

Mixed-Race Heroines in Early Nineteenth-Century Literature:

A Look at Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved October 2017 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2017

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to analyze Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon* (1817) and its inclusion of a character of color. This thesis discusses Austen's mixed-race heiress, Miss Lambe, in the context of two other pieces of fiction that feature mixed-race heroines--the anonymously published *The Woman of Colour* (1808) and Mary Ann Sullivan's *Owen Castle* (1816). Scholarship on Austen's awareness of the Abolitionist movement and her sympathy for its politics has previously been published. I advance our conversations on the subject by discussing Austen's Miss Lambe as a mixed-race heiress in the context of gender, race, and ethnicity in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels. My thesis considers literary and historical treatments of people of color and provides a trans-Atlantic approach to female characters identified as mixed race.

Juxtaposing *Sanditon*, *The Woman of Colour*, and *Owen Castle* provides insight into how Austen was working within a set of established literary traditions, while creating ways to disrupt some of its problematic elements. This project looks at conventions of the mixed-race female characters in five ways. To begin, I discuss the mixed-race heroine and the compulsion to define her place of origin. Second, I consider the convention of describing mixed-race heiresses' rights to their inheritance. An analysis of the significance of naming mixed-race heiresses follows. I discuss literary conventions of the betrayal of mixed-race females. Lastly, I explore the common use of black maid figures in novels of this era to advance social critique against prejudice. Comparative analysis of Austen with other novels featuring mixed-race heroines in this era allows us to reach new understandings of *Sanditon*. Austen's unfinished last novel is shown to question the

power of fortune, to undermine the orthodoxy of categorizing race and ethnicity, and to unsettle the hierarchy among characters of different races and ethnicities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would have never been possible without the support of my committee members, George Justice and Jacqueline Wernimont. I would like to give special thanks to my Chair, Devoney Looser, for her time, guidance, and kindness.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO *SANDITON*

Jane Austen's unfinished manuscript, *Sanditon* (1817), features Miss Lambe, the only person of color in her surviving fiction. Since Austen's manuscript is unfinished, breaking off after the twelfth chapter, readers may only guess who the hero and heroine of *Sanditon* would have turned out to be. There have been a number of attempts to complete the story, from the mid nineteenth century to the present. Most recently, Goldcrest Films announced its intention to produce a screen adaptation of *Sanditon*. Had Austen lived long enough to finish the novel, Miss Lambe's story may have been central to it. As it is, she is only briefly described as a half mulatto heiress, visiting the new seaside resort town of Sanditon for her health, accompanied by her companion Mrs. Griffiths and another set of young women, the Miss Beauforts.

The fact that Austen created a character of color still surprises some readers. Perhaps the residual surprise arises from the misconception that Austen was secluded from the early nineteenth-century world she was writing about--a world with people of different races, ethnicities, and religions.¹ But Austen may in fact be the most venerated novelist to include a mixed-race character in her fiction. There are quite a few essays on the style of Austen's writing in *Sanditon*, or on issues of health and wellness in the fragment novel, but my interests in this thesis are focused on what it means for Miss Lambe to be a person of color and how we ought to make sense of her, given the wider context of mixed-race heiresses in lesser-known literature of this era.

¹ For more information regarding this discourse see Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*.

Sanditon has come in for some critical attention in recent years, in part because of Miss Lambe as a “half mulatto” heiress. However, the character is often approached as if Miss Lambe is a singular representation of a person of color in nineteenth-century fiction. Throughout this project, I place Austen’s Miss Lambe in the larger context of literary tradition of mixed-raced heiresses. This thesis will begin by contextualizing Jane Austen’s *Sanditon* in critical conversations regarding slavery, abolition, and the transatlantic world. I argue that Austen is purposefully working against literary type in *Sanditon* in her use of the description of Miss Lambe’s origins, her rights to inheritance, naming, the betrayal of the mixed-race heroine, and the maid figure. Austen showcases the radical nature of Miss Lambe for that era, not only in her descriptions of the character but in what is *not* said about her. I contend that Austen’s bypassing the need to explain the birth of Miss Lambe or her claims as an heiress are purposeful omissions that set Austen’s mixed-race heroine apart from other characters of color in novels of this era. In addition, Austen attempts to neutralize the typically exaggerated treachery against the female of color in her text. Lastly, I argue that Austen differs from her contemporaries in giving Miss Lambe a maid and a woman who dotes on her, rather than contrasting the mixed-race heiress with a black maid, as was far more common in novels of the day. This is significant because setting Miss Lambe amongst her equals in birth and fortune, in spite of differences in race, allows us to better understand the ways Austen was working against literary type and offering a critique of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century society.

CHAPTER 2

SANDITON IN ITS SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

Reimagining Austen's work as trans-Atlantic, and reading the hints about the larger world in her writing, has been something that critics have been slow to embrace. Claudia Johnson explains this tradition as one in which we take Austen at her word. She describes the tendency to see Austen as a female author writing about "three or four families in a country village,"² limiting our ability to see an engagement with the wider world. Johnson investigates the implications of characterizing Austen in this way in our scholarship. In *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988), Johnson argues that R. W. Chapman's editions of Jane Austen's novels do not acknowledge their politics. Johnson writes, "Allusions to the riots in London, or the slave trade in Antigua, for example, are first passed over, and then believed not to exist at all" (Johnson xvii). Chapman gives scant commentary on *Sanditon*, with no mention of the character of color, Miss Lambe. He writes of his expectation that had Austen been able to finish this novel it would have rivaled *Emma* in "scale" (Chapman 208). He concludes, "The fragment has a certain roughness and harshness of satire, especially in the characters of the hypochondriac brother and sisters, of the bully Lady Denham, and above all the wicked baronet, which at its worst amounts to caricature; a defect from which the later novels are almost free" (Chapman 208). Scholarship like Chapman's passes over the opportunity to speak about Austen's character of color, and that pattern unfortunately has left Austen open to a critique of narrowness in cultural subject matter.

² Austen is quoted from her letter to Anna Austen Lefroy on 9 September 1814. The entirety of this letter can be found in Deirdre Le Faye's *Jane Austen's Letters*.

This changed with Edward Said's argument in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). He offered a harsh critique of Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), finding in it a seeming endorsement of colonialism and the British Empire. His concern is in the fact that in order to create the wealth of Mansfield Park, plantations in Antigua would have been needed to produce crops and profits. These plantations would have presumably been worked by slaves. In other novels, Austen's characters in the British navy visit other countries without addressing issues of colonialism, thereby making her complicit in the objectives of the Empire for Said. He writes, "But just because Austen referred to Antigua in *Mansfield Park* or to realms visited by the British navy in *Persuasion* without any thought of possible responses by the Caribbean or Indian natives resident there is no reason for us to do the same" (66). According to Said, and other critics who follow in his line of argument, Austen is uninterested in cross-cultural contexts and ambivalent about issues of slavery.

