, Charles had no such luck. As a point of record, Charles was owed £539.14.11 in prize money from the French privateer *La Jeune Estelle*, and he probably received about £705 from favorable settlements in six other cases. This made his total income £1,200 at best, a far cry from the fortunate Wentworth’s impressive accumulation of £25,000.

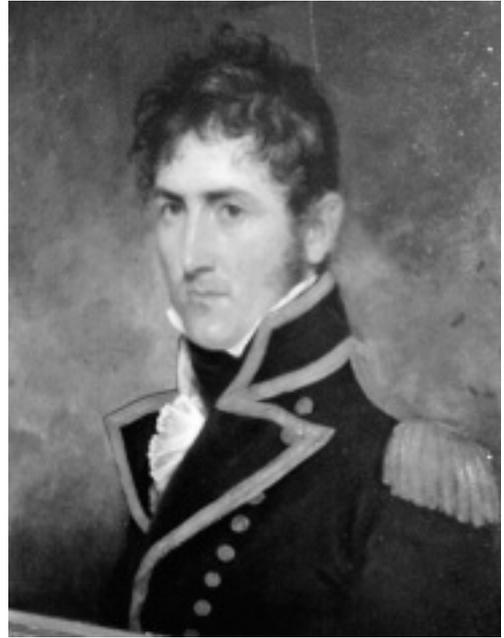
ALL Persons who were actually on board His Majesty's Sloop of War INDIAN, CHARLES JOHN AUSTEN, Esquire, Commander, and are entitled to share for the French Schooner JEUNE ESTELLE and Cargo, captured on the 19th June, 1808, and condemned in the Vice Admiralty Court of these Islands, prize to His Majesty's said Sloop, are requested to take

NOTICE

That a Distribution of the Nett Proceeds, of the said Vessel and Cargo will take place on Wednesday the 28th instant; all Persons who do not then appear are informed that attendance will be given at the Compting House of the Subscribers, in St. George's, from 10 to 2 o'clock every Tuesday and Friday, until the 28th of December next, unless the whole should be previously discharged.

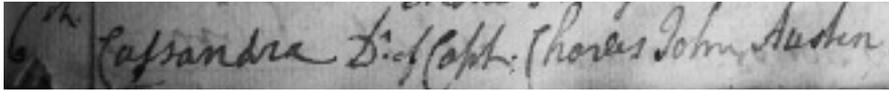
EDWARD GOODRICH,
ARCHIBALD SHEDDEN,
GEORGE REDMOND HULBERT, } Agents.
St. George's, Sept. 24, 1808.

Pay out notice for Charles Austen's prize capture, La Jeune Estelle, from the Bermuda Gazette.



Fanny Austen and Captain Charles Austen, painted by Robert Field in Halifax, c. 1809-10.

Yet if Charles was not the partial model for a wealthy prize taker, perhaps another of his brother officers on the station was.⁷ A strong candidate is Captain Robert Simpson, who had amassed a fortune of £30,000 in prize money between 1804 and 1808, when he suddenly died. Jane had met Robert's brother Captain John Simpson RN at a London party given by her brother Henry in April 1811. In order to identify John for Cassandra's benefit, she described him as being "brother to *the* Cap^t Simpson" (25 April 1811). What was it about Robert Simpson which might explain why his name struck a chord with the Austen sisters? Perhaps they knew of Simpson's lucky captures, his sudden riches, his unexpected demise in Halifax—factors which had a distinctively romantic flavor. Maybe the drama of his personal story stayed in Jane Austen's mind. Did she then contemplate what difference a sizable fortune could make in a young naval officer's prospects should he live to enjoy his largesse? Was she prompted to ascribe such a circumstance to her fictional Captain Wentworth? Becoming wealthy due to prize money is important to *Persuasion's* plot because Frederick's fortune ensures his social mobility and positions him to once more seek Anne Elliot's affections.



Baptismal entry for Cassandra Austen, eldest daughter of Charles and Fanny Austen, Register of the Baptisms of the Rev. Robert Stanser, St. Paul's Church, Halifax.

