

**Invisibility and fame  
Rahel Levin Varnhagen and Jane Austen and the role  
of letter writing in dismantling the unequal  
recognition of long eighteenth-century German and  
English women writers**

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## Synopsis

Im Fokus dieser Dissertation sind die britische Brief- und Romanautorin Jane Austen und die deutsch-jüdische Briefautorin, Salonnière und Aktivistin Rahel Levin Varnhagen. Das Schaffen dieser beiden Autorinnen lässt sich in derselben Epoche, dem „Long Eighteenth Century“, lokalisieren. Dieser Begriff bezieht sich auf die Zeitspanne zwischen 1688 und 1832 und wurde etabliert, um die Verbindungen zwischen den sozialen, politischen, kulturellen und ideologischen Entwicklungen in diesem Zeitraum hervorzuheben. Trotz der zeitlichen Überlappung und der Hinterlassung herausragender Werke beider Autorinnen, ist eine erhebliche Differenz in der literarischen Anerkennung von Austen und Levin Varnhagen festzustellen. Während Austen seit geraumer Zeit ein unabdingbarer Bestandteil nicht nur des britischen, sondern des Welt-Literaturkanons ist, bleibt Levin Varnhagen trotz ihres, seit wenigen Jahrzehnten anerkannten, Platzes im Kanon vergleichsweise unbekannt. Auffallend ist, dass sich dieser ungleiche literarische Status ebenso auf viele weitere Autorinnen des „Long Eighteenth Century“ und des darauffolgenden neunzehnten Jahrhunderts übertragen lässt. Dabei zeichnet sich eine deutliche Kluft zwischen der Berühmtheit englischer Autorinnen und dem an Unsichtbarkeit grenzenden Mangel an Anerkennung für deutsche Schriftstellerinnen ab. Während sich auf englischer Seite einige der größten Namen der Weltliteratur finden lassen – neben Jane Austen beispielweise noch Charlotte Brontë oder George Eliot – bleiben die herausragenden Leistungen von Fanny Lewald, Louise Otto oder Hedwig Dohm wenig erforscht. Die Ursachen dieses Phänomens sind vielschichtiger Art und liegen sowohl im literaturgeschichtlichen Kontext der Spätaufklärung und der Französischen Revolution sowie und vor allem in der Rolle des Briefeschreibens. Die vorliegende Arbeit zielt dementsprechend darauf ab, im Hinblick auf die genannten Faktoren, diese Ursachen der ungleichen literarischen Anerkennung deutscher und englischer Autorinnen zu identifizieren. Dabei müssen die Auswirkungen der aufklärerischen Ideale im Deutschland und England des „Long Eighteenth Century“ als zweiseitiges Schwert betrachtet werden. Einerseits brachten ihre humanistischen, egalitären Werte eine gesteigerte Bildung, ein dadurch wachsendes Lesepublikum und eine Modernisierung des Literaturmarktes mit sich. Andererseits wurden diese Werte durch ihre Assoziation mit der Französischen Revolution in Deutschland und England großen Teils abgelehnt. Angst vor Revolution im eigenen Land trieb sowohl die Anti-Jakobiner in England sowie die Romantiker in Deutschland zu verstärktem Nationalismus und Konservatismus an. Frauen, in

Deutschland auch Juden, wurden somit stärker denn je vom gesellschaftlichen Geschehen ausgeschlossen. Daran gekoppelt war vor allem in Deutschland ein wachsender Antisemitismus, von welchem Levin Varnhagens Leben sowie die Anerkennung ihrer literarischen Fähigkeiten ebenfalls stark beeinflusst waren. Die Repräsentation englischer Kultur in Austens Romanen, andererseits, wurde vom englischen Patriotismus begrüßt und verschaffte somit ihrer Rezeption einen Vorteil. In diesem Zuge muss außerdem der unterschiedliche Grad an Radikalität in Austen und Levin Varnhagen festgestellt werden. Während Austen die Gesellschaftskritik in ihren Werken, an die Umstände ihrer Zeit angepasst, nur indirekt äußert, sind Levin Varnhagens Briefe von politisch meinungsstarken, teils radikalen, Aussagen durchzogen. Da aufgrund der als Bedrohung wahrgenommenen Französischen Revolution in beiden Ländern eine Ablehnung alles Radikalen herrscht, trägt diese Diskrepanz ebenfalls zu Austens und Levin Varnhagens entgegengesetzter Rezeption bei. Diese Beobachtung wird unter Berücksichtigung der Radikalität anderer deutscher Autorinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, wie die oben aufgelisteten, besonders interessant.

Neben diesen geschichtlich-politischen Faktoren, nimmt die Rolle des Brief-Genres und seine Gegenüberstellung zum Roman in dieser Arbeit eine zentrale Rolle ein. Beide Gattungen werden im „Long Eighteenth Century“ und noch lange danach als trivial und nicht literarisch angesehen. An dieser Stelle ist die in Deutschland besonders starke Dichotomisierung von Trivial- und Hochliteratur zu erwähnen, welche die Anerkennung von allem, was sich nicht als Hochliteratur klassifiziert, fast unmöglich macht. Trotz seiner Einstufung als trivial erreicht der britische Roman bereits im Laufe des späten achtzehnten, insbesondere aber im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, eine außergewöhnlich hohe Popularität, an welche der sich etwas später entwickelnde deutsche Roman nicht herankommt. Es fällt auf, dass die großen Namen englischer Autorinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts alles Namen von *Romanautorinnen* sind. Auch für eine Untersuchung von Austens Anerkennung ist der Status des britischen Romans entscheidend; ihren Briefen wurde wohlgemerkt erst Beachtung geschenkt, als sie bereits einen hohen literarischen Status als Romanautorin innehatte. Levin Varnhagens literarisches Werk, das fast ausschließlich aus Briefen besteht, wurde aufgrund der vermeintlichen Trivialität dieses Genres stark vernachlässigt. Kapitel Zwei und Drei sind demnach hauptsächlich der Literarizität der Briefe dieser beiden Autorinnen gewidmet. Die eingehende Lektüre einiger ausgewählter Briefe

demonstriert das weite Spektrum an Stilen des Briefeschreibens, wobei Austens und Levin Varnhagens Briefe sich sehr deutlich voneinander unterscheiden. Der heitere, kurz angebundene Tonfall der ersteren steht in direktem Kontrast zu den emotional intensiven und langen Briefpassagen Levin Varnhagens. Bezüglich ihrer Hinweise auf Literarizität ähneln sich ihre Briefe jedoch nicht unerheblich. So bringen beide durch literarische Bezüge, eine gewählte Schreibweise und Kommentare über die Sphäre des Öffentlichen zum Ausdruck, dass sie das Briefeschreiben als Kunstform ansehen, die es wert ist, dem öffentlichen Diskurs beizutreten. Beide nutzen dabei das Briefeschreiben als Schreibübung sowie als ein Weg, sich im literarischen Feld ihrer Zeit zu positionieren. Ein Teil dieser Positionierung sind die Vertretung ihrer sich in vieler Hinsicht deckenden politischen Ansichten, einschließlich ihrer emanzipierten Ideale bezüglich der Rolle der Frau. Zentral für ihre Selbstpositionierung als Schriftstellerinnen sind außerdem Austens Bezüge und Parallelen ihrer Briefe zu ihren Romanen und Levin Varnhagens Entwicklung in ihrer Rolle als Literaturkritikerin und Vermittlerin Goethes. Diese Rollenverteilung bringt weitere, fundamentale Unterschiede hinsichtlich der literarischen Anerkennung beider Autorinnen mit sich. Die Literarizität von Briefen allgemein sowie die verschiedenen Formen dieser Literarizität in Austens und Levin Varnhagens Briefen muss daher anerkannt werden. Nur so können die Leistungen weiblicher Schriftstellerinnen nachvollzogen und vor allem brillante deutsche Brief-Autorinnen ans Licht gebracht werden. Abschließend wird die posthume Kanonisierung von Jane Austen und Levin Varnhagen untersucht, welche stark von diesem Hintergrund aus Literaturgeschichte und Brief-Roman-Beziehung beeinflusst ist.

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## Introduction

Bringing together one of the greatest British novelists Jane Austen and the relatively unknown German letter writer, salonnière and women's and Jewish rights activist Rahel Levin Varnhagen might at first glance appear a far-fetched comparison. This is, however, exactly the premise that this dissertation is based on. For these two women's contrasting literary status represents perfectly the gap between the long-lasting fame English women writers from and following the *Long Eighteenth Century* have been able to achieve and the almost invisible legacy attached to German women writers from the same period. The term *Long Eighteenth Century* has been established within historical research in acknowledgement of the "connections between and continuities in social, political, cultural, and ideological developments from the Restoration period to the late Georgian era."<sup>1</sup> It has since been adapted by other disciplines, including literary studies.<sup>2</sup> Frank O'Gorman locates the *Long Eighteenth Century* as ranging from the Glorious Revolution in 1688 to the Reform Bill in 1832,<sup>3</sup> however, he also emphasises the advantages of a "broad and flexible treatment" of the period.<sup>4</sup> Although these dates mark events within British history specifically, the term *Long Eighteenth Century* can be applied to the German literary scene, too, due to the Anglophilia that was dominating German literature during this time.<sup>5</sup> The latter is examined in *Britisch-Deutscher Literaturtransfer 1756-1832* by Lore Knapp and Elke Kronshage, whereby the time period they focus on has a significant overlap with the British *Long Eighteenth Century*. It likewise ends in 1832, as being the year of Goethe's death 1832 is a significant timestamp in Germany's literary field as well, equally marking the end of an era.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the term *Long Eighteenth Century* can and will be used in this dissertation as the period in which to locate both Austen and Levin Varnhagen, each being heavily influenced by the events of the eighteenth century and their long-term consequences. Besides the emancipatory developments of the Enlightenment, these entail the growing literacy, modernisation of the literary market, and rise of the novel in both countries, as examined by Richard D. Altick, Dirk Sangmeister and Ian Watt. Following Austen's

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<sup>1</sup> Katrin Berndt and Alessa Johns, 'Introduction', in *Handbook of the British Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Katrin Berndt and Alessa Johns (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Frank O'Gorman, 'Ordering the Political World: The Pattern of Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain (1660-1832)', in *Ordering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Diana Donald and Frank O'Gorman (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 83-111 (p. 89).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Lore Knapp und Eike Kronshage, 'Einleitung', in *Britisch-Deutscher Literaturtransfer 1756-1832*, ed. by Lore Knapp and Eike Kronshage (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

and Levin Varnhagen's writing careers during the *Long Eighteenth Century*, a long list of nineteenth-century women writers emerges. Strikingly, on the English side this list entails many of the best-known names within world literature, including Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) and George Eliot (1819-1880). Significant German authoresses from the nineteenth century such as Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) or Louise Otto (1819-1895), however, will hardly be familiar to people within and outside literary academia.

This lack of recognition of nineteenth-century German women writers has been pointed out only by very few critics, including Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Elke P. Frederiksen. According to the latter there persists a general consensus "daß es in der deutschsprachigen Literatur dieser Zeit einfach keine 'guten' Autorinnen gegeben habe, ganz im Gegensatz zur englischen oder französischen Literatur."<sup>7</sup> Both Joeres and Frederiksen note that the only nineteenth-century female German writer being paid attention to is Annette von Droste-Hülshoff.<sup>8</sup> Even her recognition in the literary canon is questionable, since it roots in a view of her writing as "appropriated masculine genius coupled with a retained femininity."<sup>9</sup> The appreciation of her as an authoress, then, does not help to shine a more positive light on women writers overall, and instead presents her as an exception among women who still does not quite reach the standard of male writing. However, Droste-Hülshoff's role in the recognition of German women writers will be only briefly mentioned throughout this dissertation. Rather, this paper is driven by the assumption that German women writers were indeed as much influenced by the emancipatory ideas of the French Revolution as the English or French.<sup>10</sup> In this context Frederiksen has prompted that "Wir müssen uns fragen, aus welchen Gründen Werke von Frauen nicht in den traditionellen Literaturkanon aufgenommen wurden und auch heute noch Schwierigkeiten haben, aufgenommen zu werden."<sup>11</sup> Since this appeal was made 42 years ago now and still has not received the scholarly attention it deserves, I aim at renewing this question about the lack of acknowledgement of German women writers.

In tracing potential reasons for it, the role of letter writing will be placed in the foreground as the primary genre for women writers, and especially German women writers, in the *Long Eighteenth Century*. Considering Lorely French's insightful work

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<sup>7</sup> Elke Frederiksen, 'Deutsche Autorinnen Im 19. Jahrhundert: Neue kritische Ansätze', *Colloquia Germanica*, 14 (1981), 97-113 (p. 97).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance. Nineteenth-Century German Women Writers and the Ambiguity of Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Frederiksen, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.



on *German Women as Letter Writers*, a major lack of recognition of the literary value of the letter form can be detected, which seems to go hand in hand with the lack of recognition of German authoresses. This is particularly applicable to Levin Varnhagen whose reputation relies on her role as a salonnière “while her accomplishments as an author have been almost completely passed over [...] As a woman, a Jew, and a letter writer, she did not fit into a narrowly defined literary canon.”<sup>12</sup> This historical insight will be further elaborated on in the first chapter, which functions as an overview of the conditions for women’s writing during the *Long Eighteenth Century* in both Germany and Britain. Thereby, the chapter draws heavily on Heidi Thomann Tewardson’s work on the socio-political and cultural influences on Levin Varnhagen’s life and intellectual accomplishments. What I will not adapt from Tewardson is her referral to Levin Varnhagen by her first name only. Instead, I choose to include both her surnames – her maiden name Levin and her husband’s name Varnhagen. She married in 1814, when she was already quite far into her life and career, and both periods of her life, as Rahel Levin and as Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, were equally significant and rich in literary production. To situate Austen’s writing, several essays from Claudia L. Johnson’s and Clara Tuite’s *A Companion to Jane Austen* provide a main source of reference. However, scholarship on Austen is notably much broader in scope than that on Levin Varnhagen, which is reflected in this chapter by the inclusion of further works such as Warren Roberts’ *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* or Annika Bautz’ studies on Jane Austen’s reception.

For the second and third chapter I have decided to take the less common approach of studying Austen’s often overlooked letters, rather than her novels, alongside Levin Varnhagen’s letters, examining both for their literariness. In Chapter Two the neglected genre of letter writing will be paid particular attention through a close reading of Austen’s and Levin Varnhagen’s letters. This comparative analysis will help to identify patterns and significant features that characterise each woman’s different way of letter writing as well as their similarities. The close reading of Austen’s letters will be supported by Roger Sales’ *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* and Kathryn Sutherland’s essay on *Jane Austen’s Life and Letters*. Again, studies on Levin Varnhagen’s letters are rare in comparison. Nevertheless, Renata

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<sup>12</sup> Heidi Thomann Tewardson, *Rahel Levin Varnhagen: Life and Work of a German Jewish Intellectual* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 5.