Critics have also disagreed with Said's interpretations, for various reasons. Susan Fraiman has carefully argued that Said's reading of Austen is not entirely sound because he does not take seriously his own argument about Austen's identity within the British social structure—an educated woman whose sex nevertheless disempowers her in many ways.³ Fraiman points out that Said may not fully understand Austen's own ironic tone, which does not encourage her readers to condone the moral and social structure Sir Thomas Bertram oversees at Mansfield Park. Although other scholars, too, have attempted to call into question parts of Said's postcolonial critique of Austen, the appeal and memorable nature of his argument means that it has persisted. First-time readers still

³ See Susan Fraiman's "Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism."

seemed surprised to learn that Jane Austen often alludes to and engages with the topic of slavery in her novels.

Austen would have been aware of the abolitionist movement in Great Britain in the late eighteenth century. Her novels show signs of having been created to gain sympathy for black slaves, as several critics persuasively argue. Gabrielle D. V. White writes, “Jane Austen grew up in the time of massive mobilization of popular support for abolition, when ‘the passion of an abolitionist’ became wide-spread” (White 5). White also points to the *Zong* Case of 1781, in which more than 100 black slaves were thrown overboard in order to collect insurance. At the time, black slaves were not considered human, and the loss of a black slave was considered a loss of property. Since the insurers refused to go to court, the case went to Lord Mansfield.⁴ Paula Byrne, too, sees Austen supporting abolition. She writes, “The immediate impact of the *Zong* massacre on public opinion may have been limited. But in the longer term, the breathtaking brutality of the murders, and the fact that drowned human beings could be reduced to an insurance claim brought home the urgency of abolishing the slave trade” (Byrne 200-01). The significance of such a case, along with the Somerset Case of 1772, gave rise to the belief that once a slave touches English soil he or she is considered free.⁵ As Austen critic Margaret Kirkham writes, “The title of *Mansfield Park* is allusive and ironic, [...] but to a legal judgment, generally regarded as having ensured that slavery could not be held to be in accordance with the manners and customs of the English” (Kirkham 116-117). These cases added to the debates regarding abolition and the slave trade, prompting many

⁴ See Paula Byrne’s *Belle* for further information on the *Zong* massacre.

⁵ Further information about Lord Mansfield and the Somerset case be found in Paula Byrne’s *Belle*.

scholars to return to Austen's references to the 'slave trade' in novels such as *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. Through them, we may argue that Austen was aware of slavery's significance and critical of its practices in Britain and its colonies. White writes, "Each of the later novels displays an interest in the aftermath of the British slave trade in a different way" (White 152).

Austen makes many allusions to politics in her time, including to debates about the rights of women, and scholars have often noticed the tension that Austen creates in her fiction between the rights of women and rights of slaves. Kirkham argues that one of the ways we can see this is in Austen's furthering of Mary Wollstonecraft's argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Kirkham writes about *Mansfield Park*, "In this title, in making Sir Thomas Bertram a slave-owner abroad, and in exposing the moral condition of his wife in England, Jane Austen follows an analogy used in the *Vindication* between the slaves in the colonies and women, especially married women, at home" (Kirkham 117). Scholarly debate seems to fall on both sides of the argument about what Austen may have meant when she has Jane Fairfax speak of the governess trade "not quite in human flesh – but of human intellect" (300). Scholars also debate how we are to understand the pious and moral overtones of the seemingly ironic *Mansfield Park*.⁶ Although there are reasons to believe that Austen is attempting to link women's position in society and the lack of freedom given to slaves, it also seems clear that she understood the gravity of chattel slavery throughout the British Empire. It has been noticed that Austen's brothers, Francis and Charles, were both sailors in the Royal Navy and would

⁶ Lynda Hall discusses the choice Jane Fairfax must make in her article "Jane Fairfax's Choice: The Sale of Human Flesh or Human Intellect."

have been involved in policing the newly illegal transatlantic slave trade after 1807.⁷ Moreover, previous scholars have noted that the black people living in Britain were not only slaves. Some were free and considered of working and middle class. Some were authors. It is likely that Austen knew of these populations, read their writings, and perhaps even had direct personal contact with people of color.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of people of color in eighteenth-century Britain, as Peter Fryer argues in *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. In 1764, there were an estimated 20,000 Black people living in London, according to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In 1772, Lord Mansfield estimated that there were 15,000 Black people living in London.⁸ Fryer also discusses the extent to which there was a real prevalence of Black people throughout the British eighteenth century. He writes, “The majority of the 10,000 or so black people who lived in Britain in the eighteenth century were household servants – pages, valets, footmen, coachmen, cooks, and maids—much as their predecessors had been in the previous century” (Fryer 72). Not only was white Britain aware of black people in different types of roles in society; it recognized that politics of the time included debates over the slave trade.

Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807. By 1833, slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. As White writes, “The decade after 1807 Abolition saw a pause for reflection in abolitionist activity before campaigning resumed for the ending of

⁷ Brain Southam relates in explicit detail the biographies of Austen’s brothers, as well information regarding their correspondence with Jane Austen and the inferences that can be made about her allusions to the navy in *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion*, and *Emma* in his article, “Jane Austen’s Sailor Brothers: Francis and Charles in Life and Art” in *Persuasions*.

⁸ According to “Introduction: Arriving in Britain,” *National Archives: Exhibitions: Black Presence*. <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/intro/intro.htm>> Also cited is Peter Fryer and Lord Mansfield’s Judgment.

the chattel slavery in the colonies. Awareness of the plight of those brought by the slave trade into slavery may be the main focus of the reference to the slave trade in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*” (White 2). There has been significant scholarship attempting to understand Austen in the context of the slavery and abolitionist movements, building on and responding to Said on Austen and colonial politics. Once we understand Austen’s close concern with these issues, in fiction and in life, it seems less surprising that she would have written about issues of race and ethnicity in Britain during her own time.⁹ Given Austen’s concern with these historical and political issues, the mixed-race character Miss Lambe in *Sanditon* seems less like an anomaly and may instead appear almost an expected development in Austen’s writing.

People of mixed race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have recently been described in scholarship and in popular culture. Amma Asante’s 2014 film *Belle* and scholar Paula Byrne’s account of the historical events of the film are good examples. The film tells the story of Lord Mansfield’s niece and surrogate daughter, Dido Elizabeth Belle, and their family’s involvement with the Somerset Case of 1772. We also know that eighteenth-century author Olaudah Equiano married a white English woman named Susanna Cullen, and they had two daughters, Joanna Vassa and Anna Maria Vassa. Anna Maria Vassa died of measles the 21st of July 1797. Joanna Vassa became an orphan at age 2, and she became the sole heiress of the small fortune that Equiano’s novel produced. She later married Henry Bromley and died March 10th, 1857.¹⁰ Not only were mixed-

⁹ See Sara Salih’s article, “The Silence of Miss Lambe,” for further reading on Austen’s connections to the Caribbean and her argument for the development of a character of color.

¹⁰ More information regarding Olaudah Equiano or Joanna Vassa, can be found in Angelina Osborne’s *Equiano’s Daughter: The Life of & Times of Joanna Vassa*.

race females of color more prevalent and visible in day-to-day eighteenth-century life than we now realize; mixed-race female characters in literature then were more common as well.