CHARLES'S NAVAL WIFE FANNY AND *PERSUASION*'S MRS. CROFT

Charles's lovely young wife Fanny spent time with him at sea.⁸ She was well known to Jane at least through Charles, if not also directly, so conceivably she was a source of inspiration for Jane as she sketched in the details of her fictional naval wife, Mrs. Croft. Who was Fanny, and what do we know about her life with Charles?

Frances Fitzwilliam Palmer (Fanny), the youngest daughter of John Palmer, the former Attorney General of Bermuda, was only fifteen when she met Charles. They fell deeply in love, became engaged, and were married in St. Peter's Church, Bermuda on 19 May 1807. The couple's land base was St. George's, Bermuda, where Fanny awaited Charles's return from regular cruising assignments and made a home for their young daughters, Cassandra Esten, born in December 1808, and Harriet Jane, in February 1810. Fortunately, some of her letters written from Halifax to her sister Esther in Bermuda are extant, and they reveal Fanny's own perceptions about being a naval wife.⁹

First and foremost, we learn from these letters that Fanny was solicitous for Charles's comfort and well being. When they were together in Halifax, touchingly small details concerned her, such as the adequacy of his supply of Bermuda arrowroot, and the fact that she forgot to pack his Masonic apron (17 June 1810). Secondly, her words convey the picture of a popular couple who thoroughly enjoyed each other's company. Charles had a new prominence in Halifax on account of his promotion to the rank of post captain and the command of the *Swiftsure*, flag ship of his commander-in-chief, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren. Fanny wrote enthusiastically about several elegant social functions they attended together: "a splendid ball [at Government House] which we were all at," where she won \$9 at the game Commerce, and "a very pleasant evening party at Mrs. Belcher's," which included as guests Lady Warren, wife of Sir John, and Mrs. Prevost, wife of the Lt. Governor. "The gentlemen joined us in the evening and escorted us home. . . . It was very agreeable," declared the evidently delighted Fanny (17 June 1810). Charles



HMS Cleopatra (32 guns). Charles was her captain 1810-1811. Cleopatra was the very first frigate he commanded.

and Fanny shared other happy experiences while together on shore, for on 6 October 1809 ten-month-old Cassandra Esten Austen was christened in St. Paul's Church by the naval chaplain, the Rev. Robert Stanser. In consequence of this ceremony, Jane and Cassandra Austen, who was also a godparent *in absentia*, had the distinction of a niece christened in far away Halifax, Nova Scotia.

It is very likely that Jane Austen's sensitivities to Fanny Austen's life as a naval wife influenced some aspects of her portrait of Mrs. Croft in *Persuasion*. Certainly there were some key differences between the two women. Fanny was a young, beautiful, and relatively new naval wife; in contrast, Mrs. Croft is middle-aged, weather-beaten, but confident and experienced in her job of supporting Admiral Croft. Yet the similarities between Fanny and Mrs. Croft are striking. On the point of travel patterns, both Fanny and Mrs. Croft lived aboard their husband's vessels. Fanny made a number of trips with Charles between Bermuda and Halifax on both the *Indian* and the *Cleopatra* and a single passage from Bermuda to Halifax on the *Swiftsure*. In addition she made a transatlantic voyage home to England on the *Cleopatra* in June 1811. The fictional Mrs. Croft lived on five of the Admiral's vessels and crossed the Atlantic four times. In ascribing these particular transatlantic voyages to Mrs. Croft, Jane Austen includes in *Persuasion* a reference to the North American station, even implying that the Crofts had probably been based at Halifax and Bermuda.

Austen biographer Park Honan argues that Jane Austen admired her sister-in-law's "unfussiness and gallant good sense," and he reasons that it was these aspects of Fanny's character that she drew on for her portrayal of Mrs. Croft (Honan 331). A look at Fanny's letters reveals some evidence for Honan's contention. Essentially, Fanny was disposed to make the best of a situation. Her letters from Halifax paint the picture of a young naval wife doing her best to support her husband in relation to his duties on shore and to ensure their family's domestic comfort as well as she can. This pattern continued in

subsequent years.¹⁰ Jane Austen's knowledge of Fanny's close care of Charles no doubt inspired her portrayal of the empathetic and practical aspects of Mrs. Croft's relationship with her husband.

