
Lumen

Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
Travaux choisis de la Société canadienne d'étude du dix-huitième siècle

LUMEN

Jane Austen's Vehicular Means of Motion, Exchange and Transmission

Claire Grogan

Volume 23, 2004

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1012194ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1012194ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / Société canadienne d'étude
du dix-huitième siècle

ISSN

1209-3696 (imprimé)

1927-8284 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Grogan, C. (2004). Jane Austen's Vehicular Means of Motion, Exchange and Transmission. *Lumen*, 23, 189–203. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1012194ar>

10. Jane Austen's Vehicular Means of Motion, Exchange and Transmission

I do not write for such dull elves as have not a good deal of ingenuity themselves (Austen to her sister Cassandra, *Letters* 79).¹

Reading was a challenge posed by Austen for her readers, both familial and other. Studies of Austen have clearly and repeatedly shown that greater familiarity with the social and historical context of her works deepens our appreciation of her characterization, her political and social commentary.² Furthermore, it is evident that Austen herself expects her readers (at least some of them) to use such knowledge to judge and assess character accordingly. This paper arises from work for my second edition of *Northanger Abbey* for Broadview Press during which time I became increasingly aware that carriages and modes of transportation were carrying significance that I did not fully understand. Was I, as a twenty-first century reader, becoming one of those 'dull elves'? What kinds of judgements about character and place would a broader knowledge of horse-drawn transportation allow? En route I discovered exactly how carriages work as external indicators of wealth or social standing but also, and more surprisingly, as indicators of the driver or passenger's

1 Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deidre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). All subsequent references are to this collection of the letters and references are to the letter number.

2 See for example Maggie Lane, *Jane Austen and Food* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995); Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993); Francis Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London: MacMillan, 1979); Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, 'Entering the World of Regency Society: The Ballroom Scenes in *Northanger Abbey*, *The Watsons* and *Mansfield Park*,' *Persuasions* 16 (Dec. 1994), p. 115-24; and John Breihan and Clive Caplan, 'Jane Austen and the Militia,' *Persuasions* 14 (Dec. 1992), p. 16-26.

emotional state and even sexual satisfaction. Facts allow for the interesting discovery that horse-drawn carriages are much more than a means of motion.

Austen lived during the great age of coach travel — a period in which combined improvements in road building, carriage design and horse breeding meant travel on land was increasingly a pleasure rather than just a necessity. The inception of the Tollbooth system meant roads were better managed and financed since travelers were obliged to contribute to an independent Turnpike Trust for the upkeep of the road. Another breakthrough came when the engineer John Loudon McAdam invented macadamized roads. Appointed surveyor for the Bristol Turnpike Trust in 1816, his use of successive layers of compacted broken stone bound with gravel created a well drained, raised carriageway. His transformation of road surfaces allowed smoother, safer and speedier travel. John Hatchett of Long Acre's dramatic improvements in basic carriage design 'greatly contributed to the increase in their numbers, and enhancement of their value' (Felton, *Treatise on Carriages*, p. v).³ Such improvements were both a response to the burgeoning horse-drawn traffic and a reason for its increase. People traveled for pleasure as well as business between town homes and countryseats, to seaside resorts, to spas, or on tours of the picturesque.

The Royal Mail — the brainchild of Mr. Palmer — allowed both postal communication and also speedy safe travel for paying passengers. The Royal Mail had priority on the road, traveled with armed guards and was not obliged to stop for tolls. Thomas De Quincey jokes that individuals in fear of their lives from assassins or being pursued by debt collectors could find no safer refuge than on the Royal Mail coach thundering up and down the nation!

Austen's familiarity with such developments is evident in both her *Collected Letters* (at least seventy of one hundred and sixty five mention carriage travel of one kind or another) and her fiction (in which she mentions all available forms of horse-drawn transportation).