A pioneering critic who has brought mixed-race heiresses to scholarly attention is Lyndon Dominique. Dominique edited the modern edition of an anonymously published work, *The Woman of Colour* (1808), and introduced it into our critical conversations. In Dominique's edition of *The Woman of Colour*, he includes 'A Chronology of Women of Color in Drama and Long Prose Fiction' beginning in 1605 with Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *The History of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha* and ending in 1861 with Louisa Picquet's "Louisa Picquet: The Octoroon." He also describes other novels featuring "minor heiresses" of color. Although these titles will not be discussed in this thesis, it is worth mentioning some of them: Musgrave's *Solemn Injunction* (1798), Marshall's *Edmund and Elenora; or Memoirs of the Houses of Summerfield and Gretton* (1797), Bissett's *Douglas; or, The Highlander* (1800), and Mrs. Charles Mathews' *Memoirs of a Scots Heiress* (1791).¹¹ Taken together, Dominique's list of titles shows that heiresses of color were becoming a popular literary type by 1791.

Compared to contemporary pro-abolitionist fiction and essays, Austen's fiction uses much subtler references to "slaves" and issues of prejudice. Nevertheless, I believe we can compare it to other literature that deals more directly and extensively with these issues, in order better to understand Austen's possible motivations. These other texts are illuminating as examples of the fictional types and real-life stereotypes that Austen was

¹¹ Dominique provides short excerpts from each of these novels in *Appendix C* of *The Woman of Colour*.

writing with and against. These examples include a previously unknown novel, *Owen Castle* (1816), which has not been discussed in our scholarship about race and nineteenth-century fiction. I re-introduce it into our conversations on the subject. *Owen Castle* shares similarities with *Sanditon*, in that they both feature a mixed-race heiress. Sullivan's *Owen Castle* is complex in plot and in its stereotypes of race and ethnicity, which makes it an excellent novel for investigating how Austen is working against established conventions for mixed-race heiresses in the fiction of her era.

CHAPTER 3

THE MIXED-RACE HEROINE OF SULLIVAN'S *OWEN CASTLE* (1816)

Mary Ann Sullivan's *Owen Castle, or Which is the Heroine?* deserves a place in our critical conversations about race, class, gender, and literature in this period. *Owen Castle* was first advertised as having been published in late April of 1816 and was reviewed in July of 1816, almost a year before Austen began writing *Sanditon* in January of 1817. *Owen Castle*'s mixed-race heroine, Omphale Carlton, shares striking similarities with Austen's "half mulatto" heiress, although she may or may not have been known by Austen. In any case, reading Austen's mixed-race heiress Miss Lambe in *Sanditon* alongside this and other novels proves fruitful and furthers our understanding of Austen's fictional depiction of her wealthy woman of color. Novels such as *The Woman of Colour* and *Owen Castle* allow readers to see the literary patterns that were forming in the early nineteenth century and how Austen's comedic novel, *Sanditon*, cleverly brings into focus the problematic nature of linking mixed-race status, wealth, and beauty in female characters in literature.

Owen Castle's Sullivan is a difficult figure to trace in literary history. What we know is that she is described on the title page of her novel as "Late of the Theaters Royal, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham, and Norwich." She was in all likelihood, then, a regional actress. There are some newspaper accounts of a "Miss Sullivan" acting in provincial theatre productions, and this is likely to be her. She received positive reviews for her skills in acting and aptitude for the theater. Reviewer A. Z. writes "In regard to Miss Sullivan – the rising reputation of this young lady is certainly, in the present great dearth of dramatic genius, matter of sincere congratulation

to all true lovers of the drama. Her intuitive knowledge of the stage is clearly apparent. Her performances are evidently the result of a natural inclination, rather than result of any previous application.”¹²

Sullivan also appears to have had some connections to the aristocracy. She dedicates *Owen Castle* to “The Right and Honourable Lady Combermere.” Lady Combermere was married to the Viscount Combermere in 1814. Lady Combermere kept a commonplace book. The front of the volume is signed, “Caroline Combermere, May 9th 1815,” and it includes pieces of French and English poetry. She dated and wrote the location of the prose pieces included, such as Brighton or Tonbridge.¹³ Viscount Combermere, who had previous military experience, became the Governor of Barbados and from 1817-20. It’s an interesting fact, given Sullivan’s interest in the region of the West Indies and her choice in making Barbados the country of origin of *Owen Castle*’s heroine.

Omphale Carlton is one of two heroines in *Owen Castle*. Both face similar fates and challenges. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be focusing on Omphale Carlton. The plot of *Owen Castle* is difficult to summarize, but it may help to begin with a sense of its characters and themes. Omphale Carlton is described as a “mulatto,” and she becomes an heiress twice over the course of the novel. Both Omphale and Grace (who is white) believe themselves to be orphans. The plot of the novel is set in motion with the death of Grace’s fiancé, William Murray, while Grace’s aunt, Mrs. Milbourne, is also

¹² This review of Miss Sullivan was listed in *The Suffolk Chronicle* on Sunday, July 28th, 1810.

¹³ More about this collection can be found under “MS 329 Commonplace book of Lady Combermere” in the Special Collections at the University of Southampton.

about to suffer a loss: her claim to the Whitford estate. That estate is set to be inherited by Mrs. Milbourne's estranged nephew, Augustus, through a marriage contract that would mean it would pass along to his fiancé, the mulatto, Omphale. This inheritance, although not Omphale's objective, is poised to secure her happiness. Omphale truly loves Augustus, and the inheritance would make her a suitable match for marriage. Throughout four volumes, Omphale is described as a "mulatto" twelve times. While she is sufficiently recognized as of a different race, those closest to her hardly mention that she is racially marked, and it is not the main hindrance in her life.

Unfortunately, however, the evil Mrs. Wallace seduces Augustus and schemes to turn Augustus against his fiancé, Omphale, leaving her destitute. Under the influence of the scheming Mrs. Wallace, Augustus stabs Omphale and robs her of her last possession – a piece of diamond jewelry with a miniature of her adoptive mother. Surviving this attack, Omphale retains her feelings for Augustus and "...in spite of cruelty and outrage, doated on him" (Sullivan 2. 251). Meanwhile, the second heroine, Grace, is prevented from marrying her true love. It's discovered that Omphale is the legitimate daughter of Lord Orkley, a white English gentleman, revealing her to be his sole heiress. She is thus made an heiress twice in the course of the novel.

CHAPTER 4

RECEPTION OF *OWEN CASTLE*

Although *Owen Castle* has not thus far attracted critical attention, the novel was not unknown in its own day. Advertisements appeared for the title in *Star* and the *Morning Chronicle*, from April to July 1816. The novel was reviewed in at least four periodicals,¹⁴ but the reviews were not positive. The *Critical Review*'s entire assessment was negative: "This work has neither genius or taste to recommend it, and if the authoress possess either, she has accommodated herself to those who are destitute of both."¹⁵

Despite the negative reviews, the novel was positioned to be read on a large scale and apparently was quite popular. It was first published by Simpkin and Marshall and is documented as having found its way into several circulating libraries.¹⁶ The novel must have sold well enough or received some positive reader response, because it went into a second edition in 1823. That second edition was published without significant changes from the first. Its second publisher was A. K. Newman and Company, the successor of William Lane's Minerva Press, known for its gothic and popular fiction. *Owen Castle* does not appear to have received any further reviews, and Sullivan herself apparently did not publish anything further, at least not under this name.