Both Fanny and Mrs. Croft were most content when they were sharing their husbands' lives. Fanny's Halifax letters speak of her great pleasure in being with Charles. Likewise, Mrs. Croft and the Admiral were a "particularly attached and happy" couple (63), be they occupied in driving their gig near Kellynch or enjoying the company of naval friends in Bath. Yet a subtext of anxiety runs through Fanny's letters. When Charles was taking troops to Portugal in the summer of 1810, a worried Fanny wrote to Bermuda telling of "Captain Austen's sudden departure, and the uncertainty of his returning." She agonized that "if he is not here by the middle of September, I shall give him up" (4 August 1810). Fanny had good reason to be alarmed as the delivery of troops so close to a battle ground of the bloody Peninsular War bespoke of particular dangers. In a later letter, she wryly admits that she is like Lady Warren, "never happy but when she is with her husband" (4 October 1813). Similarly Mrs. Croft, in conversation with Mrs. Musgrove about a winter she was left on shore, reminisced that it was the only time that she "ever really suffered in body or mind. . . . [In fact she] lived in perpetual fright at that time" (71). According to Mrs. Croft, "the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we were together, . . . there was nothing to be feared" (70).

On 4 October 1813 Fanny wrote to her brother-in-law James Christie Esten in Bermuda, reporting that "Charles is very anxious to be in active service just now [and] . . . should he be fortunate enough to get a frigate before the American War is over he will certainly endeavour to go out to that station and has promised I shall accompany him." Jane may well have known of Charles and Fanny's hopes that he would be posted again to the North American station. Evidence of Fanny's strong desire to be with or at least near her husband, wherever he might be deployed, may have reinforced Jane's idea that this characteristic was a particularly attractive one to assign to her sailor's wife, Mrs. Croft.

Finally, an echo of Charles and Fanny's devotion to each other occurs in another context in *Persuasion*. Recall that Captain Benwick, Wentworth's lieutenant on the *Laconia*, had been engaged to the beautiful young Fanny Harville. He is made desolate by her death while he is at sea and is in deep mourning when the reader first meets him. A similar catastrophic event had shattered Fanny and Charles's relationship when suddenly in early September 1814 she died from complications following the birth of their short-lived daughter Elizabeth. This unexpected death of a sister-in-law, who was only twenty-four,

occurred in the period before Jane began to write *Persuasion*. She was touched by Fanny's tragic demise and the deep effect it had on the grieving Charles. Her closeness to this event may explain her characterization of the emotionally devastated Captain Benwick in chapters eleven and twelve of *Persuasion*.

ADMIRAL SIR JOHN BORLASE WARREN AND
PERSUASION'S ADMIRAL CROFT

Charles and Fanny Austen had a particularly close relationship with Admiral John Warren and Lady Warren. Charles referred warmly to them, reporting to Cassandra in 1808 that "the Admiral and his family arrived here [Bermuda] and . . . I find them as friendly as ever" (25 December 1808). Fanny also appreciated their good will, writing to her sister that "Lady Warren and the Admiral are both extremely kind and attentive to me and are fond of my little Cassy" (12 June 1810).¹¹ John Warren also had a considerable public profile in England. The Austen family probably knew of the humanitarian attitudes expressed in his book, *A View of the Navy Force of Great Britain* (London, 1791), where Warren had decried the excesses of the Press Gangs; they could have read the highly complimentary article about his personal and professional virtues in the *Naval Chronicle* (1800) and from the *Chronicle* learned of his substantial accumulation of prize money. Jane, in particular, had an unexpected source of information about Admiral Warren's earlier naval prowess. His exploits had merited a reference in the final lines of the epilogue of Inchbald's translation of *Lovers' Vows* (the infamous play rehearsed in *Mansfield Park*). The relevant passage reads: "As I live, there's an end of the French and their navy— / Sir John Warren has sent the Brest fleet to Old Davy" (*MP* 538).