Fuchs' notions about her "subliminal dialogue" with Goethe,<sup>13</sup> which inhabits a central position in Levin Varnhagen's writing career will be of use to back my understanding of her letters. The last chapter, then, will be dedicated to the aspects of literariness in Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's letters and how they relate to their respective position and recognition in the literary canon. The latter will be outlined especially in the very last section, which will draw on the findings of the preceding chapters in an attempt to explain the contrasting canonisation of Austen and Levin Varnhagen. Based on these explanations, the conclusion will make transfers from the specific analysis on Austen and Levin Varnhagen to the general difference in recognition between English and German women writers. As some of these transfers remain hypothetical, they will provide the basis for an outlook on possibilities for further research moving towards women writers from the nineteenth century.

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<sup>13</sup> Renata Fuchs, "'Sie hat den Gegenstand': Rahel Levin Varnhagen's Subliminal Dialogue with Goethe", *Goethe Yearbook*, 27 (2020), 101-117 <doi:10.1353/gyr.2020.0000> (p. 104).

# 1. Writing Conditions for Jane Austen and Rahel Levin Varnhagen

Before looking more closely at letters from Austen and Levin Varnhagen, and at their role regarding the unequal recognition of these two women writers, the writing conditions they each found themselves in must be illustrated. Hence, this first chapter will set out the key factors influencing Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's position as authoresses of the *Long Eighteenth Century*. These include the eighteenth-century connection between women and letter writing, the ambivalent role of the public and the private sphere, the broader historical context, and the *Trivialliteratur-Hochliteratur*-dichotomy as particularly prevalent in Germany. The presentation of the historical context will be heavily concentrated on the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, especially focusing on their impact on women in England and Germany as well as on Jews in Germany.

## 1.1 Women and Letter Writing

Women's letter-writing around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century served several purposes. Although "to maintain family connections and to share news"<sup>14</sup> were part of the letter's function, this dissertation will focus on its more literary purposes. French aptly depicts the difficulties women writers were facing during that time, since they "were excluded from the public sphere and from the intense exposure that men had to studying and writing in the formal, 'good', classical literary forms."<sup>15</sup> As she posits, the writing of letters as well as diaries presented women with "outlets for their creativity,"<sup>16</sup> functioning as a loophole from this exclusion. Hannah Lotte Lund likewise describes the status of the letter "für Frauen um 1800 als Ausdrucksmedium par excellence,"<sup>17</sup> suggesting that letter writing enabled women to express themselves in a way that was not only socially acceptable but even wanted of them. This positive association with women's letter writing around 1800 is further confirmed by Sutherland, who mentions the presence of Austen's "own voice" which can be found only in her letters.<sup>18</sup> The "semipublic" medium of the letter, namely, allowed a woman

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<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Sutherland, 'Jane Austen's Life and Letters', in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 13-30 (p. 15).

<sup>15</sup> Lorely French, *German Women As Letter Writers 1750-1850* (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Hannah Lotte Lund, *Der Berliner „jüdische Salon“ um 1800: Emanzipation in der Debatte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> Sutherland, p. 13.

to “express herself without ever having to compromise her authenticity.”<sup>19</sup> To understand the letter as an important part of “the development of women’s literary talents,”<sup>20</sup> its double function as a writing practice and a medium to position oneself within the contemporary literary field needs to be considered.

Since Austen used the novel as her primary domain of authorship, her novels cannot be left out when examining the function of her letters as a writing practice. Ascribing a “key” role to Austen’s letters in her writing career, Sutherland calls Austen’s letters “the raw data for the life and the untransformed banalities which, magically transmuted, become the precious trivia of the novels.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, sections 3.1 and 3.2 will illustrate the parallels between her letters and her novels, illuminating the ways in which Austen used letter writing as her experimenting terrain on which she then built her novels. Levin Varnhagen, on the other hand, never applied her writing skills developed through letter writing onto a different genre. Nevertheless, her letters likewise reveal her attempt to improve her own writing within the letter writing genre through the correspondence with her vast circle of intellectual friends. The role of letter writing as an opportunity to position themselves within the literary discourse will also be depicted in section 3.1 as evident in the letters of both writers, whereby Levin Varnhagen’s reflections on other authors and their works takes up a much greater part of her writing than it does in Austen’s. Levin Varnhagen’s letters tend to not only include but *become* literary reviews,<sup>22</sup> however, it is fair to say that both women engage intensely with contemporary writers and thus participate in contemporary literary discourse.

On the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that letter writing as a genre also imposed severe limitations on women writers, whom this genre did not enable to be acknowledged as part of the ‘great’ contemporary authors. Women writers were thus belittled by being praised as particularly suited “für die weniger spezialisierte – und weniger angesehene – Gattung des Briefs, später auch des Romans.”<sup>23</sup> Their letter writing, as well as their novel writing, was never considered as great or genius, since the genres of letter and novel writing were inherently excluded from that kind of literary prestige. As Tewarson states, “the letter as an autonomous genre was demoted to

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<sup>19</sup> Tewarson, p. 206.

<sup>20</sup> French, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Sutherland, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Lund, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

secondary status”<sup>24</sup>, and women’s letters “were rarely appreciated for their literary value alone.”<sup>25</sup> Silvia Bovenschen calls epistolary writing “ein trojanisches Pferd” pretending to provide women with the possibility of being part of the literary public, while in reality diminishing their literary ambition.<sup>26</sup> Being a good letter writer meant conforming to male ideals of women’s writing as sentimental, light-hearted, and ignorant of public affairs.<sup>27</sup> Hence, by aspiring to be considered an excellent letter writer, “women risked confinement within the marginal realms of literary production,”<sup>28</sup> just as they risked a segregation “from more publicly accepted forms of literary expression.”<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the role of women’s letter writing must be viewed as highly ambiguous, enabling eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women to be part of the literary sphere, while at the same time working to disguise female genius.

## 1.2 The Public and the Private

The extent to which letter writing really enabled women to take part in the public discourse therefore has to be questioned, with French attributing the “intersection between private and public” to the characteristics of the letter form.<sup>30</sup> Sales, too, identifies letter writing as “a relatively private activity that could at the same time be an extremely public one.”<sup>31</sup> With regard to Austen’s letters, Sales explains that even private letters, addressed to only one recipient were usually read and even discussed “by a wide range of people.”<sup>32</sup> Sutherland observes accordingly that “Austen’s letters almost always imply an audience of more than one”<sup>33</sup>, hence, these letters become “themselves social events whose reach and interpretation the writer soon loses power to calculate or control.”<sup>34</sup> The same can be said about Levin Varnhagen, too, whose “entire epistolary project was based on a form of dialogue that, from the beginning, sought to unite the private and public spheres.”<sup>35</sup> Like Tewardson, Sutherland views letter writing as a semi-

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<sup>24</sup> Tewardson, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> Silvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 200.

<sup>27</sup> French, pp. 56-57.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Sutherland, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Fuchs, p. 104.

public activity, a “‘halböffentliches’ [...] Medium.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, letters were often directly reflective of contemporary political and societal debates<sup>37</sup> and of how these affected the letter writer’s life. Depending on political or cultural relevance they did sometimes transgress the line from private to public entirely, by being published in “newspapers, etiquette manuals, collections, political treatises, essays, and novels,”<sup>38</sup> which was the case with both Levin Varnhagen and Austen. Although the latter never published her private letters herself, she included many fictional ones in her novels such as in *Pride and Prejudice*, and this way was able to make epistolary writing a public art form. Noteworthy, the public sphere became even less accessible for English women after Edmund Burke had published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790. The effect of this “eloquent statement of the conservatives’ horror at what was happening in France and concern over what might well occur in England”<sup>39</sup> on the role of women will be elaborated more in 1.3. Levin Varnhagen, on the other hand, published some of her letters in different journals and collections.<sup>40</sup> Although she did so anonymously, her attempts to publish her own writing are proof of her desire to participate in public (literary) discourse, a desire which is repeatedly emphasized by Herbert Scurla in his biography on her. He illustrates her continuous aspiration to contribute to the public developments of intellectual thought by keeping letter correspondence with many public figures and hosting her own, very well-known, and well-visited salon in Berlin.<sup>41</sup>

Her salon was part of a whole salon culture in Berlin, often initiated by Jewish women, and therefore termed “jüdischer Salon.”<sup>42</sup> Lund mentions Levin Varnhagen as one of the “acht Protagonisten” of the Berlin Jewish salon culture,<sup>43</sup> highlighting her significant role among the intellectual circles in Berlin around 1800. The guests of her salon included well-known members of the “cultural and [...] political elite”<sup>44</sup> such as Alexander von Humboldt, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Ludwig Tieck, who came together to discuss literary and philosophical ideas. Lund places

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<sup>36</sup> Lund, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> Sales, pp. 31, 55.

<sup>38</sup> French, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> Tewardson, p. 201.

<sup>41</sup> Herbert Scurla, *Rahel Varnhagen: Die große Frauengestalt der deutschen Romantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980)

<sup>42</sup> Lund, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Tewardson, p. 1.

Berlin Jewish salon culture “im Schnittpunkt der Emanzipationsdiskurse”, meaning the debates concerning Jewish and female emancipation, which fell within the same time frame (1770-1830).<sup>45</sup> Thereby, the salon offered “Zugangsmöglichkeiten zur deutschen Kultur (für die Juden) wie für erweiterte Bildung (für Frauen).”<sup>46</sup> Her discussion of the salon as “‘halböffentlichen’ Ort”<sup>47</sup> draws a parallel between the salon and the letter, which are “Forschungsgeschichtlich [...] darin vergleichbar, dass beide als erweiterter Schreibort für Frauen um 1800 diskutiert wurden,”<sup>48</sup> both occupying a space in the *Halböffentlichkeit*. Like the letter, the salon could turn from a private/domestic matter into a partly public one, by inviting representatives of the literary or political public to it.<sup>49</sup>

Noteworthy, Lund challenges this “Separate-Spheres-Ideology,” claiming that the public-private-dichotomy model simplifies the understanding of public and private around 1800, which according to her differs from our understanding of these terms today.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Lund agrees that within this binary model of the two separate spheres, for men and women, both letter writing and the salon have in common that they offered women “die Möglichkeit, Kontakte anzuknüpfen und zu pflegen, ohne dafür den ihnen gesellschaftlich zugedachten Raum verlassen zu müssen.”<sup>51</sup> This resembles Senem Yildirim’s approach, which equally questions the public-private dichotomy put forth in Hannah Arendt’s biography on Levin Varnhagen: Yildirim suggests that Levin Varnhagen cannot be placed on either side of the public-private dichotomy, as she inhabits an “in-between space”, the “social space,”<sup>52</sup> which turns her into “a political figure” without being part of the public sphere.<sup>53</sup> Due to her role as salonnière and to her epistolary correspondences, Levin Varnhagen is therefore able to transcend the purely private realm; however, she still remains an outsider when it comes to actively operating within the political and literary sphere. Scuria, like Arendt, traces Varnhagen’s unceasing suffering due to her double exclusion from the public sphere as a woman and as a Jewess, stating that “als Frau, zumal als jüdische Frau, war ihr jede

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<sup>45</sup> Lund, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-69.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> Senem Yildirim, ‘Arendt’s Rahel Varnhagen: Challenging the Public-Private Dichotomy’, *Kültür ve İletişim*, 25 (2022), 102-122 <doi: 10.18691/kulturveiletisim.984424> (p. 111).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

öffentliche Wirksamkeit versagt.”<sup>54</sup> This leads us to the next chapter, in which the political context Austen and Levin Varnhagen each found themselves in, will be examined.

### 1.3 Great Events and Literary Time Periods: The French Revolution and the Other Side of History

Both Austen and Levin Varnhagen were writing during a time of major political upheaval, caused by the French Revolution and the following Napoleonic Wars, which did not only leave its traces in France, but greatly impacted most European countries. It profoundly altered England’s until then relatively stable society,<sup>55</sup> creating a “political division” among its population.<sup>56</sup> Some felt inspired by the democratic principles of the French Revolution and used Rousseau’s words and ideas to argue “for internal, domestic change.”<sup>57</sup> These radicals came to be called *Jacobins* in England, while the “widespread fear of internal revolution” led to an *anti-Jacobin* attitude among a great part of English society.<sup>58</sup> Marilyn Butler places Austen’s writing on the anti-Jacobin side.<sup>59</sup> She points out that Austen’s novels “do not mention the French Revolution and barely allude to the Napoleonic Wars.”<sup>60</sup> This criticism goes hand in hand with the judgement of Austen as “apolitical and ahistorical”, which was the general critical consensus on her texts for a long time<sup>61</sup> due to the lack of *direct* references to “the major events of her day.”<sup>62</sup> In more recent scholarship, however, the ways in which Austen’s writing reflects the social, cultural, and political climate of her time, have come to be more acknowledged. Deirdre Le Faye posits that Austen “did indeed write about the French wars — from the point of view of a single young woman living in the English countryside.”<sup>63</sup> This statement stresses the importance of considering disregarded experiences of historical events such as women’s experiences. The latter is equally emphasised by Silke Arnold-de Simine, who argues against the German custom

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<sup>54</sup> Scuria, p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London: The Athlone Press, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 123.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Spongberg, ‘Jane Austen, the 1790s, and the French Revolution’, in *Companion to Austen*, ed. by Johnson and Tuite, pp. 272-281 (p. 277).

<sup>62</sup> David Monaghan, *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1981), p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: The World of her Novels* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2002), p. 149.



of “pejoratively” terming women’s literature as ‘trivial.’<sup>64</sup> In doing so, she highlights the value of women’s “stories, letters, and diaries”, which offer “political and historical narratives as viewed from their marginalized, female perspective.”<sup>65</sup> Austen’s focus on domestic matters in her letters and her novels, then, becomes historically relevant for providing “a form of historiography in which the focus lies more on the history of customs and manners than on central political actors and events.”<sup>66</sup> Thereby, it is crucial to understand that the “atmosphere of increasingly uncompromising patriotism” induced by the war with Revolutionary France<sup>67</sup> was closely linked to notions of “proper femininity”<sup>68</sup> on which the anti-Jacobins’ identification with a stable, traditional England was based. Vivien Jones fittingly articulates the contradictory position women were placed in through the ideals of *Burkean conservatism* dominating the values of English society at the time: Burke promoted the “intimate connection between family and state,” granting women a position of high significance within the family and hence the state; however, this newfound value was only effective “within the patriotic effort,” confining women more than ever to the domestic space.<sup>69</sup> Austen, thus, presents women’s difficulties in now being forced even more fiercely into their conventional, domestic role. However, being aware of the “connection between the feminist cause and political radicalism”<sup>70</sup> as well as of the fact that “women writers came under particular scrutiny,”<sup>71</sup> Austen avoids polemical statements. Instead, she “engage[s] indirectly with the agenda of conservative reform,” endorsing Enlightenment ideas of equality and women’s rationality in “nonthreatening ways.”<sup>72</sup> While she thus cannot be called a radical/Jacobin writer, Butler’s account of her as an anti-Jacobin authoress does not seem to fit either.