¹⁴ *Owen Castle* was reviewed in *The British Review*, *London Critical Journal*, *The London Gazette*, and the *Liverpool Mercury* in May 1816.

¹⁵ *Critical Review*, 5th ser. 4 (July 1816): 91. Listed under 'Monthly Catalogue Novels'. Format: 3 vols. 8vo; no price <http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/>

¹⁶ *Owen Castle* was held in Aberdeen Public Library, Mackenzie's Circulating Library, and Gerrard Tyrrell Circulating Library. James Raven, Stephen Bending, Antonia Forster, and Peter Garside. *British Fiction 1820-1829*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

How can *Owen Castle* help us read Austen's *Sanditon*? To begin, the two texts' female heroines—Austen's Miss Lambe and Sullivan's Omphale—are both racially and ethnically mixed but wealthy enough to be socially desirable. Despite the significant differences in the narrative techniques of *Sanditon* and *Owen Castle*, the language they share reveals similarities of description for the mixed-race heiress. *Sanditon*'s Miss Lambe is labeled as “innocent,” “sickly,” and “tender,” and *Owen Castle* reveals similar use of these phrases. These heroines' characteristics are apparently offered as perfect mixings of gentility, with a keen awareness of their own position in social hierarchy. These mixed-raced figures combine aspects of stereotypically black and white cultures and conventional femininity. Austen's work seems to effortlessly develop her characters through conversations, with very little reliance on plot device. By contrast, Sullivan's work relies on plot development to drive the story. The performative nature of her work could be a direct result of her expertise in theater.

CHAPTER 5

THE ORIGINS OF MIXED-RACE HEROINES IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS

To begin, there must be an understanding of the authors' mention of the place of origin for the mixed-race heroine. One of the interesting ways Austen is able to work against convention is by allowing Miss Lambe to have an alternative "family." In the newly established seaside village, its inhabitants hope the village will prove to be a successful resort town. One of Sanditon's visitors, Diana Parker, eagerly hopes that she will be able to fill this town for her speculating brother, Tom Parker. She expects the arrival of two West Indian families of fortune. However, instead of two families, the Miss Beauforts, Mrs. Griffiths, and Miss Lambe arrive as one in the same family. Austen also writes that Miss Griffiths "had preferred a small, retired place, like Sanditon, on Miss Lambe's account" (378). Lady Denham demonstrates her excitement as well, for she hopes to pair Miss Lambe with her nephew, Sir Edward Denham. Since Austen's manuscript was left unfinished, we never hear directly from Miss Lambe, but even before her arrival to Sanditon and after, we are reminded of her significance, without knowing much about her.

In contrast, in *Owen Castle*, we learn about Omphale's mother through her account. In a Jamaican dialect, she says her mother "though black, was virtuous." Her mother was "mistress of plantation in St. George's, Jamaica, who love an English man of the name of Carlton" (Sullivan 3.34). Omphale follows her literary predecessor, *The Woman of Colour's* Olivia Fairfield's example of actively recognizing her mother's "low origins" as a black woman, seemingly acknowledging the inferiority of the race. It

becomes easy to see how Sullivan's female character of a higher class accepting her parents' class could be interpreted as a rhetorical move to help British Caucasians feel a closer connection with people of color. In both of these novels the character who is of the "inferior" "race" acknowledges a subordinate position in society, while simultaneously building a case for overcoming white people's prejudice. In addition, as Dominique points out, this camaraderie with fellow "black" slaves could be viewed as a noble act. In *Owen Castle*, Omphale explains that it is because her father left that her mother poisoned herself. "Authentic proofs of my Lord Orkley's marriage with her mother" are even produced to show her rightful place among the white British upper class. By contrast, Austen's Miss Lambe is not presented as a speaking character. Because the fragment is unfinished, we are unsure what Miss Lambe's character's voice sounded like or if her language would, like Omphale's, have been represented as a mixture of standard pronunciation and West Indian dialect.

Miss Lambe's lack of a speaking voice in the text has previously been read as meaningful. Sara Salih critiques this "silence" as representative of the "brown" woman. Salih argues that it is indicative of an anxiety regarding the dangerous Others that create economic instability in the new world.¹⁷ Although Salih is correct in recognizing that the white Parkers and Lady Denham express an interest in the economic benefit of a "rich West Indian" coming to Sanditon, I argue, on the contrary, that Miss Lambe's silent introduction to her new environment may be instead seen as Austen's attempt to write

¹⁷ See Salih's argument about "critical silence" surrounding Miss Lambe character and scholarly commentators lack of recognition of her in "The Silence of Miss Lambe: *Sanditon* and Fictions of 'Race' in the Abolition Era."

against literary convention. Austen may give Miss Lambe, through her silence, an authority that her novelist contemporaries are hesitant to allow their characters. One of the results of the silence surrounding Miss Lambe is a lack of discussion regarding her race and place of origin that makes the novel a space where her existence goes as unmarked and unquestioned as the rest of the characters. We might say that, rather than silencing her, this fictional approach gives Miss Lambe greater agency and cultural acceptance.

Unlike *Owen Castle*'s Omphale Carlton and *The Woman of Colour*'s Olivia Fairfield, *Sanditon*'s Miss Lambe's unquestioned parentage and origins serve as a sign of her respectability among her peers. Although it is clear that Miss Lambe is discussed as a "West Indian," Austen does not write her into a position in which she must explain her "inferior" birth, as was often the case in other literature of this type. In creating these ideal mixed-race heiresses as flawless specimens of their races, the novelists present heiresses whose racial and ethnic ambiguity is blurred. Dominique calls this author's tool "racial muting."¹⁸ Both black and Caucasian readers may be able to identify with mixed-race heiresses because the authors under consideration here give these characters problems that are similar to the ones that upper-class white women must deal with: arranged marriages, uncertainty in their fortunes, and unrequited love.

Although there are distinctions between the heiresses' origins, these novels use "mulatto" as a word to bridge differences between people of color and white people. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "mulatto" can describe "A person having

¹⁸ More about racial muting can be read in Dominique's Introduction of *The Woman of Colour*, pp. 30.

one white and one black parent. Frequently used to define a person of mixed race resembling a mulatto.” Interestingly, G. Reginald Daniel clarifies the phrase “miscegenation.” He writes, “Many people assume erroneously that the term *miscegenation* is derived from adding to “cegenation” the prefix *mis-*, from the Anglo-Germanic for ill, wrong, or unfavorable. The word is actually derived from the Latin words, *miscere* (to mix) + *genus* (race). In addition, miscegenation between blacks and whites has mistakenly been seen as suggesting the genetic crossing of different species that are in fact merely geno-phenotypical variations of the same species, *homo sapiens sapiens*” (Reginald 45). Despite the clear distinction between the actual locations of the characters’ origins, the overriding description of their “mulatto-ness” encourages the reader to relate them to the unspoken standard of British white women.