Despite all these advances however, horse-drawn transportation posed various risks to the traveler. A close Austen family member was actually killed in a carriage incident and her brother Edward Austen-Knight was badly injured when his horse bolted 'upsetting his carriage in the midst of Canterbury traffic'. Austen describes a frightening incident with her cousin Eliza when their horses 'gibed' near Hyde Park Gate

3 William Felton, *Treatise on Carriages* (London, 1794).

when a 'load of fresh gravel made it a formidable hill' (*Letters* 184). Her fictional work *Sanditon* opens with the 'overturning' of a Gentleman and Lady's carriage 'in toiling up ... [a] long ascent half rock, half sand' on a poorly maintained road on the south coast of England (p. 321).⁴ While not always perilous, carriage travel was inevitably exhausting and frustrating — especially when using the stagecoach. Austen jokes resignedly and repeatedly about the adventures of her trunk which 'once nearly slipt off' (*Letters* 10), another time was mislaid for days and on other occasions trailed far behind on the slower wagon (*Letters* 19, 97). More common were complaints about delays for changing horses (*Letters* 35, 87, 97), greasing wheels (*Letters* 10), uncomfortable lodgings (*Letters* 52), inclement weather and poor road conditions (*Letters* 9, 97, 98). Crowding could further add to one's discomfort as Austen notes to her sister Cassandra in 1814: 'I had a very good Journey, not crouded, two of the three taken up at Bentley being Children, the others of a reasonable size; & they were very quiet and civil' (*Letters* 105). Her letter of September 1813 provides a representative summary of the coach journey:

We had a very good journey — Weather and roads excellent—the three first stages for 1s-6d-& our only misadventure the being delayed about a qr of an hour at Kingston for Horses, & being obliged to put up with a pr belonging to a Hackney Coach and their Coachman, which left no room on the Barouche Box for Lizzy, who was to have gone her last stage there as she did the first; — consequently we were all 4 within, which was a little crowd. (*Letters* 87)

Since carriages were not heated, they could be bitterly cold in winter, hot and sweaty in summer. Austen suffers both temperature extremes, noting in *Letter* 98 how 'Fanny was miserably cold at first' while the uncomfortable heat of '[o]ur first eight miles' marked their journey in June 1808 (*Letters* 52). *Emma's* Mr Woodhouse is clearly not alone in his concerns about chills caught from carriage travel since Austen describes her own disappointment when her brother is advised by his doctor Mr. H. 'not venturing ... in the Carriage tomorrow; — if it were Spring, he says, it w^d be a different thing' (*Letters* 127). This information confirms the reader's suspicion that Lady Catherine De Bourgh's offer of a lift to only 'one of' the young ladies (Elizabeth and Maria) 'as far as London' is only extended to include both 'if the weather should happen to be cool'

4 Jane Austen, *Sanditon*, ed. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1971).

as 'neither ... are ... large' (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 229).⁵ This supposedly generous offer of course masks her desire to accommodate her own comfort above everyone else's since numbers generate heat.

William Felton's *Treatise on Carriages* (1794) and *Supplement of all the Necessary Repairs* (1796)⁶ were prodigious best sellers in their time and it is easy to picture the quintessential consumer General Tilney delightedly perusing the two volumes. The works testify to coach production as a profitable branch of British commerce well into the nineteenth century as numbers and types of carriages increased. Felton notes

the art of coach making has been in a gradual state of improvement for half a century past, and has now attained to a very high degree of perfection, with respect both to the beauty, strength and elegance of the machine: the consequence has been, an increasing demand for that comfortable conveyance, which, besides its common utility, has now, in the higher circles of life, become a distinguishing mark of the taste and rank of the proprietor. (p. i)

In the *Treatise*, which reads as an early Lemon-Aid Guide to carriages, Felton declares his 'professed aim is to enable the proprietor effectually to guard against imposition' (p. vii). He boasts that his

Treatise will be of equal advantage to the Gentleman who builds a carriage, as the House-builder's Price-book has, by experience, proved to be to him who builds a house; and as there are many more Gentlemen who amuse themselves in getting carriages built than in building houses, the utility of this *Treatise* will be more general. (p. vii)

Carriages have an obvious and immediate role as status symbols much like cars today. One recalls how '[t]he word curricule made Charles Musgrove jump up, that he might compare it to his own' (*Persuasion*, p. 133).⁷ Horse-drawn vehicles are easy markers of wealth and standing, an ostentatious public display of wealth — in the case of Northanger's

5 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Robert Irvine (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002). All subsequent references are to this edition.

6 William Felton, *Treatise on Carriages* (London, 1794), and *Supplement Comprehending all the Necessary Repairs; with Instructions How to Preserve and Purchase all Kinds of Carriages and Harness, with the Price Annexed* (London, 1796).

7 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Linda Bree (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1998).

General Tilney conspicuous consumption — or one of marked restraint in the case of *Emma's* Mr Knightley.