Rather, it seems that Austen managed to convey ideals rooted in the Enlightenment, without overstepping a line that would have cost her being accepted on the conservative English literary market. In fact, she even managed to not only be tolerated but welcomed in it by capturing “the essence of the English middle classes at

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<sup>64</sup> Silke Arnold-De Simone, ‘Blaming the Other: English Translations of Benedikte Naubert’s *Hermann von Unna* (1788/1794)’, in *Popular revenants: the German gothic and its international reception, 1800-2000*, ed. by Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (Rochester: Camden House, 2012), pp. 60-75 (p. 60).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Vivien Jones, ‘Feminisms’, in *Companion to Austen*, ed. by Johnson and Tuite, pp. 282-291 (p. 286).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Roberts, p. 155.

<sup>71</sup> Jones, p. 286.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

that critical juncture when they were shaping national identity in their image.”<sup>73</sup> Having created “a distinctly English novel,”<sup>74</sup> Austen played into the patriotic sentiment of her society, disguising her challenging views on women’s lot. Generally, the novel-genre presented Austen with major advantages in terms of popularity and literary recognition. This becomes evident against the background of Watt’s tracking of *The Rise of the Novel* that locates its beginnings in the early eighteenth century after which “the novel played a part of increasing importance in the literary scene.”<sup>75</sup> Watt traces the connections between the growing English reading public and the modernisation of the literary market and how they benefited some of the earliest novelists Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding.<sup>76</sup> This is also in line with Altick’s account of the English “mass reading public” which started to develop in the eighteenth century but became especially pronounced in the nineteenth century.<sup>77</sup> He explains the increased literacy among the immensely growing population by the rapid social changes that were taking place in the wake of the French Revolution, such as the “renewed concern to provide elementary education of the working class.”<sup>78</sup> Watt and Altick both mention the concept of the circulating library which provided “the common reader” with a cheaper and more easily accessible alternative to get hold of books.<sup>79</sup> Both also determine the novel as the “main attraction” of these circulating libraries;<sup>80</sup> it were to become “the favourite fare of the common reader, a distinction it has had ever since.”<sup>81</sup> Even though the novel was considered “not ‘literature’, and certainly not ‘art’” in the eighteenth century,<sup>82</sup> by the time of Austen “one of the most fertile, diverse and adventurous periods of novel-writing in English history” had set in.<sup>83</sup> Hence, Austen’s novel writing career took off during a momentum which enabled her to reach a wide novel readership, which would grow especially throughout the nineteenth century.

Significantly, Austen’s novels being representative of English culture was also advantageous for her reception in European countries, Germany especially, which were

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<sup>73</sup> Spongberg, p. 273.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 290.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-59.

<sup>77</sup> Altick, p. 81.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>80</sup> Watt, p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Altick, p. 63.

<sup>82</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

gripped by Britain's "kulturelle Ausstrahlungskraft" during the Enlightenment period.<sup>84</sup> Although enthusiasm for the French Revolution temporarily overshadowed Germans' interest in British culture, it was restored in 1793 "als die Schreckensherrschaft die Frankreich-Euphorie rasch in ihr Gegenteil umschlagen ließ."<sup>85</sup> Britain's appreciation for German literature, on the other hand, only started to develop slowly by the turn of the century,<sup>86</sup> which is another factor not working in favour of the literary recognition of German women writers. As depicted in Sangmeister's descriptions of the reception conditions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers in Germany, the situation regarding novel writing and extension of the reading public resembled that in England. He explains, for example, that the expansion of the literary market in the last third of the eighteenth century progressed "in einem noch nie dagewesenen Ausmaß und mit beispiellosem Tempo," whereby the novel was "das am schnellsten wachsende Segment."<sup>87</sup> Like Watt, he calls this development "Aufstieg des Romans,"<sup>88</sup> which was potentially also an effect of the prevailing Anglophilia in Germany, and did not add well to the absence of novels in Levin Varnhagen's writing career. Yet, the novel did by far not achieve the same status in Germany as it did in England, which might be due the factor of authors' independence. Watt suggests that England became the representative country of the novel genre because its booksellers were quicker in "removing literature from the control of patronage and bringing it under control of the laws of the marketplace."<sup>89</sup> The independency this granted the first English novelists from the first half of the eighteenth century put them at liberty to use the more easily understandable and producible prose form as well as more commonly popular themes.<sup>90</sup> According to Sangmeister, the equivalent step in Germany was only taken in the late eighteenth century,<sup>91</sup> the realistic possibility of living as a market-dependent writer being further delayed by the consequences of the French Revolution to the early nineteenth century.<sup>92</sup> The preconditions for the novel genre to flourish were therefore established in England significantly sooner than in Germany.

Evidently, the French Revolution played a substantial role in Germany, too, and

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<sup>84</sup> Knapp and Kronshage, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 14-15.

<sup>87</sup> Dirk Sangmeister, *August Lafontaine oder Die Vergänglichkeit des Erfolges: Leben und Werk eines Bestsellerautors der Spätaufklärung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), p. 201.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>89</sup> Watt, pp. 55-56.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>91</sup> Sangmeister, p. 208.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

its consequences were most strongly felt by members of the Jewish community to which Levin Varnhagen belonged. Despite being better off than most German Jews due to her father's privileged position under the protection of King Fredrick II, the Levin family was not spared from a continuous social exclusion based on their Jewishness.<sup>93</sup> Born between the 1770s and 1780s the childhood of Levin Varnhagen and her siblings "coincided with the period of Jewish emancipation."<sup>94</sup> One primary component of the efforts of Jewish emancipation was the attempt of Jewish assimilation within German-Gentile society. Although not all Jews, especially not the younger generation, liked the idea of having to accommodate their "Jewish self-affirmation," Levin Varnhagen continuously throughout her life attempted to assimilate, finally even through conversion and marriage to the Christian Karl August Varnhagen von Ense.<sup>95</sup> Tewarson explains that her desire to spite her unfortunate position as a Jewish woman by "attempting to join mainstream society provides the key to many of her character traits."<sup>96</sup> Some of her early letters even seem hesitant to address the discrimination against Jews, showing her attempt to distance herself from her Jewish identity that she always perceived as a burden.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that many of her lifelong friends were Jewish and that she was part of the predominantly *Jewish* salon culture shows that she never denied nor fully gave up on her Jewish origins,<sup>98</sup> which became a more central political topic in her later writings.

Importantly, the exclusion of Jews in Germany went strongly against Levin Varnhagen's belief in the egalitarian and humanist ideals shaped by the Enlightenment period.<sup>99</sup> These ideals which the principles of the French Revolution were tied to "seemed a foretaste of a tolerant society."<sup>100</sup> This was further cemented, when French Jews became full citizens in 1790 and 1791 in consequence of the French Revolution, which had now "placed the question of Jewish civil equality on the European political agenda and had made real new possibilities for inclusion and integration."<sup>101</sup> However, both Todd Endelman and Tewarson note that these positive developments owed to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution must be seen as a double-edged sword: Their

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<sup>93</sup> Tewarson, pp. 18-20.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Todd Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 66.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

relation to France, namely, caused its values, including “rationalism, humanism, and cosmopolitanism”, to be “associated with a lack of German sentiment.”<sup>102</sup> Especially after Napoleon’s victory over Prussia and entry into Berlin in 1806, the duplicity of improvement and deterioration of the Jews’ situation showed itself.<sup>103</sup> Although the legal conditions for the Jewish community benefited immensely from the French occupation, these improvements were merely “imposed from above, and in no sense a reflection of broad currents of public sentiment.”<sup>104</sup> Since new reforms such as Jews being granted full citizenship in the Emancipation Edict of 1812, for example, “were not the result of pressures from the population at large,” this kind of liberalism was now “equated with lack of patriotism.”<sup>105</sup> Tewarson defines this new German patriotism as follows:

[F]rom its anti-French stance, it followed that German society was on the verge of abandoning the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan world view; the jab against philistines and Jews revealed its elitist and therefore antidemocratic attitudes, while the exclusion of women was directed explicitly against popular Jewish sociability, dominated by women. Thus, despite the very real and positive changes in the civil status of Jews, their everyday experiences often changed for the worse.<sup>106</sup>

Again, the link between the exclusion of Jews and that of women is drawn and the ways in which German women were negatively affected by the contemporary political changes brought to light. Therewith, Tewarson confirms the relevance of Lund’s understanding of the Berlin Jewish salon as connecting the two debates on female and Jewish emancipation. Interestingly, Tewarson also remarks that Levin Varnhagen at times appeared to be even more affected by “the limitations imposed on her as a woman”, than by those imposed on her as a Jew.<sup>107</sup> While she acknowledges the extent of anti-Jewish prejudice “only gradually,”<sup>108</sup> her fervent objections to the oppression of women remained consistent throughout her life and writing. Like Austen, she therefore contributes to shedding light on women’s suffering in history which has often been neglected in male-dominated historiography.

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<sup>102</sup> Endelman, p. 67.

<sup>103</sup> Tewarson, p. 91.

<sup>104</sup> Endelman, p. 67.

<sup>105</sup> Tewarson, pp. 91-92.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

At this point, Levin Varnhagen's letters have to be considered also in light of the Romantic period with which she is often associated. For sure, she was a contemporary of the Romantics, and the emotional tone and individualistic emphasis in her letters are "akin to the poetic theories of the early Romantics."<sup>109</sup> However, there exist from the beginning certain disagreements between her and the Romantics from which by the time of her later writings "fundamental differences emerge."<sup>110</sup> One major factor in this estrangement between Levin Varnhagen and the Romantics was the latter's role in this "jab against philistines and Jews" as well as against women, as formulated in the above quote by Tewarson. For the rejection of values linked with the French Revolution caused a "reorientation" of the Romantic's ideology during the early nineteenth century, including "their embrace of Catholicism, Germanic patriotism and chauvinism, and the glorification of the Middle Ages."<sup>111</sup> Going at once against Jews and women, this newfound tendency of the Romantics could not have been something that Levin Varnhagen identified with. Admittedly, some of her letters prove that she was at times under the influence of strong patriotic sentiment as well. As early as December 1808, she writes to Karl Varnhagen: "Könnst' ich doch nur nach meinem Tode mein Land glücklich sehen! Das wäre Existenz genug!"<sup>112</sup> These patriotic tendencies were enhanced when Prussia declared war on Napoleon in 1813 and Levin Varnhagen actively participated in the war effort.<sup>113</sup> However, she always remained "firmly committed to the principles of Enlightenment", and never gave up on her cosmopolitan views.<sup>114</sup> Contrasting Austen's more subtle allusions to politics, Levin Varnhagen, thus, was directly and explicitly engaged in the political affairs of her time, though mostly in her letters from later years and in her second rather than her first salon.<sup>115</sup> What needs to be detained from this embedding of Austen and Levin Varnhagen in their respective historical context is firstly, both writers were shaped enormously by the French Revolution and its aftermath. Secondly, while German nationalism put obstacles in the way of Levin Varnhagen's career, the increased sense of patriotism in England and Austen's way of dealing with it, proved to be rather beneficial for the reception of Austen's works.

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<sup>109</sup> Tewarson, p. 200.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Rahel Varnhagen, *Gesammelte Werke – Rahel-Bibliothek*, ed. by Konrad Feilchenfeldt, Uwe Schweikert and Rahel E. Steiner, 10 vols (München: Matthes & Seitz, 1983-1986), I (1983), p. 380.

<sup>113</sup> Tewarson, p. 129.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

#### 1.4 The dichotomy of *Trivial*- and *Hochliteratur*

Since the term ‘trivial’ has come up in chapter 1.3 already, this section will examine the dichotomy between *Trivialliteratur* and *Hochliteratur* as another factor which strongly influenced German writers and especially German *women* writers. The distinction between the two is nowhere as prominent as it is in the German language, in fact, “der Begriff ‘Trivialliteratur’ [...] ist auf den deutschen Sprachraum beschränkt.”<sup>116</sup> The *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft* defines the term *Trivialliteratur* as a type of literature, “die um des Profits ihrer Produzenten (der Verleger und Autor) willen den Bedürfnissen, Erwartungen, Dispositionen eines möglichst großen Leser- und Käuferpublikums unmittelbar entgegenkommt.”<sup>117</sup> Hence, *Trivialliteratur*, while meaning “als ästhetisch minderwertig angesehen Literatur”<sup>118</sup> is usually associated with popularity and success on the literary market. Although the letter was usually excluded from the realm of *Hochliteratur* as well as from that kind of success, it was nonetheless a widely consumed genre, especially among women. Knapp and Kronshage, too, emphasise that what is today seen as ‘high’ literature “spiegelt, wie Walter Benjamin gezeigt hat, selten die tatsächliche Beliebtheit viel gelesener Schriften der Zeit, die jedoch relevant wird, wenn es um eine adäquate Geschichtsschreibung britisch-deutschen Literaturtransfers geht.”<sup>119</sup> Their reference to Benjamin is highly relevant in this context, since it allows us to pick up Simine’s point about overlooked historical narratives. For Benjamin’s notions on historiography exceed the scope of literary criticism and are tied to his position as an exiled Jew during World War II. In his theses *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, composed in 1940, he highlights the importance of interfering with history and bringing the oppressed perspectives of the past to the foreground.<sup>120</sup> Besides underpinning the significance of Levin Varnhagen’s Jewish perspective, Benjamin’s take on historiography is applicable also to the marginalised perspectives of women. Following his stance put forth in the theses, it becomes obvious that these neglected perspectives will lead to “historische Erkenntnis”<sup>121</sup> and are therefore anything but trivial.

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<sup>116</sup> Hans-Joachim Althof, ‘TRIVIALLITERATUR: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Begriffs und seines Umfelds [mit einer Bibliographie]’, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 22 (1978), 175-201 (p. 182.)

