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ABSTRACT

MARRIAGE AND MATURITY IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

by

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Jane Austen has been called an artist and a moralist. Few attempts have been made, however, to illustrate how she combines the artist and the moralist in her novels. In the light of modern critical thinking, especially, which tends to isolate the function of art from that of morality, Jane Austen's works seem to demand elucidation.

The six novels concern themselves primarily with young women who prove their maturity by their choice in marriage. Maturity, a moral theme, and marriage, a conventional literary theme, are closely related. Jane Austen's moral-realistic vision becomes the essential core of her art.

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INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen was a clergyman's daughter who never married, never left England, and refused her one invitation to meet a contemporary literary lion.[1] "Nothing of interest ever happened to her," writes J.C. Bailey confidently, "and she did nothing of interest except the writing of her books."[2] When she died in 1817 at the age of forty-one, she had completed only six novels, all love stories with happy endings. Yet, paradoxically enough, Jane Austen has become the subject of a vast bibliography of criticism.

As a young girl in the parsonage at Steventon, Jane Austen began writing to amuse herself and to entertain her brothers and sisters. Her preoccupation was not extraordinary or ambitious. Hundreds of women in her position during the Regency and early Victorian period had time and education enough to become authors. She published her first novels anonymously, and continued to make every attempt to remain anonymous. When she learned that her brother, Henry, had identified her as the author of Pride and Prejudice, she wrote to Francis, another brother:

[1] "(admittedly a French one, Madame de Staël)," comments Ian Watt, Introduction to Jane Austen: Twentieth Century Views, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), p. 1.

[2] Introductions to Jane Austen (London, 1931), p. 2.

"I know it is all done from affection and partiality, but at the same time, let me here again express to you and Mary my sense of the superior kindness which you have shewn on the occasion in doing what I wished."[3] Miss Cassandra Austen tried to comply with her sister's wishes for privacy:

> When Miss Cassandra Austen grew old, and the growth of her sister's fame made her suspect that a time might come when strangers would pry and scholars speculate, she burnt, at great cost to herself, every letter that could gratify their curiosity, and spared only what she judged too trivial to be of interest.[4]

Yet the writer, about whom so little is known, has been classified and reclassified with scholarly precision, and linked even with Marx, Freud, and Joyce.[5] Jane Austen would probably be amused to learn that she had sparked such literary controversy. In the nineteenth century, George Lewes and Charlotte Bronte disputed her merits in

3 85. To Francis Austen, 25 September, 1813. Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others, ed. R.W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (London, 1952), p. 340.

4 Virginia Woolf, "Jane Austen," The Common Reader (New York, 1925), pp. 191-206, p. 191.

5 David Daiches, "Jane Austen, Karl Marx, and the Aristocratic Dance," American Scholar, XVII (1948), 289-296.

Denys Wyatt Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," Scrutiny, VIII (1939-40), 346-362.

B.C. Southam, Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers (Oxford, 1964).

their correspondence.[6] H. William Garrod's "Depreciation," published in 1928, drew a stinging rebuttal from R.W.Chapman in 1931.[7] Critics have continued to contradict one another, calling Jane Austen "the daughter of Dr. Johnson," "a lonely and impassive pre-Romantic," a writer closer to the Romantics than has been thought.[8]

Literary criticism has perhaps played a joke on itself in trying to prove so much about an author who tried to prove so little. But good writers invariably do mean many things to many readers. One hundred and fifty years of scholarly effort must indicate that Jane Austen has something significant to say. At the same time, however, it must be allowed that critics often reveal more about themselves than they do about their subject. "It is a truth not universally to be acknowledged, " comment Ian Watt and Joseph Cady, "that every single critic in possession of a good sensibility

6 Charlotte Bronte could not understand why Lewes liked Jane Austen so much. She allowed that Jane Austen was only "shrewd and observant." To G.H. Lewes, Esq. Jan. 12th, 1848; reprinted in Elizabeth Gaskell, Life of Charlotte Bronte, 4th ed. (London, 1858), p. 289.