In Austen’s *Sanditon*, Miss Lambe is described as a “West Indian.” Miss Diana Parker speaks about Miss Lambe before her arrival, “The oddest thing that ever was! A Miss Lambe too! – a young Westindian of large Fortune” (Austen 376). In *The Woman of Colour*, Olivia Fairfield has travelled from Jamaica and describes herself as of African descent.¹⁹ In *Owen Castle*, Omphale Carlton discusses that she comes from South India. In the case of Omphale she self-identifies as a “mulatto.” She clarifies that her “mother was a black” (Sullivan 2.42), but says in her Jamaican dialect “me no spring from Afric, my mother was Gentoo black” (Sullivan 2.45).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* recognizes the historically slang word “Gentoo” as “A non-Muslim inhabitant of Hindustan; a Hindu, in South India, one speaking

¹⁹ Dominique gives an excellent synopsis of Olivia Fairfield’s heritage in his Introduction to *The Woman of Colour* and the historical context for her ethnic background.

Telugu.” These were native people of India who did not hold the same religious beliefs as Muslims.²⁰ Scholar Elizabeth Van Heyningen discusses the “origins of the ‘Gentoo’ story stating, “Although ‘Gentoo’ is unfamiliar in the late twentieth century, in the nineteenth century it was widely known” (Van Heyningen 74). Van Heyningen relates that the Anglo-Indian word first appeared in Thomas Herbert’s *Some Yeares travels into divers parts of Asia and Afrique* written in 1638 and at the time meant “pagan or gentile.”²¹ Omphale, like Olivia Fairfield in *The Woman of Colour*, must explain where her mother originated from, with a colloquial description of racial background that serves to explain her skin color.

Sanditon suggests that Jane Austen was keenly aware of this literary pattern in which the author took pains to have characters of color explain their culture, ethnicity, and place of origin. In addition to encouraging conversation about Miss Lambe’s origin, rather than writing her as inferior or explaining why she is inferior, Austen adds another ironic twist. Miss Lambe is not only “mulatto” but she is “half mulatto,” leaving readers to question their own understanding of the adequate amount of Britishness or West Indian culture one ought to have to be considered “mulatto.” In novels such as *The Woman of Colour* and *Owen Castle*, the characters self-identify as “mulatto,” reassuring the reader that they can be easily identified, categorized, and understood as the Other. Austen does not make it easy on her readers, challenging them to think through how they would be able to distinguish a “mulatto” from a “half mulatto.” She pushes the boundaries of

²⁰ The “Gentoo” people would have been of interest to the British and in 1781 Nathaniel Brassey Halhed was commissioned to write *A Code of Gentoo Law* for Warren Hastings, Governor-General of the British Settlements in the East Indies.

²¹ For more on the origin of “Gentoo” see Elizabeth Van Heyningen’s “'GENTOO' - A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY?” pp. 73-86.

previously acknowledged racial categories. Interestingly, Austen's use of the phrase "half mulatto" was one that was rare in fiction of the period.²² The phrase is used again in Captain Frederick Marryat's *Peter Simple* (1834). Unfortunately, when it is used there, it is in a derogatory taxonomy of racial categorizations.²³ Austen herself only uses the phrase "half mulatto" in her writing to describe Miss Lambe, without further commentary.

²² Salih notes her research regarding the phrase "half mulatto" and sees it "perhaps without precedent." For more information about this see "The Silence of Miss Lambe."

²³ See Frederick Marryat's *Peter Simple*.

CHAPTER 6

NAMES AND RACE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

In order to better understand Austen's unique use of character names, it is useful to see how naming has helped mixed-race figures be understood by the reader. Dominique gives a substantial account of Olivia Fairfield's name in *The Woman of Colour*. He discusses the use of the name "Fairfield," an "English surname," which "literally refers to the place where fairs and carnivals are held," and in doing so, recalls "Stallybrass and Whites's *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* and its discussions of fairs as carnivalesque sites of transgression where binaries –high/low, rich/poor, local/foreign, clean/dirty, fair/grotesque – occur and collapse" (Dominique 248). Olivia's surname, therefore, is a metaphor for the liminal position she occupies. In addition, her first name "Olivia" reminds us of her "olive" complexion which is "a clear attempt to mute the stigmas surrounding her blackness by equating her color with Mediterranean whites...." (Dominique 30). It becomes obvious, then, that the words used to help us understand Olivia through her names are intentionally chosen.

Examining Omphale's name can be equally helpful in thinking through Austen's choice in her naming of Miss Lambe. *Owen Castle* is a novel with many allusions to classical Greek tradition and mythology. It attempts to allude to classical literary history, and the text's distinctiveness and strangeness make it all the more interesting. In *Owen Castle*, Omphale's name may harken back to Greek mythology. Omphale was the Lydian

Queen who falls in love with Heracles and is forced to be her slave.²⁴ This story has been cited in variations of both Greek and Roman mythology and has been the inspiration for various paintings. There is also debate about whether Heracles' was forced to do women's work or if he performed typically masculine feats for the Omphale of myth. Some sources cite Heracles as completes the task of "spinning wool," and Omphale is the one who wears the legendary lion's skin and holds the club.²⁵ There is also some sense that mythology understands Heracles to be completing typically masculine tasks, such as fighting, for Omphale. Moreover, and perhaps importantly given Sullivan's Augustus's late realization of his love for Omphale in *Owen Castle*, in myth the Romans first introduced the "particular motif of enslavement by love" (Waldner).²⁶

Given that Augustus, the name of both the male love interests in *Owen Castle* and *The Woman of Colour*, has the significance of being a classical Greek name, Mary Ann Sullivan and the anonymous author of *The Woman of Colour* may have been attempting to draw comparisons between the women who are deemed as "Other" and the classical male figure, Augustus. In Sullivan's *Owen Castle*, Omphale, by being the sole possessor the fortune, is portrayed as the foreigner keeping Augustus against his will. The prejudices regarding the rich foreign "Other" who is a financial threat to British Empire is reflected back to the reader.

²⁴ See James Byrn's 1794 theater adaptation of this myth: *Hercules & Omphale. A grand pantomimic spectacle, (in two parts) composed by Mr. Byrn. And now performing at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden, with universal applause.*

²⁵ For further information, see David Ross Hurley's "Dejanira, Omphale, and the Emasculation of Hercules: Allusion and Ambiguity in Handel."

²⁶ For further information, see Katharina Waldner's "Omphale."