As early as the mid-1700s *The Tatler* bemoaned the dangerous increase in coaches amongst the middle classes citing a loss of social distinction. However it appears that by 1800 these very distinctions were being reinscribed by the wide range of carriages and seemingly endless assortment of possible accessories, which pushed the basic model price upwards. Felton spends some twenty pages to describe a myriad of possible accoutrements:

Coach boxes, cushions and standards, blocks, platforms, wheels, boots or budgets, springs, trimmings — lace, fringe, holders and strings, linings, hammer cloths — metal and plated furniture, lamps, steps, chaise heads, wings, dashing leathers, travel conveniences, paints and varnishes. (p. 199)

The carriage itself could of course indicate the occupant's status through display of the family coat of arms while liveried postillions and outriders conveyed further information about rank and wealth. Felton warns his readers away from tawdry, overly elaborate decals and designs (invariably denoting new money) and suggests that 'panels had better be entirely plain, than daubed as many of them are, in imitation of painting: and in particular that of Heraldry, which requires some merit to execute properly' (p. 207). Felton warns that a common trick to sell secondhand carriages is to impose upon the would-be purchaser with the appearance 'on the panels of fictitious arms, crests, or coronets' (*Supplement*, p. 106). He goes on to familiarize, and thus educate, the reader in the correct traditional heraldic emblems. Emblems could indicate whether the owner was a 'bachelor' (shield and crest) or a maiden lady (lozenge), and further what each partner brought to the marriage. The married couple's emblems combined family and individual designs and information denoting an heiress (a separate shield within the husband's shield) or indeed a widow (the widow's lozenge). Amusingly (since one recalls *Persuasion's* Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall) the only rank he notes is the bloody hand which signifies a Baron. One wishes Austen had made General Tilney a Baron to fuel Catherine's suspicions of Gothic misdoings!

The temptation to over accessorize to impress is evident in De Quincey's *The English Mail Coach*.⁸

8 Thomas De Quincey, *The English Mail Coach and Kindred Papers*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1876).

Once I remember being on the box of the Holyhead mail, between Shrewsbury and Oswestry, when a tawdry thing from Birmingham, some "Tallyho" or "Highflyer", all flaunting with green and gold, came up alongside of us. What a contrast to our royal simplicity of form and colour in this plebeian wretch! The single ornament on our dark ground of chocolate colour was the mighty shield of the imperial arms, but emblazoned in proportions as modest as a signet-ring bears to a seal of office. Even this was displayed only on a single panel, whispering, rather than proclaiming, our relations to the mighty state; whilst the beast from Birmingham, our green-and-gold friend from false, fleeting, perjured Brummagem, had as much writing and painting on its sprawling flanks as would have puzzled a decipherer from the tombs of Luxor. For some time this Birmingham machine ran along our side — a piece of familiarity that already of itself seemed to me sufficiently jacobinical.

In the ensuing race for supremacy the Birmingham carriage is soundly defeated by the Royal Mail:

Passing them without an effort, as it seemed, we threw them into the rear with so lengthening an interval between us, as proved in itself the bitterest mockery of their presumption; whilst our guard blew back a shattering blast of triumph, that was really too painfully full of derision. (p. 300)

The importance of heraldic designs is evident in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth 'immediately recognize[es] the livery' (p. 272) of Darcy and his sister Georgiana when they visit the Derbyshire inn where she and the Gardiners are staying. However, she is quite at a loss to identify 'the chaise and four' which draws up at the Bennet household unfashionably early some chapters later:

It was too early in the morning for visitors, and besides, the equipage did not answer to that of any of their neighbours. The horses were post; and neither the carriage, nor the livery of the servant who preceded it, were familiar to them. (p. 352)

In her desperate bid to prevent any further talk of marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth, Lady Catherine has hired horses to replace her tired beasts and race across the country to Longbourn. While General Tilney never moves at indecorous speeds, Lady Catherine's determination to secure Elizabeth's compliance prompts her to hire horses rather than wait to bait her own.