Moreover, Jane had reason to take more than a passing interest in Admiral Warren. In addition to the professional relationship of the Admiral to Charles as captain of his flag ship, Sir John Warren had showed Charles a degree of personal concern. He had secured Charles's crucial promotion to post captain; he and Lady Warren had encouraged Fanny and young Cassy when Charles was away on mission in the summer of 1810. These special points of contact may have become the substance of stories and anecdotes when Charles and Fanny finally returned to England in the summer of 1811. Given this myriad of connections, it looks as if Jane Austen borrowed from what she knew about Admiral Warren when she developed her portrait of Admiral Croft.

From Charles, she could have known that Warren was open-minded, kind, liked small children, and was particularly empathetic and courteous in his treatment of the officers under his command, as well as their wives and

children.¹² Similarly, Admiral Croft is a sympathetic and caring individual. He good-naturedly amuses the demanding Musgrove children. He is considerate of Anne's feelings regarding her family's departure from Kellynch, and he shows a kindly and genuine interest in her well-being on the occasions he meets her. According to Anne Elliot, "his goodness of heart . . . [was] irresistible" (127). That Admiral Croft is rich through the receipt of prize money is important for the story line of *Persuasion*. Without such largesse, he could not have afforded the rental of Kellynch Hall. Yet his tenancy there is crucial to the plot of the novel, for the Crofts's presence is instrumental to the reunion of Anne and Frederick. Thus another feature shared by Admiral Warren and Admiral Croft, personal wealth, has a role in the novel.

Although there are some detectable parallels between Admiral Warren and Admiral Croft, the same is scarcely true of their wives. Lady Warren's forceful personality contrasts sharply with the diplomatic tact of *Persuasion*'s Mrs. Croft. According to Fanny's letters, when the *Swiftsure* arrived in Halifax, Lady Warren required Fanny's company for ten days of "receiving and returning of a number of stupid visits" (10 June 1810). She subsequently took Fanny off to a confirmation service, where a dutiful Fanny, so as not to displease her companion, was confirmed alongside Lady Warren (17 June 1810). In contrast, Mrs. Croft is subtle in her "management" of personal relations, whether she is out driving with the Admiral or quietly arranging their domestic comforts.

However, Lady Warren was good-hearted, and her interest and generosity in relation to Charles's family may have inspired a small detail in *Mansfield Park*. Recall that Fanny Price's late sister Mary had greatly treasured her one elegant possession, a silver knife, "the gift of her good godmother, old Mrs. Admiral Maxwell" (387). Jane conceivably knew of Lady Warren's kindnesses to young Cassandra Austen both in Halifax and even later in England when Lady Warren ordered clothes for young Cassy (AUS/109:11 January 1817). Thus an Admiral's wife's thoughtfulness finds a place in the novel.

CHARLES'S FELLOW OFFICERS AND *PERSUASION*'S WENTWORTH, HARVILLE, AND BENWICK

Charles's fellow officers on the station included a number of able and interesting men, who shared with him bonds of friendship and profession. References to captains Sir John Beresford, Thomas Byam, Edward Hawker, Henry Jane, Fred Hickey, Sir Robert Laurie, Robert Simpson, John Simpson, Gustavus Stuppert, Samuel John Pechell, Lord James Townshend, and William Mends can be found in Austen family letters and in later years in Charles's

personal diary. Fanny's letters from Halifax confirm some of these connections. She speaks of "my very great favourite Captain Pechell" (14 August 1810, her italics) and "Lord James" (Townshend), both of whom she encountered there in 1810. Fred Hickey of the *Atalante* brought her some straw plaits from Bermuda (4 August 1810); the *Indian* arrived in port bringing Fanny tidings that the *Swiftsure* had been sighted near the Western Isles (Azores) on its way back to Halifax (12 August 1810). Such were the kindnesses Charles's brother officers showed to his naval wife. Recall that Frederick Wentworth would "'assist any brother officer's wife that [he] could.'" Such actions were "'[a]ll merged in [his] friendship'" (69).