<sup>117</sup> Peter Nusser, ‘Trivialliteratur’, in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, ed. by Jan-Dirk Müller (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2003), III, pp. 691-695 (p. 691).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 692.

<sup>119</sup> Knapp and Kronshage, pp. 13-14.

<sup>120</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), I-II, pp. 692-704 (pp. 696-697).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, (p. 700).

According to Nusser, the German dichotomy between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature has developed since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>122</sup> which falls right into the time when Levin Varnhagen began writing. Another term to be introduced here is *Unterhaltungsliteratur*, which can be placed “auf einer mittleren Ebene zwischen der Trivial- und der Hochliteratur.”<sup>123</sup> While it is less negatively connotated than *Trivialliteratur*, since it entails “differenzierte ästhetische Mittel,”<sup>124</sup> *Unterhaltungsliteratur* was still not something German writers would want to be associated with during the *Long Eighteenth Century*. Sangmeister demonstrates this with the example of the German eighteenth-century novel writer August Lafontaine. Despite achieving exceptional popularity in his own lifetime, Lafontaine’s success was always accompanied by the disdain of contemporary German authors due to the ‘triviality’ of his novels.<sup>125</sup> Like other German “Unterhaltungsautoren,” he was constantly exposed to “Kritik, die [seinen] Publikumserfolgen stets den künstlerischen Wert absprach.”<sup>126</sup> When he wanted to turn away from the novel and produce something “von bleibendem Wert,” his attempt at getting rid of the label “Unterhaltungsschriftsteller” by devoting himself to the classics remained unsuccessful.<sup>127</sup> This indicates that moving between the spheres of *Trivial-* and *Hochliteratur* was nearly impossible.

Significantly, Althof identifies Goethe and his exceptional standing within German literature as one of the main causes of Germany’s “Fixierung auf literarische Spitzenleistungen.”<sup>128</sup> He claims that Goethe’s writing was viewed as the norm for greatness, against which every other piece of writing was measured.<sup>129</sup> This phenomenon of one author changing the ambition of every following author of their country is unique to Germany, and there is “keine Entsprechung” in the literatures of other nations.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, Goethe’s reflections concerning the “Dilettantismus-Problem” around 1780 were indeed the “Ausgangspunkt für die Abwertung der

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<sup>122</sup> Nusser, p. 692.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 691.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Sangmeister, pp. 131-133.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>128</sup> Althof, p. 182.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 183.



Massenliteratur;”<sup>131</sup> in 1797, his and Schiller’s *Xenien*, “verfestigen die Dichotomisierung von hoher und niederer Literatur.”<sup>132</sup> This exceptional position German writers thus find themselves in, has “produced a great many poets and philosophers”<sup>133</sup> but also led to a constant fear of being considered ‘trivial.’ German writers such as Levin Varnhagen, hence, show an immanent refusal to include anything in their writing which might associate them with ‘trivial’ literature or *Unterhaltungsliteratur* rather than ‘high’ literature. This might have been one reason why Levin Varnhagen kept away from the novel genre which was so closely linked with mass entertainment.

Although Goethe’s ideas on German literature “waren nicht unerheblich von der britischen beeinflusst,”<sup>134</sup> in England, while also belittled, entertainment literature was less harshly distinguished from ‘high’ literature. To be sure, English critics did form categories for what would be considered great or genius. The status of the novel, for instance, was also “low,”<sup>135</sup> which meant that there was “no real possibility of greatness in this genre.”<sup>136</sup> However, not being able to achieve greatness did not like in Germany result in writers being held in constant contempt. Bautz traces the reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott, illustrating their ability to establish a name for themselves, despite writing novels and even though one of them was a woman. As she claims, “Both Austen and Scott are exceptional in having achieved at a period over the course of their reception history high critical acclaim simultaneously with an immense public popularity.”<sup>137</sup> Albeit the fact that general popularity and critics’ appreciation did not often go hand in hand,<sup>138</sup> Austen and Scott did obtain esteem from all sides. However, the difference in their gender does not leave their reception unaffected: While Scott manages to achieve critics’ “unparalleled” admiration even as a novelist,<sup>139</sup> Austen’s works at first remained “clever but not intellectually challenging.”<sup>140</sup> This hints at a connection between trivial literature and women’s literature: Since “What added to the

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<sup>131</sup> Hans-Edwin Friedrich, ‘Kitsch’, in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, ed. by Harald Fricke (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2000), II, pp. 263-266 (p. 264).

<sup>132</sup> Sangmeister, p. 112.

<sup>133</sup> Mary Lane Fahnestock, ‘The Reception Of Jane Austen In Germany: A Miniaturist In The Land Of Poets and Philosophers’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 1982), p. 257.

<sup>134</sup> Knapp and Kronshage, p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> Annika Bautz, *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott: A Comparative Longitudinal Study* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

novel's low literary status was its being regarded as a female-dominated genre,"<sup>141</sup> it could be overcome by a male novelist. Nevertheless, I argue that being valued within this literary sphere of lower critical esteem, which was about to gain in prestige, paved the way for Austen's "comparatively sudden rise in her reputation"<sup>142</sup> in the twentieth century. Importantly, her popularity as well as her later status in the literary canon is rooted in her novels rather than her letters, since Austen's letters are by no means exempt from the aforementioned "secondary status" of letter writing. Although the condemnation of triviality seems especially strong within German scholarship, it "has often stigmatized most serious study of the private side of women's letters" in general.<sup>143</sup> Hence, in light of Benjamin's emphasis on the experiences of suppressed groups, women's letter writing "needs reevaluation to eliminate the pejorative connotation it has as a less-significant discourse and a non-literary form,"<sup>144</sup> which is part of the purpose of this study.

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<sup>141</sup> Bautz, p. 10.

<sup>142</sup> Walter Allen, *The English novel: a short critical history* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), p. 103.

<sup>143</sup> French, p. 167.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. Stylistic and Thematic Comparison between Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's Letters

Comparatively analysing selected letters from Austen and Levin Varnhagen will relocate the literary focus onto women's letter writing. Simultaneously it will help to identify potential reasons for the opposing developments of their recognition. Thereby, it needs to be acknowledged that the recipients of Austen's letters are in great parts restricted to her close family, predominantly her elder sister Cassandra Austen. Le Faye calls these letters "the equivalent of telephone calls between the sisters – hasty and elliptical, keeping each other informed of domestic events and occasionally making comments on the news of the day, both local and nation."<sup>145</sup> Levin Varnhagen's letters, on the other hand, encompass a much wider scope of correspondents as well as more and longer in-depth reflections of her own life and thoughts. To give an impression of the stylistic and thematic differences as well as similarities between Austen and Levin Varnhagen's letter writing, this section will analyse some early and some more mature letters by these two women alongside each other.

### 2.1 A Close Reading of Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's Early and Mature Letters

Le Faye's collection of Austen's letters starts in 1796, with a letter to Cassandra Austen who was residing in Kintbury with her fiancé at the time. Jane tells her about the ball from the night before, immediately introducing the gossipy, and humourist judgmental tone which draws itself through most of her letters. She remarks, for instance, that "Miss Heathcote is pretty, but no near so handsome as I expected."<sup>146</sup> Pointing out superficialities becomes a habit in many of her letters after this first one. Regarding her own conduct at the ball, she tells Cassandra: "I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together."<sup>147</sup> By her "Irish friend" Austen means Tom Lefroy with whom she is suspected to have been somewhat romantically involved.<sup>148</sup> Her way of telling Cassandra about her and Tom's misdemeanour and her being "afraid" of her elder sister's disapproval reveals a very youthful, almost childlike

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<sup>145</sup> Deirdre Le Faye, 'Preface', in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. xiv-xviii (p. xvii).

<sup>146</sup> Jane Austen, *Austen's Letters*, ed. by Le Faye, p. 1.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

manner in the 21-year-old Austen. Except from such anecdotes which solely serve the purpose of entertaining their reader, keeping Cassandra informed about factual matters concerning their family, is another essential function of the letter. Accordingly, she tells her of their brother Henry's plans about "getting a lieutenancy and adjutancy in the 86<sup>th</sup>, a new-raised regiment" and of their brother Charles who she supposes "must have sailed by this time."<sup>149</sup> This reading can be extended to the second letter, which was written only a few days after the first one and functions as a follow up letter. What is however striking about the second letter is the fact that the act of letter writing itself is brought up, which leads us to the fundamental concern of this analysis – the literariness of Austen's letters. After admitting to being "very much flattered" by Cassandra's praise of her last letter, Austen claims: "I write only for Fame, and without any view to pecuniary Emolument."<sup>150</sup> Although this might be just a playful, ironic comment, it does suggest that letter writing is also an art and does not *only* serve practical purposes. The role of the public and Austen's position in it is introduced, implying that Austen wishes to become a part of the public sphere through her writing. At the end of the letter another dominating trait in Austen's letters – her detachment from passionate emotions – can be detected. She laments: "At length the Day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, & when you receive this, it will be over – my tears flow as I write, at the melancholy idea."<sup>151</sup> The over-dramatic phrasing seems to ridicule her own sadness so that the reader cannot be sure of her true emotion, if she is being sarcastic or if the ironic undertone is a performative act to conceal a genuine heartbreak.

Letter number six, also addressed to Cassandra, is especially representative of Austen's light-natured way of providing us with a general picture of the daily life concerns of the English middle-class woman of her time. It tells of her life in Rowling, where she was then residing, while her sister seems to have stayed in their hometown Steventon. Each piece of information is only briefly mentioned and never much elaborated on, causing an "impatient, dismissive tone."<sup>152</sup> According to Sales, this can be blamed on the "then, strong economic pressures on most letter writers to write succinctly," since in this period, the recipients had to pay for the letters.<sup>153</sup> This is also confirmed by Le Faye's annotation within the letter, explaining that some of the

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<sup>149</sup> *Austen's Letters*, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> Sales, p. 36.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

paragraphs were written upside down and between the lines,<sup>154</sup> indicating that Austen wanted to fit in as much information in as little space as possible. She mentions several dinners she has attended, focused on giving her sister an impression of the people she met with, again accentuating her preference for studying and gossiping about different characters. Thereby, her observations exceed to what Sales calls “abusiveness” as the symptom of “a temporary loss of countenance that has to be worn publicly.”<sup>155</sup> She comments on Miss Fletcher’s Muslin that it “is pretty enough, tho’ it does not become her complexion,”<sup>156</sup> before going into the “two Traits in her Character which are pleasing; namely, she admires Camilla, & drinks no cream in her Tea.”<sup>157</sup> Both these remarks carry a sense of superiority in them, exposing Austen’s conviction of possessing a non-plus-ultra opinion on everything and everybody. Again, her main interest, however, lies in those events which concern her own family, in this case her brothers James, Edward, Henry, and Frank, whom the entire ending of the letter is centred around.<sup>158</sup> The ending also reveals her female dependency on her brother Frank in terms of travelling. She informs Cassandra that “You must not expect us quite so early however as wednesday the 20<sup>th</sup>”, explaining that “Frank had never any Idea of going away before Monday the 26<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>159</sup> The matter-of-factness of this explanation indicates that Frank’s will is clearly not up for debate; the day on which *they* leave depends on what day *he* wants to leave. This need for a sister to obey her brother and follow his plans is further cemented when she complains “As to the mode of our travelling to Town, *I* want to go in a Stage Coach, but Frank will not let me.”<sup>160</sup> Herewith, the depiction of the limited possibilities for women of Austen’s time, a predominant motif in her novels, is already introduced, if very briefly, in her letters.

Levin Varnhagen’s most significant correspondents include her childhood friend David Veit, her friend and later husband Karl Varnhagen, and her youngest brother Ludwig Robert. The many ways in which the letter writing of both women differs from each other can already be observed in comparing the above letters by Austen from 1796 to Levin Varnhagen’s early letters to Veit, who was the only one to accompany her “frühen Bildungsgang” and to guide her in her “Entwicklungsprozess.”<sup>161</sup> In February

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<sup>154</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 11.

<sup>155</sup> Sales, p. 35.

<sup>156</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 9.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Scurla, p. 54.

1794 she opens her letter to Veit with the question “Ich darf Ihnen doch etwas erzählen?“, followed by a seemingly trivial story about her younger brother Moritz and his attempt at lying about his misbehaviour. While the tone of this letter in the beginning reminds of the light tone Austen uses in her letters when writing about her brothers, Levin Varnhagen does not leave the story as a minor anecdote characteristic for Austen’s letters. Instead, she fills several pages precisely recalling the way in which Moritz tried to deny his mischief, and his mother’s reaction to his lying:

nur Moritz läugnete, der sagt nämlich, ich habe ja gar kein Bleistift, und dabei blieb er, das antwortete er wohl sechszehn- bis siebzehnmahl, auf alle Fragen, die nun in die Kreuz und Quer, wie in wirkliches Verhör, und mit Verstand ihn ängstigend, von allen Seiten hin und her gethan wurden; seine Farbe zeugte wider ihn, aber selbst das Rothwerden unterdrückte er und blieb recht hübsch dabei [...] Es gingen noch sehr hübsche Dinge bei der Geschichte vor; zuletzt, wie er’s denn nun wirklich gestanden hatte, so sagte Mama: „Man läugnet nicht, man sagt Lieber, ich war’s, und ich habe nicht gewußt, daß es unrecht ist, nun werd’ ich’s nicht mehr thun“<sup>162</sup>

Levin Varnhagen evidently feels for Moritz and is able to empathise with the fear that he felt in the moment of interrogation. This gives an insight into the kindness and tolerance she was said to meet anyone with,<sup>163</sup> setting her apart from Austen’s “abusiveness.” Choosing the adjective “hübsch” for these descriptions shows Levin Varnhagen’s affection for her younger brother as well as her appreciation of this incident as an intellectual exercise rather than as an everyday nuisance. She goes on to reflect the issue of raising children “für den Tummel der Welt” rather than “für einen positiven Himmel.”<sup>164</sup> Criticising that scaring children and making them feel ashamed of themselves were bad for their character development, Levin Varnhagen proposes that it is important to teach children to make up excuses, since they live in a world where lies are “ein nothwendiges Übel.”<sup>165</sup> This demonstrates her urge to see beyond trivialities and relate even such small daily life occurrences to a bigger picture, in this case children’s upbringing and education. Underpinning her determination to write for more than entertainment, she finishes the letter on the next day with a short comment of

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<sup>162</sup> Varnhagen, p. 68.

<sup>163</sup> Tewarson, p. 37.