One also recalls Mary Musgrove's lament in *Persuasion* that despite her party's curiosity about a visiting gentleman's carriage in Lyme, she failed to recognize her own cousin in Lyme (ironically this cousin is

estranged and therefore should or could not be comfortably acknowledged should he have been recognized):

I wonder the arms did not strike me! Oh! — the great-coat was hanging over the pannel, and hid the arms; so it did, otherwise, I am sure, I should have observed them, and the livery too; if the servant had not been in mourning, one should have known him by the livery. (p. 134)

All of the possible ways to accessorize should not make us forget that running even the most basic of carriages was an expensive proposition. One recalls the short-lived consternation of the Highbury community in *Emma* when it is rumoured that Dr. Perry is about to establish his own carriage rather than hire. The response is mixed since it suggests his professional success — that he could contemplate such an expense — but also the impertinence of rising above his allotted social station. Austen's immediate family was forced to lay down their own carriage in 1798 when it proved too great an expense (*Letters* 11). Alongside the initial cost and subsequent upkeep of the carriage, one had to budget for the annual taxes. When Felton complains of a 'new tax' — twenty shillings for four-wheeled carriages and ten shillings for two-wheeled carriages, he reminds us that these vehicles are luxury items.

A common alternative to owning was that of hiring or leasing by the year, month or day, although this clearly connoted a commensurate lack of status. Thorpe accuses Mr. Allen of niggardliness since James cannot afford his own wheels and must hire a 'tittuppy thing' and a 'cursed broken-winded jade' (*Northanger Abbey*, p. 105)⁹ to court Isabella. The gossiping Mrs Bennet's speculates that Darcy resented talking with the various Netherfield community members because he is so 'ate up with pride' and had 'heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage, and had to come to the ball in a hack chaise' (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 57).

Horses were yet another expense, so again many hired or borrowed them as the need arose. Mrs Bennet's courtship machinations for her daughter Jane work on the prior knowledge that the Hursts keep a carriage but no horses, while Mr Bennet's horses also work the land and are not readily available for outings. Austen's brother Edward's purchase of horses is accorded due notice in her letter of June 1799:

9 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002). All subsequent references are to this edition.

He made an important purchase Yesterday; no less so than a pair of Coach Horses; his friend M^r Evelyn found them out & recommended them, & if the judgement of a Yahoo can ever be depended on, I suppose it may now, for I beleive M^r Evelyn has all his life thought more of Horses than of anything else. — Their Colour is black & their size not large — their price sixty Guineas, of which the Chair Mare was taken as fifteen — but this is of course to be a secret. (*Letters* 22)

The absence of either a private carriage or money at one's disposal for hire meant total reliance on friends, neighbours and distant family — whether to attend social gatherings or to move between family properties. Austen clearly chafes but is begrudgingly resigned to her dependence on others, noting 'until I have a traveling purse of my own, I must submit to such things' (*Letter* 54). Many of her letters testify to her brother's largesse (p. 159, 95, 98) such that she can jokingly exclaim in November 1813, 'What a convenient Carriage Henry's is, to his friends in general! — Who has it next?' (*Letters* 95). This dependence reflects both economic standing and gender since we read of male relatives unhampered by such constraints and recall many of her fictional men who dart around for haircuts, on unplanned shopping trips or to view neighbour's hounds and horses at the drop of a hat.

When money was available, paid passage on the Royal Mail, stagecoaches or about town in Hackney coaches or even Sedan chairs was possible. But these conveyances were neither very comfortable, safe nor clean. Austen describes several rides with her brother James through London in a 'nice, cool, dirty Hackney coach' (*Letters* 105, 70). Social propriety required women traveling on public transport to be chaperoned (*Letters* 34), and this neglect by General Tilney when he summarily expels Catherine from Northanger Abbey is perhaps his most egregious crime. Austen complains to Cassandra in September 1796, 'I want to go in a Stage Coach, but Frank will not let me' (*Letters* 6). This concern is echoed by Lady Catherine De Bourgh when she insists that Maria Lucas and Elizabeth Bennet

must [have] a servant with them. You know I always speak my mind, and I cannot bear the idea of two young women traveling post by themselves. It is highly improper...Young women should always be properly guarded and attended, according to their situation in life. (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 230)

Austen's ironic comment on the necessity of such protection arises from the juxtaposing of Lady Catherine's detail that her niece, Georgiana Darcy, was accompanied 'by two men servants' when 'she went to Ramsgate last summer' and the knowledge that such precautions failed

to protect her from the machinations of the governess and Wickham. Dangers lie closer to home although they are perceived to be on the road.