In contrast to Olivia Fairfield in *The Woman of Colour*, and Omphale Carlton in *Owen Castle*, Austen's mixed-race female is not given a first name before the fragment breaks off. Despite knowing only that this "half mulatto" heiress is to be called "Miss Lambe," there is much that can be made of this surname. Margaret Doody's *Jane Austen's Names* suggests that Miss Lambe "...seems to be a lamb ready to be thoroughly fleeced" (Doody 207). Doody also believes that Miss Lambe will be the "important counterweight to Charlotte" (Doody 212). Doody argues that Miss Lambe's being alone signals that she will be a figure to be exploited; "unlike placid Charlotte and tough Clara Miss Lambe will be emotionally vulnerable" (Doody 212). While it may be possible that Austen is pointing to the emotional fragility of Miss Lambe as Doody suggests, it could be that Austen is attempting to take her naming one step further in distancing her from her literary predecessors. This gives Miss Lambe, as a mixed-race heiress, less obvious ties to her race and ethnicity.

Miss Lambe is not the domineering foreign Queen who forces the man she loves to be her slave. At least it does not seem likely to be the case given Miss Lambe's having been described as "tender." Miss Lambe is also not described as the place where racial binaries meet, like Olivia Fairfield. Instead, Miss Lambe's name could be seen through William Blake's 1789 poem, "The Lamb," part of his *Songs of Innocence* and the counterpart to "The Tyger," published in *Songs of Experience*. Blake's poem asks, "Little Lamb who made thee/Dost thou know who made thee" (Gardner 168).²⁷ Scholars have noted that this poem is the most religious of all Blake's writing, and the lamb and child

²⁷ For more information regarding "The Lamb," "The Little Black Boy" and "The Tyger" see Stanley Gardner's *The Tyger, The Lamb and The Terrible Desert*.

who is asking the question all share the same identity with Christ the Saviour (Gardner 220- 221). Also interesting is that Blake's *The Little Black Boy* has often been noticed by scholars for questioning imagery and notions of "darkness" or "blackness" and "whiteness" as allegories for good and evil.²⁸ Here again, we may be able to better understand Austen's references by understanding the poem to which she may be making an allusion. If Austen were familiar with Blake, his poem "The Tyger" could have been an option for seeking material to name her mixed-raced heroine. Instead she chose an allusion to one of "innocence" and "tenderness," rather than to experience. Austen seems to be going against the grain by writing her mixed-raced heroine with a name and with descriptive words that cast her as marked foremost by innocence. She is innocent, not despite her skin color, but because of the essence of her soul's relation to Christ.

²⁸ For more information regarding historical connotations of "blackness" and "whiteness" see Peter Fryer's *Staying Power*, pp. 145.

CHAPTER 7

MIXED-RACE HEROINES AND RIGHTS TO INHERITANCE

Understanding rights of inheritance in this period is also vital to understanding mixed-race figures in literature. Miss Lambe is a West Indian, so the reader is immediately reminded of the phrase, “as rich as a West Indian,” a common saying in late 18th-century Britain (Fryer 18). That they are designated heiresses with a “fortune” makes them worthy of marriage. In *The Woman of Colour*, Olivia Fairfield must marry her cousin, Augustus, in order to receive her inheritance. She writes to her governess, Mrs. Milbanke, “I see the generous intention of my father’s will; I see that he meant at once to secure to his child a proper protector in a husband, and to place her far from scenes which were daily hurting her sensibility and the pride of human nature!” (Anonymous 55). Olivia gives strong arguments for marrying her white cousin and leaving the scenes of slavery. It is in the best interest of this orphan to follow her father’s dying wish and the will he left. Dominique gives an excellent analysis of the problematic nature of these paternal marriage contracts and the racialized nature of requiring a mulatto daughter to marry a white Englishman.²⁹

In *Owen Castle*, Omphale too must see the reasoning for choosing to marry a white gentleman, although she is no longer an orphan. Once Omphale’s birth is revealed, the doting Lord Orkley conveys the importance of her choice in companion: “You are the daughter of a North Briton, whose noble descent is only inferior to that of royalty” (Sullivan 3.127). Lord Orkley reminds Omphale of her daughterly duty to listen to her

²⁹ See Lyndon Dominique’s *Imoinda’s Shade* chapter on “Abolition and the Mulatto Heiress in England.”

newfound father, and she soon acquiesces to his wishes. Omphale begins, “Oh! My lord (said she, throwing herself at his feet) my duty is your’s; the duty of a daughter, you have so nobly taken by the hand, and raised to the rank and splendor far above her desert, is the least she can give in return for all your great benefits so lavishly heaped upon her, - me all obedience” (Sullivan 3.136). The use of the word “noble” may evoke the “noble savage” imagery, popular in literature of this era.³⁰ The reader is meant to think that Omphale, although mulatto and not quite “white,” is still a refined and a well-bred perfect version of her race. In other words, she is “illustrious or distinguished by virtue of position, character, or exploits” and this makes her eligible for this marriage.³¹ This differs entirely from the lack of proof of Miss Lambe’s marriageability in Austen’s novel fragment.

Sanditon’s Miss Lambe is not shown to be “noble” in the sense that becomes a qualifier for marriage eligibility in other novels that feature a mulatto heiress. Instead, what is known about her is merely that she is “wealthy.” Austen is arguably calling attention to the hypocrisy of society in which race can be used to discriminate against people but can be entirely ignored when it is convenient. In the case of Miss Lambe, her “immense fortune” leaves the people in Sanditon apparently colorblind, due to their greed and self-interest. Where other novels seem to use the heiresses’ skin color to comment on prejudice or to advocate for the abolition of slavery, Austen makes Miss Lambe’s marriageability the principal concern of the community in *Sanditon*. In *Sanditon*, the

³⁰ Aphra Behn’s novel, *Oroonoko* (1688), later adapted for the stage by Thomas Southerne and others, created the fictional archetype of the “noble savage” in which a slave that was captured was actually a Prince and, therefore, possessed exceptional qualities that marked him as different from his comrades.

³¹ A full definition and usage of the word “noble” can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

matchmaking mostly comes from a matriarchal community, in the form of Mrs. Denham and Miss Parker, in contrast to the doting fathers who attempt to secure their daughters position in society and carry on a good family name in the other narratives. This, too, shows Austen playing with literary conventions of the mixed-race heiress, apparently moving away from a plot in which hidden paternal parentage will be the factor on which the story turns.

CHAPTER 8

BETRAYAL OF THE MIXED-RACE HEROINE

An unmistakable characteristic of *Owen Castle* and *The Woman of Colour* is the betrayal of the mixed-race figures. In the anonymously published *The Woman of Colour*, Olivia Fairfield is already married to Augustus. Olivia and Augustus find out that Augustus's wife, presumed dead, is alive and hiding in the forest. Augustus and his first wife, Angelina Forrester, reunite as a married couple, and his commitment to Olivia is voided. As Dominique points out, Angelina Forrester is aptly named an "Angel-in-a-forest" and comes into the story as a perfect specimen heroine, one we'd expect to be married off to a novel's hero (Dominique 251).³² In *The Woman of Colour*, Olivia Fairfield, determined to live alone as a widow, nobly returns to Jamaica to help her fellow black brethren.