Some evidence of these enduring friendships must have come Jane Austen's way and arguably influenced her when she wrote about the close links among Captains Wentworth, Harville, and Benwick. This bonding among brother officers is an important theme in *Persuasion*. Anne Elliot greatly admires the loyalty, generosity, and support that these men show each other. That Captain Wentworth has friends of this calibre is a mark very much in his favor and indicative of the quality of his character. For Jane Austen this theme of naval solidarity is particularly important, for she wanted to highlight the general character of the navy, "their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness" (99).

Of all Charles's brother officers from this period, Edward Hawker was his closest personal friend. They had first met in Bermuda in early 1805 when both men were ashore for many months awaiting the readiness of their vessels for sea. Hawker quickly became a family friend. He was a godparent for Charles and Fanny's first-born daughter Cassandra, and he would have taken a kindly interest in Fanny's well-being when she was alone in Halifax during the summer of 1810. Later, when Charles needed a friend most, when he was devastated by Fanny's sudden death, Hawker was a loyal and sensitive supporter.¹³ Such empathetic concern is reminiscent of Frederick Wentworth's response when he volunteered to deliver the news of Fanny Harville's death to Benwick and stayed on board to support his friend in his grief.

There is yet another way that news from Charles about his fellow officers would have been of interest to Jane. No doubt she heard from Charles that relations between England and America had been particularly tense since June 1807, when one of his fellow officers, Captain Humphreys of the *Leopard* (50 guns) had mounted an unprovoked attack on the unsuspecting US *Chesapeake* (36 guns) over the question of British deserters sailing on American vessels. Jane Austen's awareness of the growing threat of an American war and its

possible consequences for her naval brothers may be responsible for the chilly touch at the end of *Persuasion* where we are told that “the dread of a future war, [was] all that could dim [Anne’s] sunshine” (252).

ECHOES OF CHARLES’S NAVAL LIFE AND *MANSFIELD PARK*

No character in *Mansfield Park* bears so clear and compelling evidence of influences from Charles’s naval life as do Captain Wentworth and the Crofts in *Persuasion*. But as Brian Southam, author of the important book *Jane Austen and the Navy*, has speculated, “Charles’s return to England [in 1811] 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*” (“North America” 26). Certainly several specific biographic details pertaining to Charles did find their way into the novel. We are told that when William Price arrives in Portsmouth to join his new ship the *Thrush*, the vessel lies at Spithead close to the *Cleopatra*. By including this small contextual detail in her description of the Spithead anchorage, Jane Austen draws on another feature of her brother’s North American career, for Charles was captain of the *Cleopatra* from autumn 1810 until he brought her home with the convoy to Spithead in June 1811. Additionally, William Price makes the gift of a “very pretty amber cross” (254) to his beloved sister Fanny, who is delighted to be wearing it for a ball given in her honor by her uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram. This particularly pleasing detail echoes an instance of Charles Austen’s generosity not too long before he went out to the North American station. On account of a modest windfall of £30 prize money, the then Lt. Charles Austen was able to make a special gift of topaze crosses with gold chains to his sisters. Jane enthusiastically confided to Cassandra that they would be “unbearably fine” and protested in mock horror, “of what avail is it to take prizes if he lays out the produce in presents to his Sisters” (26–27 May 1801).

OTHER NAVAL ECHOES THAT JANE AUSTEN’S CONTEMPORARY READERS MIGHT DETECT

Since many of Jane Austen’s contemporary readers were navy-savvy, some of her naval references in the novels would have prompted additional associations, which her modern audience is not well placed to appreciate. Consider again, for example, the mention of the *Cleopatra* in *Mansfield Park*. In the spring of 1805 this vessel had fallen prey to a French attack and was captured. Weeks later she and her captor, *Ville de Milan* (38 guns) were retaken by the brave action of the *Leander* (50 guns). These dramatic events surrounding