Even within the hired coach there was a definite hierarchy of places (amongst the seats inside, those up front and those behind). De Quincey writes

up to this time, say 1804, or 1805 (the year of Trafalgar) it had been a fixed assumption of the four inside people ... that they the illustrious quaternion, constituted a porcelain variety of the human race, whose dignity would have been compromised by exchanging one word of civility with the three miserable delf-wares outside. (*The English Mail Coach*, p. 290)

Traveling outside was cold and clearly more dangerous. Austen describes how her nephews recklessly traveled 'on the outside, and with no great coat' and would have completely frozen if 'the coachman, [had not] good-naturedly spared them of his as they sat by his side' (*Letters* 60). In her fiction one recalls how often the maids are relegated to the box when space is required with no thought of their comfort. Dawson, the maid, is peremptorily relegated to sit with the driver in the 'Barouche box' to accommodate Lady Catherine's offer of a lift in *Pride and Prejudice* (p. 229).

A clear hierarchy of carriages and modes of transport existed — one more apparent to the eighteenth than the twenty-first century reader. Near the bottom appears the wagon used for supplies, cheap, slow passage and bringing on luggage behind. Slightly above is the 'tax-cart', a springless vehicle, which Austen embarrassedly recalls she was obliged to accept a lift in with her neighbours Mr. and Mrs. Clement — 'I would rather have walked' (*Letters* 78). Next are the various means of paid carriage (Sedan, Hackney and Post) which are all inferior to the private means of transportation. Amongst privately owned carriages there was a wide assortment to choose from according to need and finances. The two-wheeled carriages, chosen 'for the advantage of ... simplicity and lightness ... but more risk' (Felton, p. 75), were the 'single-horse' Gig and the two-horse Curricule. A variety of open carriages such as the Phaeton, landau and landalette were available, but these were not only small but expensive vehicles definitely marked as luxury items since they were only practicable to drive six months of the year. Larger, steadier and thus safer choices were the various four-horse vehicles such as the Barouche, Chaise and four and the Traveling Coach. Each year it seemed new models or modifications appeared. Mrs. Elton of *Emma* is as anxious to be seen in her brother Mr Sucklings' new Barouche-Landau (a rare four-wheeled carriage built between 1804 and 1811 by Barker and Co of London) visiting the busy town of Kingsweston

as Catherine Morland is mortified and anxious not to be seen returning in a stage coach to Fullerton. The crassness of Elton's ostentatious parading can be contrasted with the assembled Elliot / Musgrove / Harville party in *Persuasion* who visit 'the no thorough-fare of Lyme ... entirely out of season' with 'no expectation of company' (p. 128) or ogling crowds. This clearly marks Lyme as a resort for an entirely different clientele since in the absence of a stagecoach, it is only accessible by private vehicle.

So when we reread *Northanger Abbey's* John Thorpe boasting about his knowledge of carriages and horses ('horses which he had bought for a trifle and sold for incredible sums' p. 86), we know for specific reasons why his comments are as misplaced and as shallow as his reading and courtship skills. Setting the comments in Felton's 1796 *Supplement* on second-hand purchases ('in which impositions practiced are not inferior to those used by horse dealers' p. 102) alongside Thorpe's verbosity on the subject, reveals the latter's boorish ignorance. Felton warns

it is usual in order to promote the sale of a carriage, to pretend it belonged to some person of credit, who has parted with it only because one of another kind was more convenient; or that the parties are dead, gone abroad, &c. (p. 106)

Thorpe boasts to a largely uncomprehending Catherine (but a cognizant reader):

Well hung; town built; I have not had it a month. It was built for a Christchurch man, a friend of mine, a very good sort of fellow; he ran it a few weeks, till, I believe, it was convenient to have done with it. ... "Ah! Thorpe" says he "do you happen to want such a little thing as this? it is a capital one of the kind, but I am cursed tired of it." (p. 69)

Felton warns that such imposters often

Ornament them, in particular with plated work, new painting, putting in a new lining, with some showey lace, new wheels, or ringing them with new iron, to give them the appearance of new, adding new lamps &c. (p. 103)

Thorpe cannot afford more than a gig but boasts it is

Curricule-hung you see; seat, trunk, sword-case, splashing boards, lamps, silver moulding, all you see complete; the iron-work as good as new, or better. (p. 69)

Presumably he will impose upon certain observers who will mistake it for the genuine article. According to Felton, a new gig fetches fifty-seven

pounds, so Thorpe acquiring his second-hand for fifty guineas indicates it was not the prodigious bargain he professes. When he continues, 'I might have sold it for ten guineas more the next day; Jackson of Oriel, bid me sixty at once,' James' quick interjection 'but you forget that your horse was included' (p. 69-70) adds to the reader's amusement.