In *Owen Castle*, Omphale is betrayed by Augustus, when he is being manipulated by Mrs. Wallace. As previously mentioned, Augustus is seduced by Mrs. Wallace, whose first name is Arpasia. In the novel, Arpasia is often called Arpy for short, possibly meant to sound like the mythological Greek "harpy." Harpies are said to be winged bird-like monsters that have the heads of beautiful females, who encourage men to do evil and wicked things.³³ Omphale is betrayed when Augustus breaks off his engagement to her, taking the fortune which rightfully belonged to Omphale and then stabbing her to steal the last of her valuables.

³² For further information see Dominique's explanation in *Imoinda's Shade*.

³³ This mythological tradition dates back to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

In Austen's *Sanditon*, there seems to be an opportunity for a similar love triangle to exist, between Miss Lambe, Clara Brereton, and Sir Edward Denham. In the beginning of this novel, it is Clara Brereton who seems to be the target of the rake-like Lovelacean figure, Sir Edward Denham. He seems to be hoping to seduce Clara. While we cannot know what would have happened had Austen's novel continued, there are some indications that Austen is writing her characters against the typical plot of treachery that has previously befallen the mixed-raced heroine. Diana Parker and Lady Denham sincerely hope that Miss Lambe will take an interest in Sir Edward Denham; however, the perceptive Charlotte Heywood has already has him pegged as quite a fool.

Austen writes, "Clara saw through him, and had not the least intention of being seduced – but she bore him patiently enough to confirm the sort of attachment which her personal charms had raised" (184). Jocelyn Harris argues that it is Miss Lambe's name that makes her likely to become the victim of this Byronic seducer.³⁴ Although this could be the case, it seems that the ridiculousness and irony with which Austen writes Sir Edward Denham makes him ineffectual as the villain. Tony Tanner comments on Sir Edward Denham's quoting of books, "The possible results of this ineradicable ambiguity Jane Austen deftly summarises in the portrait of Sir Edward, who is as manifestly 'absurd' and latently as 'atrocious' as the villains inscribed in his impressionable and ill-educated imagination" (Tanner 278). Thus, although Sir Edward Denham seems to be preposterous, the violence behind his words still makes him a threat.

³⁴ Jocelyn Harris argues that Austen was modeling Miss Lambe is representative of Saartjie Baartman in her book, *Satire, Celebrity, and Politics in Jane Austen*.

In *Owen Castle* and *The Woman of Colour*, the mixed-raced heroines' situations and lives seem to revolve around the love of the male hero-figure. By contrast, Austen seems to be writing that male hero in a different light, for Miss Lambe does not seem to know Sir Edward Denham at all (at least not yet) and Clara Brereton perceives his trickery; therefore, this set up would seem to render the literary triangle of love and betrayal as not indicated in Austen's case.

In the case of Olivia Fairfield in *The Woman of Colour*, although she subverts the plot of marriage by returning to Jamaica a political heroine, she is not without her agony over the loss of Augustus. She writes:

The bitterness of death is past – the climax of my fate, is sealed – I am separated for ever from my – Oh Mrs. Milbanke, I must not write the word! To weeks of agony of despair, is now succeeded the calm stupor of settled grief; - the short, the transient taste of perfect happiness which I lately enjoyed, has rendered the transition doubly acute. (137)

In addition to feeling the loss of her beloved Augustus, she is now at odds with the white heroine, Angelina. Olivia Fairfield's Augustus in *The Woman of Colour* does not intend to hurt Olivia with his unexpected previous marriage; he pleads several times for her forgiveness. However, it is because they cannot be together that the reader sympathizes with Olivia. Moreover, Olivia Fairfield's kindness in giving Angelina the family jewels, because she is now Augustus's wife, would have seemed incredibly virtuous by eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century standards. Olivia would have seemed more virtuous because of her sacrifice and blessing of the happiness for the white heroine and hero.

In *Owen Castle*, Omphale Carlton shares her explicit despair at the loss of love for her Augustus. When Augustus first tells Omphale that he can no longer love her, she

says to him, “I cancel my Augustus’s bondage; thus I give liberty and joy to him, and condemn myself to misery and want. You are *free*” (Sullivan 2.116). In addition, Sullivan writes of the physical weakness that overtakes her once she realizes the magnitude of Augustus’ deception. She writes, “Despair marked every feature: her quivering lips turned white, a giddiness swam before her eyes, and in making an effort to gain the door, she staggered, and fell prostrate at his feet” (Sullivan 2.116). Omphale deems herself to be entirely miserable without her beloved Augustus, and his leaving her makes her sickly. The rest of her story in *Owen Castle* is dictated by what villainous decisions Augustus makes and the words that he speaks.

In the case of Austen’s unfinished *Sanditon*, it cannot be known what Sir Edward Denham would have said to Miss Lambe. It seems unlikely that he would have been given much attention, since his histrionics have little effect on Charlotte. Moreover, Clara Brereton’s discernment of Sir Edward Denham can be seen as two-fold. First, the female character most likely to be named “heroine” is unpersuaded by the would-be hero, thus giving Miss Lambe no oppositional character as has been the case in *The Woman of Colour* and *Owen Castle*. Secondly, if more than one of Austen’s characters seem to be able to “see through” the ridiculousness of Sir Edward Denham, then it might be assumed that Miss Lambe will be able to judge him accurately, too. Austen seems to begin this set up for a love triangle in order to render it ineffective. There is no reason to assume that Miss Lambe has any interest in “asses-milk,” “taking her first dip,” or Sir Edward Denham, for she is a unique mixed-raced heroine.

CHAPTER 9

MIXED-RACE HEIRESSSES AND THE MAID FIGURE

Discussing the maid figures in these novels can be of great use to understanding how to read Austen's *Sanditon*. Not only does Austen draw attention to the mixed raced heroine's intimates, she restricts conceptions of servants who are meant to be inferior both in race and class, according to literary archetypes. Miss Lambe arrives with the Miss Beauforts but does not seem to be in friendship with them. The friendship and association was a common theme in literature of the time, apparently designed to earn the sympathy of the white Britons for people of color, specifically for black slaves.³⁵ Austen, however, makes presumably Caucasian readers, and even contemporary critics, question why Miss Lambe would be out of place amongst the company she is keeping. In addition, if the half mulatto or mulatto heiresses in these typical novels seem designed to lessen social prejudices in Caucasian readers, it is done at a cost. In order for the reader to see the mulatto heroines as ideal representations of the convergence between two races, they are juxtaposed against the "blacks" who are presented as loyal slaves or servants.

The social class status that the mixed raced characters' skin affords them becomes apparent in fiction of this period. For instance, *The Woman of Colour's* Olivia Fairfield's maid is keenly aware of her social position, dictated as it is by her blackness:

...although here she be "blacky," and "wowsky," and "squabby," and "guashy" and all because she has skin that is not *quite* so white, - God Almighty help them all - me don't mind that though, do we, my dear Misse? But Mrs. Merton's maid treats me, as if me was her slave; and

³⁵ Dominique and Salih each give persuasive arguments regarding their analysis of larger issues at work in these interracial relationships. For further reading see Dominique's Introduction to *The Woman of Colour* and Salih's "The Silence of Miss Lambe."