Cleopatra's restoration to the squadron and the valor of the *Leander* were well publicized in Britain. This event touched Charles, for he contributed £3 to the benevolent fund set up on the North American station "for the relief of the widows and orphans of those brave fellows . . . killed on *Cleopatra*" (*Royal Nova Scotia Gazette*, 16 May 1805). Jane's early readers, including Charles and the Austen family, who knew of *Cleopatra's* history, might well have experienced a flush of patriotic feelings when they found reference to her in *Mansfield Park*. For Charles there were additional associations as his vessel the *Indian* had been in company with the *Cleopatra* in the autumn of 1805 when they had co-captured the prizes *Dydden* and *Ocean*.¹⁴



Jane Austen's characters and plots in her naval novels resonate with acquaintance with the lives and experiences of Charles Austen, Fanny Austen, and their associates on the North American station. The question remains: what is gained from exploring these connections? First, it is highly entertaining to juxtapose facets of Charles Austen's naval world with elements of Jane Austen's naval novels. David Waldron Smithers, author of *Jane Austen in Kent*, favored making this kind of connection. He recommends, "Let us allow ourselves the amusement of finding it interesting, diverting and even quite rewarding to discover some of Jane's prototypes for [the characters of her novels]" (15). Indeed Jane herself might have approved of such a project, for certainly diversion and amusement were activities which she endorsed.

Secondly, identifying and reflecting on Jane Austen's use of biographical material provides a way of appreciating her particular genius. She did not take a brother or sister-in-law, as they existed in real life, and make them the thinly-veiled characters in one of her novels. She did something much more complex. Through her communications with her brother Charles she had access to a personal narrative about the world of a naval station. For more than six years, Charles related his own accomplishments; he reported the enterprises of his fellow officers and recorded the lives of his own young family. This rich database gave Jane Austen an intriguing catalogue of sentiments, feelings, attitudes, and personality traits that animated naval life. We can appreciate the quality of Jane's fiction by the way she imaginatively selected items from this catalogue and reworked them to her own purposes in the construction of the unique range of character traits, opinions, and actions which bring to life her naval characters. For example, Frederick Wentworth is Jane Austen's own creation, but we can detect in him traces of the personality and

career of the charismatic Charles Austen.¹⁵ The character of Mrs. Croft is admirably and cleverly drawn, yet among her many features is included the loyalty and caring nature that so distinguished Fanny Austen. Jane Austen gives us an Admiral Croft who consistently acts with humane kindness. It was surely not merely a coincidence that this attribute was also central to the persona of Admiral John Warren in both his personal and professional capacities.

Thirdly, connecting the biographic with the fictional in light of Charles Austen's North American career affords a geographic insight into Jane Austen's writing. She may be viewed as a writer whose fictional creations reflect the habits of Old England. Yet, her horizons were much larger. Tracking the echoes and parallels between Charles's life and his sister's fiction informs the reader that the dynamics of North American naval life were in Jane Austen's mind and imagination. Certainly she had an empathetic understanding of the human activities on this station both at sea and on land in the ports of Halifax, Nova Scotia and St. George's, Bermuda, for these were the locations where her brother's career and personal life were unfolding. How intriguing it is to think that Charles and Fanny's experiences on *this* side of the Atlantic contributed in a recognizable way to the creation of the splendid naval characters that inhabit the worlds of *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*.

NOTES

1. The station included the waters north, south, and east of Bermuda, which was its southern base. The northern base, Halifax, Nova Scotia, is 1500 miles from Bermuda.
2. For example, Jane wrote to Cassandra: "I had the happiness yesterday of a letter from Charles. . . . He had taken a small prize in his late cruise; a French schooner laden with Sugar, but Bad weather parted them, & she had not yet been heard of" (24 January 1809). Jane later commented on Charles's skills in letter writing: "How pleasantly & how naturally he writes! and how perfect a picture of his Disposition & feelings, his style conveys!" (26 November 1815).
3. Jane Austen has Anne Elliot consulting similar sources. During the eight years of her separation from Captain Wentworth, "[s]he had only navy lists and newspapers for her authority, but she could not doubt his being rich" (30).
4. Jane had another sailor brother, Frank, who was also a source of information about naval matters. However, it is doubtful that Frank's personal narratives of his sea going life were equal in richness and vivacity to Charles's tales of life on the North American station. Moreover, in contrast to the charismatic Charles, Frank's disposition was sober, his wife Mary did not live with him at sea, nor did Frank have the warm connections that Charles enjoyed over an extended period of time with the same set of brother officers on the North American station. Jocelyn Harris (chapter 4) and Brian Southam have discussed Frank Austen's influence on his sister's fiction. Southam thinks that Francis Austen "finds his place in the novels, most evidently in the character of Captain Harville" ("Sailor Brothers" 39-40).
5. After mid June 1808 captains claimed only a two-eighths share of the prize money.