Likewise, since Austen provides accurate information about distances and traveling time in *Northanger Abbey*, the various day trips reveal further insights into character. The astute reader understands that the Tilneys' projected day trip from Bath to Wick Rocks (twelve miles) or Claverton Downs (six miles) are far more practical and sensible than Thorpe's overly long trip to Blaise Castle and Kingsweston conservatively estimated at thirty-five miles. Thorpe not only exaggerates his horse's physical capabilities but also misjudges the time required to complete the trip such that the desired destination is never reached. General Tilney, on the other hand, micromanages both the journey from Bath to Northanger Abbey and also the day trip in a chaise and four to Woodston. On the former twenty-nine mile journey Catherine chafes at the two-hour refreshment break at Petty France just fourteen miles north of Bath, despite a substantial meal before leaving Bath. While the day trip to Woodston necessitates Henry's leaving Northanger Abbey days earlier to prepare an adequate lunch.

One cannot fault Thorpe however, on his familiarity with the respective prestige of carriage types, when he lies to Catherine about having seen Henry depart in a 'Phaeton with bright chestnuts' (p. 102). He not only selects a suitable carriage for Tilney but then proceeds to employ his own carriage in a manner typical of many eighteenth-century sentimental novels — as a vehicle for abduction.¹⁰ Austen's parodying of such fiction sees the protesting Catherine driven away by the boisterous and rude John 'who only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on' (p. 104). Although the worst to befall Catherine is a disagreeable outing, we see the carriage as a site for intimate exchanges — whether welcome (James and Isabella) or not (John and Catherine) — in a public setting. Thorpe's refusal on a later trip to take his sister Anne 'because she had such thick ankles' (p. 130) makes explicit the carriage's role in the public display of what should remain private — the female body. It is, after all in the carriage returning from the Weston's Christmas party that Mr Elton summons up courage

10 See Amy Smith, 'Julia's and Louisa's: Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and the Sentimental Novel,' *English Language Notes* 30 (Sept. 1992): p. 33-43.

to propose to Emma, while Lydia and Wickham begin their life together by escaping first in a carriage and then by hack chaise.

In *Northanger Abbey* Catherine's comparison between the horsemanship of Thorpe and Tilney clearly favours the latter. In so doing Austen uses the carriage to not only signify material wealth, but also to deploy a new consciousness of space, time and motion. Carriages are invested with emotional and psychological significance. John Dussinger notes how for Austen 'vehicles as objects' become 'vehicles as state of consciousness' (p. 122).¹¹ This is most evident in Austen's later fiction. In the much anticipated journey from Bath to Northanger Abbey the various carriages mirror Catherine's emotional state: 'An abbey before, a curricule behind ... she meets every mile stone before she expected it'. [Milestones had been reintroduced in 1793 from Roman times] Her admiration of the style in which they travel, of the fashionable chaise and four postillions handsomely liveried, rising so regularly in their stirrups and numerous outriders properly mounted, sunk a little under [the] inconvenience [of the two-hour bait at Petty France]. Her subsequent movement to Henry's curricule (which parallels the earlier excursions in Thorpe's gig 'curricule-hung') carries obvious sexual connotations, which make even Catherine blush in remembrance of Mr Allen's opinion respecting young men's open carriages (p. 160). However, a

very short trial convinced her that a curricule was the prettiest equipage in the world ... but the merit of the curricule did not all belong to the horses. — Henry drove so well, — so quietly — without making any disturbance, without parading to her, or swearing at them; so different from the only gentleman-coachman whom it was in her power to compare him with! (*Northanger Abbey*, p. 160)

There is transference of her emotions for Henry to his carriage and back again. Man becomes his carriage and his management — in the case of John Thorpe mismanagement, in the case of General Tilney micromanagement, or the Croft's hilarious shared management — is inextricably part of the person.

The Admiral and his wife are steadier at sea than on land, although they love to travel in their gig. Wentworth good-humouredly wonders 'whereabouts they will upset today' (*Persuasion*, p. 114). When Anne is given a lift, we discover their unique driving style:

11 John Dussinger, "'The glory of motion": Carriages and Consciousness in the early novel,' *Studies On Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 263 (1989): p. 122-24.