<sup>164</sup> Varnhagen, p. 69.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

literary criticism on Homer. In observing that “Homer, so oft er von Wasser redet, immer groß ist, wie Goethe wenn er von den Sternen redet,”<sup>166</sup> she introduces a topic very prominent in many of her letters: her love for Goethe, a love which accompanies her throughout her whole life, and which Scurla even calls “Goethe-Anbetung.”<sup>167</sup> Aligning herself with Goethe who had achieved a status as the epitome of German literature and whom she viewed as the only “Maßstab poetischer Größe”<sup>168</sup> can be viewed as Levin Varnhagen’s attempt to associate her own writing with *Hoch-* rather than *Trivialliteratur*.

This is not to say, however, that her appreciation of Goethe is not sincere or does not result in a most profound understanding of his works: The next letter to be examined, likewise addressed to Veit in June 1795, functions as one example of her in-depth analysis of Goethe’s writing. Again, the beginning of the letter resembles Austen’s style before turning into an ambitious review of Goethe’s writing. There is, for instance, some gossip to be found on a person called Latrobe, who according to Levin Varnhagen, “geht ohne Puder und ist kurzsichtig; sieht melancholisch aus; und trug einen braunen Rock.”<sup>169</sup> This observance reminds of Austen’s way of giving account of her superficial first impressions of other people. However, after explaining how and what she heard about Latrobe, Levin Varnhagen finds her way back to Goethe, in stating that “er muß ein Mensch sein, weil ihn Goethe liebt.”<sup>170</sup> The next sentence “Meine Etcetera’s können Sie sich nun schon denken” is simultaneously a self-mockery on her obsession with Goethe as well as an introduction to her following lengthy examination of the character Aurelia from *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Discussing her own “Ähnlichkeit mit Aurelien”<sup>171</sup> she reflects upon their differences before acknowledging that “In Aurelien habe ich oft meine eigenen Worte gefunden.”<sup>172</sup> Hence, the approach Levin Varnhagen takes in analysing Goethe’s work is a very personal one, emphasizing the immediate connection she draws between Goethe’s works and her own life. Nevertheless, she does not blindly worship Goethe.<sup>173</sup>

Wenn er auch alles erfunden hat, Aurelien auch, die Reden von ihr hat er einmal gehört, das weiß ich, das glaub’ ich. [...] Die Frauen laß ich mir

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<sup>166</sup> Varnhagen, p. 70.

<sup>167</sup> Scurla, p. 52.

<sup>168</sup> Scurla, p. 69.

<sup>169</sup> Varnhagen, p. 138.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>173</sup> Fuchs, p. 108.

nicht abstreiten. Entweder, man denkt so etwas als Frau, oder man hört's von einer Frau. Zu erfinden ist das nicht. Alles andere nur Menschenmögliche gesteh ich ihm zu. Das weiß ich aber als ich.<sup>174</sup>

This remark proves her intellectual confidence in critically evaluating Goethe's writing, a confidence, which in this case is partly based on her knowledge and experience "als ich", aka as a woman. At the same time, her modification of "das weiß ich" to "das glaub' ich" can be viewed as an indicator that she is never quite sure of herself, an aspect that will be further carved out when looking at her more mature letters.

As Levin Varnhagen ascribes great importance to the search of *truth*,<sup>175</sup> the truth she finds in Goethe's works is one aspect that she especially values about him and that is repeatedly praised by her in many of her letters. She mentions it in this letter, too, pointing out that Goethe's poem "auf die Knappschaft zu Tarnowith ist himmlisch" because it is "eine allgemeine Wahrheit."<sup>176</sup> She proceeds by defining what a "wahrer Dichter" ought to be, emphasizing that he "muß an die äußersten Enden greifen [...] und diese bei jedem kleinen einzelnen Fall immer natürlich berühren."<sup>177</sup> This might be seen as an appeal to the empathetic qualities of a poet/author, who will only achieve greatness by touching upon ("berühren") others' emotions. Thereby, the need for a poet to be real ("natürlich") is emphasised. Levin Varnhagen's pursuit to live up to the truth in her own life and writing starts with the authenticity of her letters. Consequently, she asks Veit "Warum wollen Sie niemandem einen Brief ganz von mir zeigen? Mir würd' es gleich sein, nichts davon darf scheuen gesehen zu werden."<sup>178</sup> She is not worried about her letters being shown to the public, because she has nothing to hide. Indeed, she even exclaims "könn't ich mich nur den Menschen aufschließen wie man einen Schrank öffnet," expressing a wish to be part of the public sphere and share her opinions with a wider audience.<sup>179</sup> Despite the many differences in Levin Varnhagen's and Austen's letter writing, they thus share the aspiration to make their letter writing count for more than its function as a vehicle for information.

These patterns observed in Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's early letters before 1800 are enhanced in their more mature letters. Austen's letters addressed to Cassandra in 1811 are notably representative of the above-described chatty phone-call resemblance

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<sup>174</sup> Varnhagen, p. 140.

<sup>175</sup> Scuria, p. 72.

<sup>176</sup> Varnhagen, p. 142.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.



in her letter writing. On 18 April, Austen herself announces the contents of her letter as “little matters,” which entail her stay in a different town, the weather, her spendings, and a visit to the museum.<sup>180</sup> We find, with regard to Mary, daughter of the befriended Cooke family, another remark about women’s dependency on male relatives: Austen writes that she suggested that Mary and her should go to Chawton together, “but perhaps it may be impossible; unless a Brother can be at home at that time.”<sup>181</sup> Expressing her contentedness with undergoing simple everyday activities, she goes on to tell Cassandra that “We drank tea again yesterday with the Tilsons, & I met the Smiths. – I find all these little parties very pleasant.”<sup>182</sup> What she finds most “pleasant” about such events is that they give rise to opportunities for Austen to play voyeur to the people she meets with. Her “abusiveness” becomes evident again in her judgement of Miss Beatrice Smith, who according to her “is goodhumour itself, & does not seem much besides.”<sup>183</sup> This underlines the fact that “Civility was not always so necessary in at least some of the letters that were written to Cassandra, Martha Lloyd and, later on, to the nieces.”<sup>184</sup> A closer look at the following section of a letter to her close friend Martha Lloyd will demonstrate in what other way except this lack of civility Austen’s letters are “not always harmless.”<sup>185</sup> Proving that her writing is not detached from the social and political context of her time but reflects “her political opinions, especially as regards women’s situation,”<sup>186</sup> Austen exclaims:

I suppose all the World is sitting in Judgement upon the Princess of Wales’s Letter. Poor Woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a Woman, & because I hate her Husband – but I can hardly forgive her for calling herself “attached & affectionate” to a Man whom she must detest – [...] but if I must give up the Princess, I am resolved at least always to think that she would have been respectable, if the Prince had behaved only tolerably by her at first.<sup>187</sup>

The voicing of female solidarity depicts Austen’s “re-evaluation of standards of female worth”<sup>188</sup> in a time where “women can rarely have been held in lower esteem.”<sup>189</sup> While

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<sup>180</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 179.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 180.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Sales, p. 34.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 208.

<sup>188</sup> Monaghan, p. 107.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

expressing her disdain for the Princess of Wales's husband and their marriage, Austen is careful not to blame the woman and instead hold on to the belief "that she would have been respectable", were it not for the husband's bad behaviour. Yet, there are limitations to Austen's sympathy even towards another woman, as it is tied to the condition of a mutual understanding of her husband as "a Man whom she *must* detest." Again, Austen presents her view as the ultimate, unquestioned one.

The last letter by Austen to be analysed is a letter written to her niece Anna Austen in September 1814, which gives an impression of Austen's literary references as well as references to her own novel writing, which is another prominent aspect of many of her letters. Their letter exchange was often centred around Anna Austen's attempts as a novelist about which she came to her aunt for advice and feedback.<sup>190</sup> Their correspondence is thus of great interest, as it brings out Austen's role as authoress more strongly than any of her other letters, where personal matters and everyday inquiries are often in the foreground. The letter almost immediately begins with detailed commentary on the characters that appear in the chapter Anna Austen had given her aunt to read. Jane Austen, here, shows her expertise as a (novel) writer, especially when commenting on a character called "Henry Mellish" that "I am afraid will be too much in the common Novel style."<sup>191</sup> Likewise, Austen advises her niece against an expression she used in the chapter, because "it is such thorough novel slang."<sup>192</sup> Not only does this advice indicate that she is familiar with the contemporary practices of novel writing, the negative connotation of the term "novel slang" also discloses her percipience of the bad reputation of the novel.

Moreover, the letter entails literary references to other contemporary authors demonstrating an awareness of what was happening within the literary field of her time. She notes, for example, that "I am very fond of Sherlock's sermons, prefer them to almost any"<sup>193</sup>, whereby she is referring to Thomas Sherlock's volume *Several Discourses preached at the Temple Church*, which was first published in 1754.<sup>194</sup> Her knowledge of this not quite contemporary work – although it was published as a new edition in 1812<sup>195</sup> – as well as the implication that she has read many other sermons, is

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<sup>190</sup> Jan Fergus, 'The Literary Marketplace', in *Companion to Austen*, ed. by Johnson and Tuite, pp. 41-50 (p. 42).

<sup>191</sup> *Austen's Letters*, p. 277.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

evocative of the decent literary education that Austen received growing up.<sup>196</sup> One of the most striking literary references, however, is her expressed admiration for Walter Scott:

Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. – It is not fair. – He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people’s mouths. – I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverly if I can help it – but fear I must.<sup>197</sup>

While praising Scott’s work, this remark also insinuates their rivalry on the literary market. This sense of rivalry is then further enhanced by her announcement that “I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth’s, Yours & my own.”<sup>198</sup> This accentuates the high standards to which she holds her own writing and reveals her ambition to gain “Fame & Profit” as an authoress.

The strong integration of literary references seems to be one aspect where Austen and Levin Varnhagen’s writing resemble each other. Like in her earlier letters to Veit, Levin Varnhagen’s main source of reference continues to be the works of Goethe. One letter, which confirms that her adoration of him only increases over time, is her letter to Karl Varnhagen from 22 July 1808. It opens with the exclamation: “Du hast keine Vorstellung davon, mit welchem Schreck ich erwache! Eine hemmende Überlegung, die selbst nie zu Ende kommt, drückt mir das Herz zu, und wie zurück.”<sup>199</sup> This passionate beginning of the letter is typical for Levin Varnhagen’s writing, which, contrasting Austen’s emotionally reserved writing style, tends to give profound insights into her state of feeling. After describing her agitated mood, Levin Varnhagen goes on to explain how she seeks shelter in Goethe. Again, it becomes evident that Goethe is more than just a literary reference to her. Like in her earlier letters, “she does not leave out Goethe, while reflecting on her life,”<sup>200</sup> and therefore takes a very personal approach to her relationship with him:

Durch all mein Leben begleitete der Dichter mich unfehlbar [...] mein rührender Freund, von dem ich wußte, welche Höllen er kannte! – kurz, mit ihm bin ich erwachsen, und nach tausend Trennungen fand ich ihn immer

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<sup>196</sup> Roberts, p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 277.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>199</sup> Varnhagen, p. 338.

<sup>200</sup> Fuchs, p. 110.

wieder, er war mir unfehlbar; und ich, da ich kein Dichter bin, werde es nie aussprechen, was er mir war!<sup>201</sup>

This passage evokes the impression that she is intimately acquainted with Goethe and reveals how much emotion Levin Varnhagen has attached to this literary figure whom she appears to view as a close friend. Her great knowledgeability of the entirety of his writings ostensibly provides her with the authority of speaking of *Goethe* as a whole, rather than just of singular works. Interestingly, unlike Austen with Scott, she views her own writing as clearly inferior to Goethe's, stating that she cannot even put into words what he means to her because she is "kein Dichter." Instead, she quotes a verse passage from *him* before affirming that "Mein Freund hat es auch dismal für mich ausgesprochen!"<sup>202</sup> Again, the exclamation mark and the use of the word "Freund" confirm the interweaving of Levin Varnhagen's literary references with her personal life, as well as the generally emotionally charged tone of her letters.

But her literary references are not reduced to Goethe. In fact, the large spectrum of references to various works and authors in her letters reveals that "she was unusually widely read in classical and European literature and in recent and contemporary German literature."<sup>203</sup> One example is her letter from 18 November 1808, also addressed to Karl Varnhagen, which sets in with her telling him that "Gestern Abend habe ich den Sigurd gelesen. – Lange, lange nicht hat mir etwas so gefallen!"<sup>204</sup> She then goes on to elaborate what exactly she likes about the text, whereby she mentions her usual aversion "gegen jede andere, als die olympische Mythologie, gegen nordische Sagen, Runen u. dgl."<sup>205</sup> Comparable to Austen's comment on the sermons, this assertion about general dislike towards anything other than Olympic mythology works to hint at her expertise concerning this area of literature. This emphasis on her own intellect is further intensified in the second part of the letter, where she depicts her dilemma: "Meine Einsicht ist so tüchtig, meine Weltkenntniß so gereift [...] mein Gemüth kann nur noch von Edlem, Ausgezeichnetem, Geistvollem und Reichem affiziert werden."<sup>206</sup> These thoughts almost carry a sense of intellectual arrogance. They underpin German's "reputation for exaggerated intellectuality"<sup>207</sup> and can be regarded as another effort to

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<sup>201</sup> Varnhagen, p. 339.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>203</sup> Tewardson, p. 29.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Fahnestock, p. 257.

place her writing on the side of *Hochliteratur*. Within the review-like passage on “Sigurd” she includes another reference – to Shakespeare – recalling her emotional reaction to the text: “wie ich nur Lady Macbeth und Einmal Juden die lange Nacht habe weinen sehen, so muß’ ich das Buch weglegen, und Schleusen eröffneten sich innen, laut reden und ächzen muß’ ich dabei.”<sup>208</sup> Besides the pointing to Lady Macbeth, what stands out in this reference is her comment on the suffering of Jews. Political comments of this sort become much more prominent in her later letters, which then become even more different from Austen’s. At the time of the anti-Jewish Hep Hep riots in Germany in 1819, for example, she writes to Ludwig Robert:

seit 3 Jahre sag’ ich; die Juden werden gestürmt werden: ich habe Zeugen.  
Dies ist der deutsche Empöhrungs Muth. [...] Juden. – die man kraft  
Religionsauswüchse als Untergeordnete Wesen hassen, verachten und  
verfolgen durfte. [...] Es ist nicht Religionshaß: sie lieben ihre nicht, wie  
wollten sie andere haßen<sup>209</sup>

This passage gives an impression of her political understanding and her awareness of the changing situation of German Jews. Strong words such as “hassen” and “verachten” as well as the fact that she accuses Gentile society of not loving their own religion also show her lack of restraint in her political criticism.