6. Charles's prizes included four American ships, one Swedish ship, three Spanish schooners, three American brigs, and one French privateer (see Kindred).

7. Consider also Captain Edward Hawker, godparent to young Cassy Austen, Charles's first daughter. He sent thirty-three vessels for adjudication before the Vice Admiralty courts. They included the armed French vessels *L'Observateur* (18 guns), the *Colibri* (16 guns), and *La Fantome* (18 guns), all of which were immediately commissioned into the Royal Navy. Hawker earned over £3,000 from *Colibri* and *Fantome* alone. Given his connection to the family, it is plausible that Jane knew of Hawker's impressive prize score.

8. Fanny's niece Caroline Austen later described her as being "fair and pink, with very fair hair" and noted that she had "admired [her] greatly" (26); "Uncle Charles and the lovely Fanny Palmer are married at Bermuda," wrote their niece Fanny Knight in her diary in May 1807 (Le Faye 339). During Fanny's visit to Chawton Jane described her as "looking as neat & white this morn^g as possible" (14–15 October 1813).

9. Fanny was in Halifax with Charles for about seven months during 1809 and 1810. Her letters to Esther in Bermuda were written in 1810.

10. See also Fanny's letters from *Namur*, a collecting ship for seamen to make up crews for outgoing vessels, which was moored off Sheerness, Kent. Here the Austen family lived from mid November 1811 until September 1814. Fanny's letters from early 1812 onward are brave in spirit and tell of her ingenuity in making a home at sea for Charles and their three little girls. As time went by her understandably reduced enthusiasm for domestic shipboard life became evident. Fanny was pregnant again, was often separated from at least one child, and had trouble securing domestic staff. For a full discussion of Fanny's life on *Namur* see Deborah Kaplan's article.

11. Charles's diaries show that social relations with the Warrens extended to 1817 and beyond.

12. John Warren was also known to value fair play in professional contexts and was justifiably irritated when in 1808 Admiral Cochrane of the Leeward Islands station arbitrarily ordered Captain Hawker's frigate *Melampus* to serve under him when he knew that Admiral Warren needed Hawker back on his own station (ADM 1/499, October 1809). We learn that Admiral Croft also values just behavior. At Bath, he points out the reprehensible Admiral Brand and his brother: "Shabby fellows. . . . They played me a pitiful trick once—got away some of my best men" (170).

13. Charles's pocket diary records meetings with Hawker on shore in early 1815 and in later years. On one occasion, "Mrs Hawker took the children out in the carriage and gave them heaps of toys" (AUS/ 101: May 1817). See also AUS /101: 6, 13 January 1815; 29, 30 April 1815. AUS/109: 29 April 1817; 6,7,13 May 1817; 9 June 1817.

14. Clive Caplan has suggested that Frederick Wentworth's capture of "the very French frigate I wanted" (66) could have been modeled on the dramatic capture of the French Frigate *Furieuse* (22 guns) by the British naval ship-sloop *Bonne Citoyenne* (20 guns) just off Halifax on 5 July 1809. This British victory achieved wide publicity. The navy even showed its approval by awarding Captain William Mounsey the Naval Gold Medal. Caplan suggests that "it is certainly likely that Jane would have known from [Charles] of this . . . extraordinary episode, truly worthy of her heroic Wentworth" (37).

15. Brian Southam has suggested that "the portrait of . . . William Price—eager, enthusiastic, open—owes much to Charles's own boyish charm" ("North America" 27).

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