Dido was never slave but to her dear own Misse, and she was *proud* of that! (100)

Harris defines the use of the term “Wowski” or “wowsky.” She writes:

Wowski was a character in George Colman the Younger’s extraordinarily popular comic opera *Inkle and Yarico* of 1787. Had Austen either seen the opera onstage, or read the libretto of this influential contribution to the discourse about abolition? It was certainly reprinted many times in her lifetime, including in 1808 by Mrs. Inchbald, in *The British Theatre*. (Harris 261)

Lyndon Dominique has argued that the authors’ syntax and imagery allows us to recognize their united experiences and subversions of prejudice as black women in England.³⁶ Although it works in this way, it is also a way for the novelist to distinguish the two women of color, separating them by the darkness of their skin.

In *Owen Castle*, Omphale’s black slave, Chloe, is described in similarly demeaning phrases, racially marked as “black and ugly” because her skin color is much darker than Omphale’s. When Chloe encounters a Quaker trying to convert her, he passes a sort of judgment because of her skin color, “yet thou shouldest not prize fairness of skin, nor the redness of roses, being as thou art *black*; were I to judge thee from thy colour, I should say satan were busy with thee, and no good abideth in thy mind” (Sullivan 3.11,12). The darker skinned women, although possibly able to relate to their mulatto counterparts, are continuously marked “ugly,” “squabby,” or assumed to be closer to “satan.” This is quite a different use of phrases than those that are used to describe Olivia, Omphale, and certainly Miss Lambe, who are not only lighter in skin

³⁶ Lyndon’s explanation of this can be found in Chapter 6: “Abolition and the Mulatto Heiress in England” in *Imoinda’s Shade*.

color, but wealthy by comparison to the maid. Wright argues that the inclusion of the black character in a systematic way was often employed in fiction in order to create a sense of social expectation. Wright writes, “Such prejudice signaled a growing sense of racial hierarchy” (Wright 42). This hierarchy becomes apparent in *Owen Castle*.

Austen, however, is ingenious, in that she plays on the assumptions of the “black maid,” “black slave” or what the reader believes will be their example of a “perfect” mulatto figure. Instead of Miss Lambe arriving with a “black maid,” she is travelling with “a maid of her own” whose racial identity remains unknown. In addition, Miss Lambe’s chaperone, Mrs. Griffiths (presumably white), dotes on her charge as much, if not more, than the black slave figure does her mistress in other works. Instead of describing her in camaraderie with her peers, Miss Lambe receives specialized attention from a guardian. Austen writes that Miss Lambe has “an immense fortune – richer than all the rest” (155). She is the “young West Indian of large fortune” (164). Miss Lambe becomes the rarity in Sanditon and is singled out for her particular wealth. Mrs. Griffiths does not cater to the Miss Beauforts in the way she does Miss Lambe. The irony is that Mrs. Griffiths is marked as white, and there is a nonchalance in Austen’s narrator’s tone in describing her doting on Miss Lambe. Even more remarkable is that Austen does not need to include any other black characters to reinforce the (white) reader’s assumptions about gradations of racial distinction and birth. Of course, again, *Sanditon* was left unfinished. However, viewing *Sanditon* in contrast to other works of this time allows us to see Austen’s choice to avoid the literary conventions that so obviously and often immediately call attention to the differences between the “black maid” and the “mulatto” heiress.

Lucille Mathurin Mair cites the historical reality that some mixed-raced women, whom she labels as “coloured women,” hired slaves in common practice. She writes, “Coloured women were found among those who earned their living by hiring out slaves” (Mair 279). Moreover, Wright tells of the fiction that was written to expound on these facts. As Wright argues, “British women writers of the late eighteenth century systematically presented black characters in their works. This included a figurative ingredient which compassion, deployed by central characters towards the helpless and poverty stricken, manifested” (Wright 42).³⁷ Austen in *Sanditon*, however, capitalizes on the moments of the reader’s interpretation of the heroine who is representative of her multiple races. Austen describes her heroine as “tender” and the “most important and precious” of the three ladies with whom she is travelling. Salih interprets Austen as describing her as a “constitutional weak ‘mulatto’ (exactly what Diana Parker is hoping for)” (Salih 332). Instead, it could be said that Austen is deploying her wit and irony to display in few words what the literary tradition of the mulatto heiress has already illustrated, the “feebleness” and delicate natures of these heiresses are exactly what make them “most important” and “precious.”

Lady Denham continues to speculate the eligibility of the young heiress, Miss Lambe, perhaps suggesting that she imagines her as a future wife for Sir Edward Denham. She says, “Now, if we could get a young Heiress to be sent here for her health – (and if she was ordered to drink asses’ milk I could supply her) – and as soon as she got well, have her fall in love with Sir Edward!” (360). Austen is using satire to emphasize

³⁷ More can be read in Eamon Wright’s *British Women Writers and Race*.

the ridiculousness of admiring a female character because of her feebleness, a theme common in Austen's novels, and writes this mixed-race heroine into her joke. As the reader is meant to laugh affectionately at the ridiculousness of Emma Woodhouse, the reader too can laugh at the folly of Diana Parker and Lady Denham's expectations of their new visitor.

Similarly, in a town such as Sanditon, in which everyone is suffering from "hypochondriacal conditions and obsessed with curing illnesses," the people of Sanditon believe nothing could be more perfect than an heiress invalid who is "delicate" and "tender" and seen, like other mulatto heiresses, as virtuous. Austen carefully chooses the word "sickly" to describe Miss Lambe to mirror stories already in the literary canon, such as *The Woman of Colour* and *Owen Castle*, perhaps to push the reader to understand the irony of valuing heroines simply because they believe themselves (or others believe them) to be "sickly." The Denhams have concern over Miss Lambe's health, regardless of her color. Miss Parker says, "I must be at Mrs. Griffiths's – to encourage Miss Lambe in taking her first Dip. She is so frightened, poor Thing, that I promised to come and keep up her Spirits, and go in the Machine with her if she wished it" (382). The care for characters of mixed race seems to be more closely tied to their wealth and their eligibility for marriage than to their color.

CONCLUSION: JANE AUSTEN'S WORK AGAINST CONVENTION

This study of these texts together—*Owen Castle* and *Sanditon*—shows that Austen is purposefully using the literary conventions of the mixed-race figure to call attention to the most important characteristic of these heiresses—their wealth—while working against established conventions in describing racial origins, naming, rights of inheritance, the black maid figure, and betrayal of the mixed-raced heroine. The addition of Sullivan's *Owen Castle* to our conversations about mixed-race heiresses in literature of this era offers us further ways to gain insight into race, ethnicity, gender, and class in novels of manners. It also allows us to expand our sense of what is unusual and what is unconventional in Austen's *Sanditon*. Moreover, questioning notions of the representations of mixed-race characters may allow us to expand research to real-life examples of women of color. There are most certainly missing voices in literature of this period where mixed-race females and woman of color are concerned. Although it is fascinating to see the ways in which similar language and plot conventions comment on the interplay of race and class in British literature and culture, it is also useful to think through ways in which we can attempt to recover and reimagine the position of these underrepresented figures through more sustained comparison and contrast.

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