## 2.2 Findings: Differences and Similarities in Austen’s and Levin Varnhagen’s Letters

At first sight the two women’s letter writing differ significantly from each other. Overall, Austen’s letters are shorter and “avoid any intimate revelation,”<sup>210</sup> while Levin Varnhagen’s are lengthier and more passionate. Austen’s curtness, thereby, often seems accompanied by a judgemental undertone or even “abusiveness,” as opposed to Levin Varnhagen’s empathetic and intimate, trusting manner. To some extent, then, Levin Varnhagen’s letters seem more authentic, less controlled, than Austen’s whose indifference generates a sense of performativity. On the other hand, Austen’s style could also be interpreted as simply more youthful and relaxed, while Levin Varnhagen’s focus on intellectuality and profoundness could, in turn, be seen as an act. Fearing an

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<sup>208</sup> Varnhagen, p. 370.

<sup>209</sup> Rahel Levin Varnhagen, *Briefwechsel mit Ludwig Robert*, ed. by Consolina Vigliero (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), p. 243.

<sup>210</sup> Julia L. Epstein, ‘Jane Austen’s Juvenilia and the Female Epistolary Tradition’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 21 (1985), 399-416 (p. 412).

association with the 'trivial', Levin Varnhagen evidently tries to stay away from the gossipy tone which is so prominent in Austen's letters. Instead, she concentrates on presenting her intellectual ideas and emotional processes in a detailed, intense manner that contrasts the casual nature of Austen's writing. These ambiguities in both women's letters regarding "Authentizität und Fiktion sowie das Potential des Briefes für Selbstinszenierungen" is to blame on the ambivalent position of the letter between the private and the public.<sup>211</sup> Another major difference is Levin Varnhagen's obsession with Goethe, for which Austen's letters show no equivalent. While Levin Varnhagen's works seems to be intertwined with Goethe's, leading her to "resituate him as her kindred spirit,"<sup>212</sup> Austen puts her own writing more in the foreground than the writing of any other author. Nonetheless, the two writers resemble each other in that their letters display a striking literariness, both women being very conscious of writing at an aesthetically high standard, rather than using letters exclusively for practical purposes. Austen as well as Levin Varnhagen assume an audience that consists of more than one recipient, each expressing confidence in the quality of her own writing and a desire to become part of the public discourse. Hence, they both also make allusions to political themes, even though Austen expresses her political opinions rather indirectly through commentary on social circumstances, while Levin Varnhagen is more direct in voicing her sometimes even radical views. Her letters display awareness of and investment in the public and political sphere of her time. However, Levin Varnhagen is no more able to truly access this public sphere, being imposed to similar, if not more restrictions than Austen – as a woman and as a Jewess. As Fuchs states, "The problem of Levin Varnhagen's literary recognition [...] becomes clearly entwined with gender and race issues, as her ability and licence to write for a wider audience was condemned and opposed."<sup>213</sup> Therefore, the next chapter is committed to exploring the letters' literariness, for which the rich inclusions of literary references in the writings of both Austen and Levin Varnhagen will be most relevant. Although the latter goes more into depth in articulating her views on certain authors and their works, the literacy expressed in Austen's letters is equally significant and valuable when examining the role her letters have played for her career as an authoress.

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<sup>211</sup> Lund, p. 131.

<sup>212</sup> Fuchs, p. 113.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

### **3. “*I have now attained the true art of letter-writing*” – The Literariness of Austen’s and Levin Varnhagen’s Letters**

After giving an impression of the characteristics of Austen’s and Levin Varnhagen’s letters, their literariness and its relation to the gendered nature of letter writing must be explored in more detail. As mentioned in section 1.1, the letter offered women an “entrance into the literary realm”, which male authors did not require.<sup>214</sup> This chapter will investigate more closely the dual function of the letter for female writers as a writing practice and a way to position themselves within the literary field, followed by a juxtaposition of Austen’s and Levin Varnhagen’s respective status as novelist and mediator as well as of their publication and posthumous canonisation.

#### 3.1 Austen’s and Levin Varnhagen’s Letters as Writing Workshops and Self-Positioning in the Literary Sphere

In letters of both Austen and Levin Varnhagen, references to the epistolary writing practice itself can be found. In January 1801, for example, Austen tells her sister that she has now “attained the true art of letter-writing, which we are always told, is to express on paper exactly what one would say to the same person by word of mouth.”<sup>215</sup> Calling letter writing a “true art,” Austen acknowledges the literacy of the letter form, suggesting that her letters possess literary worth regardless of their content. Moreover, the claim at authenticity, which according to Austen defines this art form, is in line with Levin Varnhagen’s search for truth and genuineness, a characteristic which is unique to the letter, as a non-fiction form of writing. Austen’s literary ambition in her epistolary writing is depicted in many of her letters, like when she declares her desire to “write *something* that may do to be read or told.”<sup>216</sup> Sutherland remarks that “the letters can read like jottings for fiction, offering clues to the kinds of risks she took as a novelist,”<sup>217</sup> which portrays Austen’s letter writing as a means of trying out ideas and techniques to apply to her novel-writing. Especially her letters written between 1801 and 1809 “have a particular claim to be considered as the equivalent of an author’s notebook.”<sup>218</sup> Sutherland even goes so far as to call these years the “novelist’s apprenticeship, during which she set aside the literary models of epistolary fiction and

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<sup>214</sup> French, p. 73.

<sup>215</sup> *Austen’s Letters*, p. 68.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>217</sup> Sutherland, p. 23.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

tested the potential of her own epistolary voice.”<sup>219</sup> The term “tested” is crucial in comprehending Austen’s letter writing as a literary practice that would impact her career as an authoress/novelist.

Levin Varnhagen, too, raises the interest in letter writing as a literary exercise, often praising her correspondents’ way of writing. Reacting to a letter from Ludwig Robert in June 1806, for instance, she starts by exclaiming: “Gestern erhielt ich deinen Brief über die Hochzeit. Ich finde diesen Brief außerordentlich schön. Diable! Du schreibst urplötzlich schöne Briefe!”<sup>220</sup> Instead of focusing on the content of her brother’s letter, which gave her account of an event as exciting as a wedding, she puts his use of language in the foreground. While these kinds of comments on other people’s writing appear repeatedly in her letters, it is her own writing that Levin Varnhagen is most concerned with. French observes that “her letters in German have been known for their unconventional usage of other languages, orthography, neologisms, and punctuation.”<sup>221</sup> This underlines the way in which Levin Varnhagen used letter writing to explore and adapt different, sometimes experimental, stylistic devices, expanding her literary talents through her epistolary correspondences. In an early letter to Veit on 28 August 1795, she laments:

Wie kann man so genau, so pünktlich, so gründlich, so ästhetisch möcht’ ich fast sagen, wissen was schön geschrieben ist, und sich selbst nicht bessern: sogar mein Geschmack, mein Urtheil bessert sich, und ich spreche schlechter als die geringste Frau, die drei Friedrichs von Siegfried gelesen hat. Jeder kann besser schreiben und reden, mit viel dümmere Gedanken [...] Ich goutiere [...] das mindeste Wörtchen; weiß so schön den Unterschied bei Dichtern zu finden und bei Schriftstellern, weiß sie zu charakterisieren, zu klassifizieren, viel besser als Andere; und ich glätte mich doch nicht aus, bessere mich nicht.<sup>222</sup>

This complaint clearly reveals her self-conscious attitude towards her own style of writing. The way she openly discusses her frustration at the lack of improvement of it confirms that her letter correspondence with Veit is a way to practice her skills as an authoress. Simultaneously it is nonetheless expressive of her confidence in her own

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<sup>219</sup> Sutherland, p. 24.

<sup>220</sup> Varnhagen, p. 290.

<sup>221</sup> French, p. 170.

<sup>222</sup> Varnhagen, p. 153.



intellectualism, literary taste, and understanding of the works of others. Besides displaying her use of letter correspondence as a writing workshop for herself, this passage hence already identifies Levin Varnhagen's role as a critic and mediator of other people's writing, which will be discussed against Austen's status as a novelist in section 3.2.

With regard to this difference in position between the two women, their own placing of themselves within the literary field has to be illuminated, too. Both Austen and Levin Varnhagen use literary references to stress their intellectualism. In stating that her verses "seemed to [her] purely classical – just like Homer & Virgil, Ovid & Propria que Maribus,"<sup>223</sup> Austen conveys her appreciation and knowledge of the classics in the same way that Levin Varnhagen frequently expresses her familiarity with Shakespeare's works. Comparing herself to "Polonius in Hamlet, der immer klug predigt, und dumm handelt,"<sup>224</sup> she does not simply name-drop a famous work, but shows off her ability to transfer what she has read. This confirms German's affinity for British writers as well as the one-sidedness of this appreciation, as Austen's letters hardly display significant awareness of German authors, not even of Goethe. Shakespeare is a major source of reference in the letters of both women; however, they also share a concern for fictional female characters. Levin Varnhagen's comment that the three female characters in *Wilhelm Meister* "nicht konnten leben bleiben: es ist noch keine Anstalt für solche da"<sup>225</sup> subliminally criticises the lack of attention that is often paid female characters in the fiction of male writers. Despite her adoration of Goethe, Levin Varnhagen "did not ignore his ingrained prejudice against women," proving that this topic was very close to her heart.<sup>226</sup> Her profound engagement with it is confirmed, for example, in a letter written to her sister Rose on 22 January 1819:

Es ist Menschenunkunde, wenn sich die Leute einbilden, unser Geist sei anders und zu anderen Bedürfnissen konstituiert, und wir könnten z.B. ganz von des Mannes oder Sohnes Existenz mitzehren. Diese Forderung entsteht nur aus der Voraussetzung, daß ein Weib in ihrer ganzen Seele nichts

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<sup>223</sup> Austen's Letters, p. 169.

<sup>224</sup> Varnhagen, p. 297.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>226</sup> Fuchs, p. 113.

Höheres konnte, als grade die Forderungen und Ansprüche ihres Mannes in der Welt.<sup>227</sup>

The evaluation of women's "Geist" that Levin Varnhagen expresses here, are strikingly progressive, even radical considering her time. The idea of women's dreams and beliefs being independent from men's exposes her as an early feminist, strongly inclined towards Enlightenment thoughts.

Austen, too, positions herself as a female writer, advocating female worth, as I have depicted in the close reading of her letters. She often points out literary works either written by women or with a female character in its centre narrative such as *The Heroine*, that she reports to have read with great pleasure.<sup>228</sup> Nevertheless, Austen conspicuously stays away from radicality. At this point it is worth taking Joeres' assessment of Droste-Hülshoff into account: "she was hardly radical. Members of a canon seldom are."<sup>229</sup> This corresponds also to Sangmeister's observation of the "deutlich abnehmende Progressivität und Radikalität" in Germany during the late Enlightenment due to strict censorship.<sup>230</sup> In order to be tolerated on the literary market in England as well as Germany, radical views had to be kept to a minimum. Perhaps then, this pinpoints another reason why Austen had less trouble being accepted in the literary canon than Levin Varnhagen. Despite their difference in radicality, Austen and Levin Varnhagen resemble each other in their self-positioning as *women* writers, rather than trying to blend in with the 'great' male authors of their time. Notwithstanding their efforts to accentuate their literacy, their letters (and Austen's novels) are centred around domestic and emotional subjects, which would have fallen under the "derogatory classification of [...] *Trivilliteratur*, or *Frauenliteratur*."<sup>231</sup> In using the letter as "a viable literary mode [...] while discovering the capabilities of their 'selves',"<sup>232</sup> however, both writers prove that domestic or emotional themes are not always a sign of triviality. Instead, they work to mirror the self against their contemporary literary and socio-political environment.

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<sup>227</sup> Varnhagen, *Rahel. Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde*, 3 vols (Berlin: Dunker und Humblot, 1834), II (1834), p. 564.

<sup>228</sup> *Austen's Letters*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>229</sup> Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, p. 77.

<sup>230</sup> Sangmeister, p. 236.

<sup>231</sup> French, p. 62.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

### 3.2. The Novelist and the Mediator: Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's Strategies to Participate in the Literary Discourse

A great part of the literariness of Austen's letters roots in her role as a novelist, which is often brought up and reflected in the letters. Although the letters have literary value of their own, it is significantly enhanced by the fact that they were written alongside her novels, since "what we are interested in is the life of the novelist."<sup>233</sup> Apart from giving insights into circumstances of her writing such as "how she wrote; where her ideas may have come from; what her working methods may have been; how she prepared her manuscripts for the press,"<sup>234</sup> the letters also feature many thematic and stylistic parallels to the novels. Neither are overtly political, but they "do provide valuable socio-historical documentation,"<sup>235</sup> with one common motif being the female living experience during the *Long Eighteenth Century*. In November 1814, for instance, Austen was exchanging letters with her niece Fanny Knight to give her advice on whether she should get married to her suitor "Mr J.P."<sup>236</sup> In these letters she displays a strong sense for the contemporary conventions of marriage and of all the factors a woman had to consider:

There *are* such beings in the World perhaps, one in a Thousand, as the Creature You & I should think perfection, where Grace & Spirit are united to Worth, where the Manners are equal to the Heart & Understanding, but such a person may not come in your way, or if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a Man of Fortune, the Brother of your particular friend, & belonging to your own County.<sup>237</sup>

Austen, hence, reminds her niece of a woman's economic reality in which she has to take several non-romantic factors, such as a man's financial situation, into account. Nevertheless, she still ends up urging Fanny "not to commit yourself farther, & not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection."<sup>238</sup> Austen's views on women and marriage are thus "at odds with the mainstream of contemporary thought,"<sup>239</sup> advocating

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<sup>233</sup> Sutherland, p. 26.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Epstein, p. 412.

