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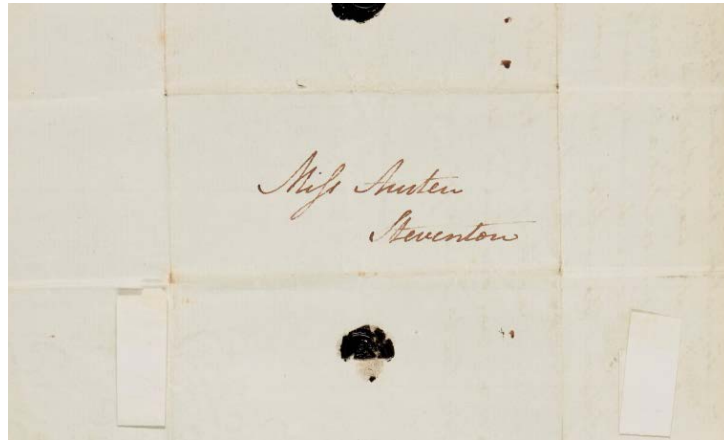
## SENSE AND SATIRICAL ABILITY

A cache of Jane Austen's charming hand-written correspondence  
To be offered at Sotheby's on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2017

### Letters Provide a Rare Insight into How Austen thought about Fiction

And Disclose the Intricacies of her Family Life and Personal Relationships

(Download images [here](#))

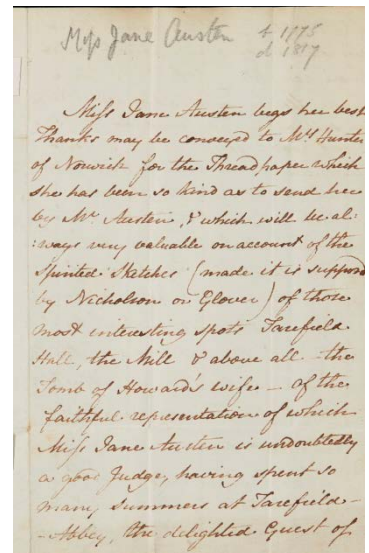


Lot 82: Jane Austen's correspondence with niece Anna Lefroy (née Austen). The letter retains integral autograph address panel ("Miss Austen | Steventon") and the remains of a black wax seal impression [Chawton, ? 29-31 October 1812].  
Estimate: £80,000 – 100,000.

**Sotheby's London, July 2017** – Almost exactly 200 years to the day of Jane Austen's death in 1817, a masterly comic letter written by the author to her favourite niece will come to sale for the very first time at Sotheby's London on 11<sup>th</sup> July with an estimate of £80,000-100,000. The celebrated novelist, whose own literature has remained the subject of critique for over two centuries, is here seen exercising her own critical opinion of another writer's work in a light-hearted *jeu d'esprit* which exudes not only Austen's supreme intellect, but also her comic charm.

Dating from 29-30 October 1812, a critical time in Austen's career - immediately after the publication of *Sense and Sensibility* and around the time that the manuscript of *Pride and Prejudice* was sent for publication - this unique correspondence provides a rare insight into how Austen thought about fiction. The object of her censure is a "most tiresome and prosy" Gothic novel titled *Lady Maclairn, the Victim of Villainy*, published by her contemporary Rachel Hunter.

Both Austen and her niece Anna Lefroy, the eldest daughter of Rev. James Austen, Jane's eldest brother, had thoroughly enjoyed reading the novel together. And this letter, addressed as if to the author Rachel Hunter herself, brims with the shared pleasure the two women had taken in this over-plotted melodrama, relishing its clichés and absurdities, from the heroine's relentless tears to the verbose repetitions of character and



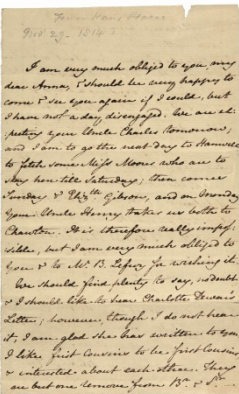
plot. Mrs Hunter's novel cannot, of course, survive the mock-enthusiasm of perhaps the wittiest pen in the language, but it is at least clear that Austen had found the novel to be enjoyable nonsense.

Indeed, this satirical exposure of the clichés of the Gothic novel is strikingly reminiscent of *Northanger Abbey*, in which Austen gleeful parodied the conventions of Gothic novels. The link to Austen's own *oeuvre* is furthered when the novelist turns the attention toward her personal style of writing, pleading for 'at least 4 vols more about the Flint family' and demanding a more extensive examination of the lover's courtship, which Hunter 'handled too briefly'. Referring to herself in the third person, she asserts: 'it is certainly not hard to imagine that Austen could have made much of an episode' of 'the arrival of a handsome young curate'. Indeed, her comments mock the iconic style for which Austen's novels are famed, alluding to the lengthy passages of characterisation and courtship which perpetually preside.

The letter is significant then, not only because it is littered with a delightfully light-hearted irony shared exclusively between close family members, but because it illuminates the remarkable relationship which existed between the author, her novels, and the novels of her contemporaries, at the very peak of her literary career.

For full details click [here](#).

### Two Further Fragments of Correspondence between Jane Austen and her Favoured Niece Anna Lefroy

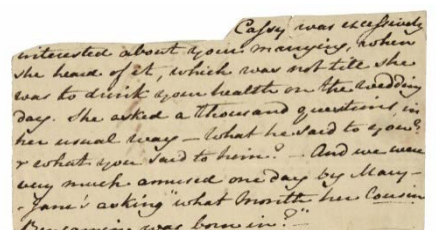


Sotheby's sale will also include two fragments of handwritten letters addressed to Lefroy, which disclose the intricacies of Austen's family life and leisure.

The first of these fragments ([lot 83](#)) was written during Austen's ten day visit to London in November 1814, the main object of which was to meet with her publisher to discuss a second edition of *Mansfield Park*, following a sell-out first run.

The letter recounts the lively family gossip circulating in the weeks following Anna's marriage to Benjamin Lefroy, and discusses the family trip to the theatre to see David Garrick's popular production of *Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage*. It is hardly surprising that Jane would take the opportunity that the visit to London gave her to visit her "literary niece" for the first time since her marriage, and this engaging letter expresses her pleasure in Anna's new life.

Perhaps most importantly however, this fragment exemplifies the emphasis which Austen placed on a close-knit extended network of family, a theme that bears out in many of her most-loved novels. As with many of Jane Austen's letters, it gives a powerful sense of her life within an extensive familial network of immediate family and cousins: 'I like first Cousins to be first Cousins, & interested about each other'.



[Lot 84](#) comprises the second fragment of this same letter. Here, the importance with which Austen regards family is again the foremost theme, as she describes a visit to her nieces whose mother had recently passed away; Charles Austen's wife had tragically died following childbirth in 1814, and the baby was lost two weeks later. The fragment recalls the 'thousand questions' put forth by her young inquisitive nieces, aged five, four, and two, and by Francis Austen's daughter, aged seven.

Together, these letters have a combined estimate of £118,000-162,000.

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