“My dear Admiral, that post! — we shall certainly take that post.” But by coolly giving the reigns a better direction herself, they happily passed the danger; and by once afterwards judiciously putting out her hand, they neither fell into a rut, nor ran foul of a dung-cart; and Anne, with some amusement at their style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs, found herself safely deposited by them at the cottage. (*Persuasion*, p. 121)

The lift, we note, reveals Captain Wentworth’s returning considerate awareness of Anne’s person. Not only can we estimate Anne’s hip size (‘If we were all like you, I believe we might sit four’ [*Persuasion*, p. 120]) from this exchange but we can gauge Anne’s emotional response to this considerate gesture:

Yes, — he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest. (*Persuasion*, p. 120)

Thus Catherine’s untimely expulsion from Northanger Abbey in a stage coach, for an eleven-hour journey unchaperoned, on a Sunday is not only an egregious act of impropriety by General Tilney, but also articulates eloquently the depths of despondency and degradation Catherine feels as she returns to Fullerton. When Catherine retraces her steps, firstly from Northanger Abbey to the Woodston turning and later from Fullerton to the neighbouring Allens, she notes, ‘how altered a being did she return!’ (p. 228). ‘Every mile, as it brought her nearer Woodston, added to her sufferings, and when within the distance of five, she passed the turning which led to it, and thought of Henry, so near, yet so unconscious, her grief and agitation were excessive’ (p. 222). Lest we overlook this Austen reminds us that

A heroine returning ... to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in their several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a traveling chaise and four, behind her, is an event on which the pen of the contriver may well delight to dwell

while

a heroine in a post-chaise, is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand. (p. 224)

The implication that fine carriages and a successful marriage can regain reputation is ironically contrasted to Catherine's innocent but ignominious return to Fullerton. Appearances weigh against her having kept her reputation.

Carriages have become outward indicators not only of social standing and wealth but also of emotional states and even sexual satisfaction. At the conclusion of *Persuasion* Anne Eliot is 'restored to the rights of seniority and the mistress of a very pretty landaulette' (p. 256), while in *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth Bennet is imagined by Mrs Gardiner as the 'owner of a low phaeton with a nice pair of ponies' (p. 330). One can only hope that Catherine got the carriage she so deserved and drove off happily into the sunset!

A codicil to this essay arises from the light that Austen's *Letters* shed upon her own social position. As previously mentioned since her father laid up the family carriage in 1798 when it proved too costly her immediate family was dependant upon various relatives and neighbours for lifts. A mode of transport that only appears in the final pages of her correspondence is that of the donkey. As her health failed she was encouraged, in the absence of a carriage, to take regular outings for fresh air on a donkey. However, this downgrading of her means of transportation further restricted outings since they were so weather dependant. She writes to James Edward in December 1816 that 'the walk is beyond my strength (although I am otherwise well) & this is not a Season for Donkey Carriages' (*Letters* 146). A month later Austen intimates the recalcitrant and stubborn nature of the donkey to Althea Bigg. She writes 'I can only see her at Chawton as this is not a time of year for Donkey-carriages, & our Donkeys are necessarily having so long a run of luxurious idleness that I suppose we shall find that they have forgotten much of their Education when we use them again' (*Letters* 150). Despite her declining health she still protests in March 1817 that she 'mean[s] to take to riding the Donkey.... I shall be able to go about with A^t Cassandra in her walks to Alton & Wynards' (*Letters* 153). It is poignant, if not pathetic, that a writer, who so astutely observed the status of vehicles in her fiction, should find herself reduced to a donkey.

Even on what was her final journey to Winchester she was dependant upon her brother's largesse to provide a carriage. We learn from her letter to Anne Sharp that '[t]he journey is only 16 miles ... and [we] are to have the accommodation of my elder brother's Carriage which will be sent over from Steventon on purpose' (*Letters* 159). However, since there is not room for everyone to travel inside the reader is left with the striking image from her final letter to her nephew James Edward Austen:

Thanks to the kindness of your Father & Mother in sending me their Carriage, my Journey hither on Saturday was performed with very little fatigue, & had it been a fine day I think I sh^d have felt none, but it distressed me to see Uncle Henry & W^m K- who kindly attended us on horseback, riding in rain almost all the way. (*Letters* 160)

Clearly, both her fiction and her correspondence reveal new depths when contextualized by detailed information about horse-drawn transportation as a signifier of socio-economic standing and emotional welfare.

CLAIRE GROGAN
Bishop's University