<sup>236</sup> *Austen's Letters*, p. 279.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Monaghan, p. 108.

women's worth and marriages "in which the two parties operate on a basis of mutual respect."<sup>240</sup> This letter is one of the few where Austen does not impatiently rush through information but really goes into detail in explaining her stance on Fanny's dilemma. Evidently, she has put a lot of thought into this topic of marriage and female worth that is also explored in her novels, such as and especially in *Pride and Prejudice*, as Monaghan rightly observes.<sup>241</sup>

An essential part of the portrayal on women and marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* evolves around Mr. Collins's marriage proposal to Elizabeth Bennet, her resolute rejection of it, and him marrying Charlotte Lucas instead. When Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins's marriage offer, he sums up the situation eighteenth-century women without fortune found themselves in: "it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications."<sup>242</sup> Like in her letter to Fanny, Austen does consider women's economic dependencies on men, which are, however, not enough reason for her heroine to accept a man she cannot stand and has no respect for. In that Elizabeth differs from her close friend Charlotte who decides to accept Mr. Collins's proposal after Elizabeth has rejected him. Through Elizabeth's horrified reaction to this marriage and her disappointment in Charlotte, Austen expresses her own belief that women should not betray their own worth by sacrificing "every better feeling to worldly advantage."<sup>243</sup> On the other hand, Jane Bennet functions as Austen's way of refraining from blaming Charlotte for her unhappy marriage, reinforcing the emphasis on female solidarity displayed in her letter to Martha Lloyd. With Jane reminding her sister that Charlotte "is of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match,"<sup>244</sup> the novel reflects on the fact that in Austen's world women like Charlotte do not have the luxury to choose affection in marriage over financial security. Their sacrifices, then, are not just about "worldly advantage" but rather about survival.

Mr. Collins's character is also well-suited to illustrate some of the stylistic similarities between her letters and her novels, especially regarding her sense of humour. Before the Bennet family's first meeting with Mr. Collins, they discuss his

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<sup>240</sup> Monaghan 108

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>242</sup> Austen, 'Pride and Prejudice', in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2016), pp. 199-405 (p. 258).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

letter addressed to Mr. Bennet, announcing his visit. To Elizabeth's question whether her father expects Mr. Collins to be a "sensible man", Mr. Bennet replies: "No, my dear; I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse."<sup>245</sup> The irony and sense of superiority in this comment are in line with the kind of mocking humour of Austen's letters, which then exceeds towards the above-discussed "abusiveness." Elizabeth's judgement of Mr. Collins as "a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man,"<sup>246</sup> for example, reminds of Austen's verbal abuse of many of the characters mentioned in her letters. Crucial to note is also that Austen includes epistolary writing in her novels as well, whereby "Austen's letters, indeed, do not differ very substantially from those of her fictional characters."<sup>247</sup> The act of letter writing itself is brought up at many points within the novels. One example is Lucy Steele's first letter in *Sense and Sensibility* which is "read [...] aloud with many comments of satisfaction and praise" by Mrs. Jennings, who is pleased by "how prettily she writes!"<sup>248</sup> This public reading of the letter as well as Mrs. Jennings's comments on how the "sentence is very prettily turned,"<sup>249</sup> confirms the literariness that Austen attributed to (her own) letter writing. Another vital aspect of the connections between Austen's letters and her novels are the references she makes in her letters about her novel writing. Her letters to Anna Austen, for instance, have shown that she identifies strongly with her talent as a novelist, giving Anna thorough advice on novel writing. The importance her own novels have for Austen is further underscored in another letter to Cassandra, where she goes so far as to compare the care she has for her novel *Sense and Sensibility* to a mother's care for her child: "No indeed, I am never too busy to think of S&S. I can no more forget it than a mother can forget her sucking child."<sup>250</sup> She also seems keen on receiving criticism on her novels, telling Cassandra that "Henry is going on with Mansfield Park; he admires H. Crawford – I mean properly – as a clever, pleasant Man."<sup>251</sup> Austen's focus on her role as a novelist is understandable given the possibilities tied to the "tradition of the English novel" set out above.<sup>252</sup>

In contrast to Austen's positioning as a novelist stands Levin Varnhagen's establishing herself as a reviewer and mediator of others' works rather than as an

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<sup>245</sup> 'Pride and Prejudice', p. 234.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>247</sup> Epstein, p. 412.

<sup>248</sup> Austen, 'Sense and Sensibility', in *Seven Novels*, pp. 1-198 (p. 144).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>250</sup> *Austen's Letters*, p. 182.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>252</sup> Watt, p. 296.

authoress of her own works. As early as November 1794, she demonstrates her expertise as a review-specialist telling Veit that she is going to “Ihnen meine Meinung über zwei Rezensionen sagen, die ellenlang werden wird.”<sup>253</sup> The then following review of reviews, displays not only her capability to assess literary works but also her knowledgeable ability of the methods and purposes of reviewing as a literary practice. Her skills as a literary critic are further emphasised in her letter to Brinckmann from 18 January 1808 where she pleads: “Schreiben Sie mir, Brinckmann, wenn ich auch nicht so sehr gut schreibe; auch litterarisch kann niemand Ihre Briefe besser schätzen, beurtheilen und goutieren, als ich.”<sup>254</sup> While she praises her own way of evaluating Brinckmann’s writings as better than anyone else’s, this passage again exposes her insecurity about her own writing, calling it “nicht so sehr gut.” This is a crucial aspect to understand about Levin Varnhagen – while she highly valued her own writing, she always remained critical of her potential to become herself a writer to be reviewed by others. On 16 February 1805 she explains this struggle to Veit as follows:

Wenn Jemand sagte: “Sie glauben wohl, es ist so etwas Leichtes originell zu sein! [...] es kostet ein ganzes Leben voll Anstrengung”, so würde man ihn nur für verrückt halten, und gar keine Frage mehr anstellen. Und doch wäre die Behauptung ganz wahr [...] Wer sich ehrlich fragt, und sich aufrichtig antwortet, ist mit allem, was ihm im Leben vorkommt, immerfort beschäftigt, und erfindet unablässig, es sei auch noch so oft und lange vor ihm erfunden worden.<sup>255</sup>

One of the main reasons for Levin Varnhagen’s hesitation of trying herself as an independent writer appears to be her fear of not being original enough, her conviction that everything she might come up with has already been said at some point. Thereby, the strict distinction between *Trivial-*and *Hochliteratur* most likely shaped her belief that her writing would not be worth it unless she invented something indisputably genius and original. On the other hand, her fear of not being original enough seems to be contradicted by the publication instructions she gives in a letter to her friend Frau von Bone in July 1800: “Und sterb’ ich, such’ alle meine Briefe [...] – und ordne sie

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<sup>253</sup> Varnhagen, *Rahel-Bibliothek*, p. 100.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

mit Brinckmann. Es wird eine Original-Geschichte und poetisch.”<sup>256</sup> Presumably, remaining so closely aligned with Goethe and developing a uniquely deep understanding of his works is her way of trying to stand out as *original*, and therefore blur the line between critic and authoress.

Rather than merely reviewing some of Goethe’s works, Levin Varnhagen often interprets them in full detail, and applies them to life and to the world. She thus functions as a mediator of the entirety of Goethe’s writing as well as of his personal beliefs and philosophies expressed in it. As Tewarson posits, she “became Goethe’s early interpreter and most enthusiastic advocate.”<sup>257</sup> Her care for Goethe not just as an author but as a person becomes evident, when she reflects on “den Platz, den er einnimmt, als der Mensch, als welchen er sich zeigt [...] und dadurch, als Schriftsteller: dies ist er doch nur, und verdankt er sich und wir ihm, dadurch, daß er sich selbst glaubt: und keinem Andern.”<sup>258</sup> This could be taken as a paradox statement, since she neglects her own advice by focusing on Goethe rather than on her own writing. However, if we assume that she views herself as Goethe’s true mediator, this role becomes her own, individual one despite being bound to another author. By labelling herself as the one person “der ihn immer angebetet, vergöttert hätte, auch wenn ihn niemand rühmte, verstünde, bewunderte,”<sup>259</sup> she claims an understanding of him that is not at all impacted by others’ judgement of him nor by his status in the public and literary sphere. Interestingly, Levin Varnhagen was herself likewise looking for a mediator of her own views, which is where her husband comes into play. Concerning her position as a woman with a desire to participate in the public political and literary discourse, Scurla notes:

Wollte sie aber etwas schaffen, das über ihren engsten Lebenskreis hinauswirkte, bedurfte sie in einer Zeit, in der die Frau zumindest im öffentlichen Leben keine dem Manne gleichwertige Stellung einzunehmen vermochte, eines Mittlers, der ihr den Dienst leisten konnte und wollte, ihr Sprachrohr zu sein. Varnhagens Willigkeit, in seinen Beiträgen für Zeitungen und in seinen historisch-chronologischen Veröffentlichungen

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<sup>256</sup> Varnhagen, *Rahel-Bibliothek*, p. 208.

<sup>257</sup> Tewarson, p. 30.

<sup>258</sup> Varnhagen, *Rahel-Bibliothek*, p. 374.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Rahels humane Gedanken, ihre Zeit und Ort aufhebende zukunfts-gewisse  
Weltsicht durchscheinen zu lassen, beglückte sie und machte sie stolz.<sup>260</sup>

Despite her public role as a salonnière and her connections to well-known authors and public figures, Scurla identifies Levin Varnhagen's position as a woman as limited to the private sphere, therefore being in need of a male "Sprachrohr" to take part in public debates. At this point one major difference between her and Austen is disclosed: The latter, namely, remained needless of having another writer mediating her views because she had found a way to convey these views more subtly, using humoristic language and trivial plots to disguise her writings as harmless and appropriate for a woman writer of her time. Levin Varnhagen, wishing to voice blunt *truths* rather than cautious, ambiguous implications, found herself confronted with the social restrictions which Austen managed to use in a way that served rather than hindered her purposes.

### 3.3. Publication and Posthumous Canonisation

As has been mentioned at a few points throughout this paper, both Austen and Levin Varnhagen expressed a desire for the publication of their works. Almost all of Austen's novels were published during her lifetime, whereby she went about their publication quite professionally.<sup>261</sup> Her popularity that had begun to set in during her lifetime increased immensely over the course of the two centuries following her death, granting her a "position as one of the leading lights in today's canon of world literature."<sup>262</sup> Mary A. Favret identifies three major phases where Austen was "awakened,"<sup>263</sup> interest in her arising anew: The first phase occurred in the late nineteenth century,<sup>264</sup> when a wave of new interest in Austen as a figure was enabled by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, released in 1870. The second phase is located by Favret "in the 1920s and 30s, now truly awakened to an adoring kingdom," before the third phase at the end of twentieth century, when she started to appeal to feminist scholars.<sup>265</sup> Austen-Leigh's memoir, which Sales likewise views as "launching the Austen industry,"<sup>266</sup> depicted her as "the ideal Victorian lady," who would never neglect

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<sup>260</sup> Scurla, p. 191.

<sup>261</sup> Fergus, 'The Professional Woman Writer', in *The Cambridge Companion To Jane Austen*, ed. by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>262</sup> Anthony Mandal, 'Austen's European Reception', in *Companion to Austen*, ed. by Johnson and Tuite, pp. 422-433 (p. 433).

<sup>263</sup> Mary A. Favret, 'Jane Austen's Periods', in *Companion to Austen*, ed. by Johnson and Tuite, pp. 402-412 (p. 404).

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Sales, p. 3.



her domestic duties.<sup>267</sup> Although Austen was not herself a Victorian writer, her family undoubtedly made sure to portray her in a way that would fit the Victorian ideals of female novel writers, trying to “promote Austen as an accidental artist” rather than as an authoress with monetary pursuits and a desire for publication.<sup>268</sup> And indeed, Austen’s novels, in which “the Victorian world can be seen on the horizon,”<sup>269</sup> can to some extent be regarded as prototypes for the multifaceted genre of “the Victorian novel.”<sup>270</sup> Significantly, the latter “has long enjoyed a popular revival”<sup>271</sup> and was to become a genre which enabled so many Victorian women writers to achieve long-lasting fame. The “Englishness” of her writing has also “played a significant role in sustaining Austen’s popularity for over two centuries,”<sup>272</sup> that is within *and* outside England. Anthony Mandal posits that in the mid-twentieth century, “a general postwar drift towards a pan-Europeanism [...] resulted in an increased interest in British culture and literature.”<sup>273</sup> Thus, her being so distinctly associated with English culture “has functioned less as a barrier than a point of interest for European readers and scholars.”<sup>274</sup> Moreover, “The therapeutic potential of Austen’s novels in wartime,”<sup>275</sup> mentioned by Claire Harman, also increased the demand for Austen’s novels in the interwar and post-war times of the twentieth century. The escapism her novels offered in being set in an idyllic world exclusive of direct political allusions, was recommended for use in military hospitals,<sup>276</sup> further sustaining Austen’s posthumous career.

The third phase of Austen’s popularity rise can be largely ascribed to the “timelessness” of the novels and their flexibility in terms of interpretation. Bautz states that “The novels’ greatness is their capacity to apply to any society,”<sup>277</sup> observing that Austen “has been appropriated to fit in with dominant cultural trends.”<sup>278</sup> The interpretive scope Austen’s texts leave, “gives movie-makers and writers of sequels,

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<sup>267</sup> Bautz, *Austen and Scott*, p. 102.

<sup>268</sup> Claire Harman, *Jane’s Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered The World* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2009), p. 200.

<sup>269</sup> Roberts, p. 11.

<sup>270</sup> Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 2.

<sup>271</sup> Deirdre David, *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>272</sup> Mandal, p. 423.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 427.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 433.

<sup>275</sup> Harman, p. 183.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Bautz, *Austen and Scott*, p. 140.

<sup>278</sup> Bautz, ‘The Reception of Austen in Germany’ in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, ed. by Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), pp. 93-116 (p. 104).

prequels, adaptations, and travesties the freedom to assemble their own Jane Austen.”<sup>279</sup> Accordingly, they have towards the end of the twentieth century started to become the basis for a myriad of screen adaptations, which each present their own takes on Austen and her characters. Her standing as the “foremother” of the “twenty-first-century chick lit” genre has further nourished her “postfeminist popular cultural success.”<sup>280</sup> Regarding the choice of material for screen adaptations, Sales also notes that “Austen’s texts were popular choices because they usually contained good dialogue,”<sup>281</sup> the latter presumably being a trace left in Austen’s novels from her letter writing practices. In turn, Austen’s letters have profited from “The phenomenal success of the screen adaptations” which “played a considerable part in establishing Austen as a leading writer in the canon of world literature by the start of the twenty-first century.”<sup>282</sup> For although the inherent literariness of her letters has been shown throughout this paper as independent from her fame, the literary status of her letter writings only came to be acknowledged after her canonisation as a novelist. Her letters were indeed “accused of triviality when they were first published in a scholarly edition,”<sup>283</sup> even after her status as a canonical writer had already been established.

Thus, being restricted to the letter format did not help Levin Varnhagen’s recognition in terms of authorship. Scurla notes in his biography of her that her accomplishment “ist nicht literarischer Art. Rahel hat im wesentlichen nur Briefe hinterlassen, und man wird nicht behaupten können, daß es sich dabei um Kunstwerke handelt.”<sup>284</sup> This judgement of Levin Varnhagen’s work shows that even in the 1960s, which is when the first edition of this biography was published, the literary status of letter writing was still largely unacknowledged. Neither was the letter form suitable for pop-cultural adaptations like those of Austen’s novels, of course. Both played a role in the delayed canonisation of Levin Varnhagen as well as in her still enduring lack of fame outside the canon. Although her letters were “destined to be published,”<sup>285</sup> the publication of Levin Varnhagen’s writings has remained severely restricted, especially in comparison to the publication history of Austen’s texts. A significant part of her work consisted of her salonnière activity “which can no longer be reconstructed due to the

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<sup>279</sup> Jocelyn Harris, *Satire, Celebrity, and Politics in Jane Austen* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 300.

<sup>280</sup> Jones, p. 291.

<sup>281</sup> Sales, p. 17.

<sup>282</sup> Bautz, *Reception of Austen in Europe*, p. 11.

<sup>283</sup> Sales, p. 46.

<sup>284</sup> Scurla, p. 81.

<sup>285</sup> Fuchs, p. 104.

volatile and impermanent nature of oral communication in the salon.”<sup>286</sup> Publication of her work, then, was reliant on her letter writing. The latter, however, was almost as difficult for her to use for publication purposes during her lifetime, because the publishing of women’s letters “was usually done anonymously and under the pretence of shedding light on their contemporary culture, but with little or no emphasis on the authors or their writing.”<sup>287</sup> Thus, when Levin Varnhagen anonymously published some of her letters on Goethe in the *Morgenblatt für Gebildete Stände* in 1812, “they were important merely because they illuminated the life of a great person,” rather than because they showed “the aesthetic beauty” of her letter writing.<sup>288</sup> She did prepare her letters (not only those about Goethe) for publication together with her husband, who finished the project after her death and published it under the title *Rahel: Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde* (1833). This posthumous publication at first turned out to be “immensely popular,” so much so that it was extended and turned into three volumes in 1834.<sup>289</sup> Nevertheless, Carol Diethe concedes that *Das Buch Rahel* “was more important as a social phenomenon than as a literary document.”<sup>290</sup> Hence, despite this initially successful posthumous publication of her works the recognition Levin Varnhagen received in the years following her death was hardly tied to her role as authoress. This was partly owed to the increased German antisemitism, which had started to worsen under the influences of the French Revolution.<sup>291</sup> Additionally, the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature in Germany sharpened even more after Levin Varnhagen’s death, since the term ‘trivial’ “erhielt im Verlauf des 19. Jhs. eine zunehmend abwertende Konnotation.”<sup>292</sup> Contrary to England, where women’s reading and writing of ‘trivial’ genres was endorsed as appropriate for them, the association between women’s writing and triviality was a disdainful rather than just a patronising one.

When Karl Varnhagen died in 1858, his immediate posthumous reputation caused a turn-around in the reception of his wife’s letters. After his death his

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<sup>286</sup> Tewardson, p. 52.

<sup>287</sup> French, p. 34.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Carol Diethe, *Towards Emancipation: German Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Berghan Books, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Robert Wistrich, ‘Radical Antisemitism in France and Germany’, *Modern Judaism*, 15 (1995), 109-135 (p. 109).

<sup>292</sup> Nusser, p. 692.

“biographisches und zeitgeschichtliches Archiv,”<sup>293</sup> consisting of Rahel Varnhagen’s letters and of his own diaries and other documents, was passed on to his niece Ludmilla Assing. When she released his private diaries that exposed the full extent of his liberal views, she “stirred a posthumous controversy that destroyed Varnhagen’s eminence and sent him into a long and disgraceful exile, far from the halls of cultural fame.”<sup>294</sup> After Assing’s publication of Varnhagen’s archive, she was “threatened with a political lawsuit” in 1862 and 1864, which had her flee to Florence, Italy.<sup>295</sup> Nonetheless, she continued working on what would more than a century later become one of the most important elements of Levin Varnhagen’s posthumous canonisation: *Die Sammlung Varnhagen*. It was bequeathed by Assing to the Prussian Royal Library in 1881,<sup>296</sup> but disappeared from there “in the aftermath of World War II.”<sup>297</sup> Its rediscovery in the 1970s, when it turned out that the archive had been moved to Kraków in 1946,<sup>298</sup> is defined by Tewarson as “the real catalyst for the renewed interest in this outstanding woman.”<sup>299</sup> It enabled the creations of new editions and reprints of her works; however, due to further complications regarding German-Polish relations, it was only in 1983 that public access to the archive became unrestricted and unproblematic.<sup>300</sup> Accordingly, 1983 also marks the year where “Rahel received recognition as an author in her own right” with a new edition of her *Gesammelte Werke* which could be completed based on the documents in the Varnhagen archive.<sup>301</sup> Although by now she is “recognized as a significant woman of letters worthy of serious scholarly efforts”<sup>302</sup>, this recognition is still a long way from the enormous literary standing Austen has not only within England but worldwide. This has been confirmed by the difficulties in finding recent works on Levin Varnhagen, including articles, biographies, and new editions of her letters.

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<sup>293</sup> Dietmar Pravida, ‘Die Sammlung Varnhagen in der Biblioteka Jagiellon’ska, Kraków: Zur Situation ihrer Erschließung und Erforschung aus Anlass zweier Publikationen’, *Heine Jahrbuch*, 58 (2019), 121-139 (p. 122).

<sup>294</sup> T.H. Pickett, ‘Varnhagen von Ense as Historian’, *Philosophy and History*, 6 (1973), 203-205 <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.5840/philhist19736234>> [accessed 28 March 2023] (p. 205).

<sup>295</sup> Nicholaas Rupke, ‘Alexander von Humboldt and Revolution: A Geography of Reception of the Varnhagen von Ense Correspondence’, in *Geography and Revolution*, ed. by David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 336-350 (p. 344).

<sup>296</sup> Pravida, pp. 122-123.

<sup>297</sup> Pickett, p. 204.

<sup>298</sup> Pravida, p. 123.

<sup>299</sup> Tewarson, p. 6.

<sup>300</sup> Pravida, p. 123.

<sup>301</sup> Tewarson, p. 5.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

## Conclusion

The above has illustrated the writing conditions for Jane Austen and Rahel Levin Varnhagen, as well as the significance and literariness of their letters and women's letter writing in general. Thereby, the ambiguous position of the letter due to its being a culturally valued form of writing without being recognised as "possessing aesthetic merit"<sup>303</sup> has been depicted. In doing so the letter's moving between the private and public sphere has been explained, while both authoresses can be observed as being torn between these two spheres (if we assume a two-sphere-model). Within the framework of this 'Halböffentlichkeit' Levin Varnhagen shows more overt efforts to leave the private realm, which can be ascertained from her activity as a salonnière as well as from her more radical voicing of political views in her letters. Nonetheless, Austen, whose approach to participating in the public sphere can be understood as cautious but persistent, by now is the one with the publicly acknowledged, even famous, status. The historical context has been centred around *Long Eighteenth-Century* long-term processes induced by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, including female and Jewish emancipation, the growing reading public, and the progressing literary market. While the impact these historical developments had on Levin Varnhagen is more directly reflected in her letters, Austen's writings "concern the social history of the landed gentry, and it is hard to find a topic more central to English history than that."<sup>304</sup> Looking at *both* these women writers has, thus, worked to illuminate the other side of this part of history. It also showed the opposing effects that the rising nationalism in European countries during their time had on Austen and Levin Varnhagen. Furthermore, the elaboration of the strict distinction between *Hochliteratur* and *Trivialliteratur*, and Germany's compulsive dissociation from the latter, has been identified as a major factor in keeping German women's (letter) writing small. It has evidently caused a stigma on letter as well as novel writing, a stigma which was also prevailing in England for a long time. However, over the course of the nineteenth century the English novel made it to a genre of great literary recognition, setting it apart from the still underestimated letter genre as well as from the German novel.

The close reading of some of Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's letters has demonstrated their differences and the wide range of letter writing styles. Yet, it has also shown fundamental similarities in these two women's relationships to the public

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<sup>303</sup> French, p. 21.

<sup>304</sup> Eagleton, p. 115.

literary sphere. They resemble each other in their attempt to participate in literary discourse by including references to contemporary literature and emphasising the artistic qualities of their letters. They also can be equated in the way they use their letter writing as a mode to enhance their writing skills and position themselves in the literary field. Although Levin Varnhagen writes more strong-opinionatedly, similar themes can be perceived: Most importantly, they both advocate women's worth and intellectual capacities. Of particular relevance when it comes to their positions within the literary field is Austen's identification with the role of novelist and Levin Varnhagen's with that of "a literary critic"<sup>305</sup> or mediator. The rise of the novel in combination with an increasing literacy, expansion of the English reading public and literary market have provided Austen with opportunities for literary recognition. By the end of the twentieth century, being part of the (Victorian) novel tradition would even turn this recognition into fame through pop-cultural productions that drew on it. For Austen, then, examining her letters is essential to strengthen an understanding of her novels, albeit her letters' literary value also must be seen as detached from her role as novelist. As R.W. Chapman states, "Even if Jane Austen had no other claim to be remembered, her letters would be memorable," as they help us attain a more complete picture of her time,<sup>306</sup> but also because they serve as an example of how the literary potential of the letter can be exploited. For Levin Varnhagen the significance of letter writing is even higher because it is her almost exclusive form of writing. Since she "knew that Goethe's path was not hers,"<sup>307</sup> she focused on her role as his mediator. Rather than viewing her as confined within this role, her ambition to use it in an original way must be acknowledged and the writing mode she chose recognised as literary. Hence, a two-fold conclusion regarding the role of letter writing emerges: Firstly, the fact that letter writing was long not regarded as a literary form vastly contributed to the unequal recognition of English and German authoresses, since the former were able to evade to the novel. Secondly, acknowledging the literariness of letter writing is essential to understand the entirety of women's writing – even in Austen's case, looking at her letters helps discovering more facets of her writing and writing career.

Besides the role of letter writing as opposed to novel writing, the other circumstances benefitting Austen's recognition while counteracting that of Levin Varnhagen come together in two overarching causes. The first cause can be summed up

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<sup>305</sup> Fuchs, p. 101.

<sup>306</sup> R.W. Chapman, 'Introduction to the First Edition', in *Austen's Letters*, ed. by Le Faye, pp. ix-x (p. x).

<sup>307</sup> Tewarson, p. 198.

as the rising nationalism in many European countries, including England and Germany, due to the effects of the French Revolution. For in Germany, it was coupled with rising antisemitism, which constituted a hardship for the Jewess Levin Varnhagen that Austen did not have to face. In fact, for the latter, England's increased patriotism as well as other countries' anglophile inclinations turned out to be rather beneficial for the reception of her novels, which were perceived as representing and validating English culture. Even the twentieth-century war period was in a way advantageous for Austen's posthumous career while it severely damaged Levin Varnhagen's. Secondly, Austen's idyllic descriptions and countryside settings paired with more *indirect* social criticism seems to have been preferable over Levin Varnhagen's political radicality for admission to the literary canon. As Joeres' stance on Droste-Hülshoff has suggested, the fact that Austen's works were for a long time viewed as simple, "least inappropriate,"<sup>308</sup> and conventional has been rather beneficial for her acceptance in the canon. Of course, this evaluation of her works underestimated her genius, though the alleged absence of genius was not demonised in England in the same way as it was in Germany. Indeed, in women's writing it was favoured, which was in a sense good for Austen's canonisation. Levin Varnhagen's intellectualism and the fact that her and her husband's openly liberal views, on the other hand, have not worked in favour of her reception until very recently. Only now she is slowly coming to be recognised for the brilliant woman and writer that she was.

For further research it will be interesting to see if a transfer can be made from my conclusions on Austen's and Levin Varnhagen's recognition to other *Long Eighteenth-Century* English and German authoresses or to the generations succeeding these two. One obvious hypothesis would be that the three causes I have pinned down for their recognition or lack thereof, provide a basis for overall assumptions on the recognition-gap of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and German women writers. It is fair to say, for instance, that other German-Jewish women writers during and after Levin Varnhagen's time have suffered in similar ways from the growing nationalism and antisemitism. To examine this issue more closely, remarkable German-Jewish authoresses such as one of the leading Berlin salonnières next to Levin Varnhagen, Henriette Hertz (1764-1847), or Fanny Lewald (1811-1889), and their letters could be looked into. Furthermore, the way Austen and Levin Varnhagen not only represent but might also have shaped the developments of their following

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<sup>308</sup> Harman, p. 201.

generations could be examined. Comparing another pair of English and German women writers from a later point in the nineteenth century, such as George Eliot and Louise Otto, for instance, would be productive for these purposes. Looking at Eliot's outstanding status will help to further illuminate the role of the English novel and the way Eliot's novels are the "horizon" of the Victorian world that Sales sees in Austen's novels. As Eagleton states, Austen "will bequeath" her version of the novel "to the great realist novel of the nineteenth century."<sup>309</sup> It could be argued, for example, that Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) works as a follow-up novel to Austen's texts about women and the marriage market. While being equally realist in tone and with the same depth of insight into the characters' psychological reflections, its plots are centred around life *after* marriage. Strikingly, Otto, despite her use of the novel genre rather than the letter, is not even remotely close to enjoying the same literary recognition as Eliot. Being part of the *Vormärz* generation, Otto was deeply invested in the political processes of her time. These are reflected in her "polemic and social-critical writings, which focused primarily on women's rights and political liberalism"<sup>310</sup> including her best-known novel *Schloss und Fabrik* (1846). In 1865 she founded the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*, which was the "first German women's organization dedicated to the social and political improvement of the situation of women."<sup>311</sup> Hence, she displays a political radicality similar to and potentially stronger than Levin Varnhagen's. Like her, she is better known for "her political role and her social and political activities" than for her literary accomplishments and her fiction, which is "rarely discussed."<sup>312</sup> Of course, Levin Varnhagen cannot be viewed as the only or even the main influence on the *Vormärz* generation. Yet, especially in her second salon she did engage thoroughly with the younger generation.<sup>313</sup> If she was "far ahead of the active feminists of the second half of the nineteenth century,"<sup>314</sup> her persistent advocacy of her beliefs in her writings and her social/political activities might certainly have had an impact on them.

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<sup>309</sup> Eagleton, p. 94.

<sup>310</sup> Joeres, 'Louise Otto-Peters (1819-1895)', in *Women Writers in German-Speaking Countries. A Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. by Elke Frederiksen and Elizabeth G. Ametsbichler (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), pp. 356-366 (p. 357).

<sup>311</sup> Joeres, 'Louise Otto', p. 357.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>313</sup> Tewardson, pp. 187-200.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.



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