7 Garrod calls Jane Austen 'parochial' in "Jane Austen: A Depreciation," Essays By Divers Hands, n.s., VIII (1928), 21-40. See Chapman's "Jane Austen: A Reply to Mr. Garrod," in the same journal, X (1931), 17-34.

8 C.S. Lewis thinks that Jane Austen inherits much of Dr. Johnson's common sense, morality, and style. See "A Note on Jane Austen," Essays in Criticism, IV (1954), 359-371, p. 371. Garrod calls Jane Austen a pre-Romantic, p. 31. Frank O'Connor has developed an interesting but questionable thesis on Jane Austen's romanticism. See "Jane Austen: The Flight from Fancy," The Mirror in the Roadway (New York, 1955), pp. 17-41.

must be in want of an author to be its mate."[9] Jane Austen's critics have attempted to make her complicated where she is simple, ironic where she is forthright, uncertain where she is most certain. Yet she stubbornly defies such limiting critical presumptions: "It seems unlikely that Jane Austen is yet ready to extend to any of them the reciprocal assurance that their hopes may be fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union."[10] In other words, Jane Austen continues to elude definition and facile generalization. In spite of all that has been said about her works, there is always more to say.

It seems necessary, moreover, to attend to certain moral assumptions in Jane Austen's six novels. These assumptions have perhaps been too often overlooked. The novels are certainly entertaining stories about young women who marry, but they are also serious--far more fundamentally serious than they seem. This thesis will attempt to show how seriousness is essential to Jane Austen's art. Chapter I will try to demonstrate how the author consistently relates maturity and marriage in the novels. The

[9] Ian Watt and Joseph Cady, "Jane Austen's Critics," The Critical Quarterly, V (1963), 49-63, p. 49.

[10] Watt and Cady, p. 63.

heroines are particularly significant to this study, since they develop and express the author's moral theme. The novels will then be studied chiefly in the light of their heroines. Chapter II will consider the heroines of the early novels, Northanger Abbey (1817) and Sense and Sensibility (1811).[11] Chapter III will study the lively heroines of Pride and Prejudice (1813) and Emma (1815). Chapter IV will concern itself with the author's new insights into maturity and marriage in the heroines of Mansfield Park (1814) and Persuasion (1817).[12] The Conclusion will finally attempt to show that the heroines belong to the same "moral family" and represent Jane Austen's moral ideal.

[11] The dates are those of the first publication of the novels. See also Appendix for chronology of composition and publication, p. 83.

[12] The definitive edition of Jane Austen's novels is that of R.W. Chapman, The Novels of Jane Austen, 3rd ed., 5 vols. (Oxford, 1933). All subsequent references to the novels will be made to this edition and will be incorporated in the text.

CHAPTER I

JANE AUSTEN'S MORAL UNIVERSE

Jane Austen's six novels transmit a sense of authority and confidence foreign to twentieth-century readers. The author herself seems to have been able to comment with certainty on what she observed and read. This certainty eventually found its way into what she wrote.

Virginia Woolf suggests that at the age of fifteen, Jane Austen was doing what all girls of fifteen are always doing--laughing. She was not, however, quite like most girls of fifteen who laugh at everything.

> They have no fixed abode from which they see that there is something eternally laughable in human nature, some quality in men and women that for ever excites our satire. They do not know that Lady Greville who snubs, and poor Maria who is snubbed, are permanent features of every ball-room. But Jane Austen knew it from her birth upwards. One of those fairies who perch upon cradles must have taken her a flight through the world directly she was born. When she was laid in the cradle again she knew not only what the world looked like, but had already chosen her kingdom. She had agreed that if she might rule over that territory, she would covet no other.[1]

When she turned to the novels of the period, she could detect abnormalities that were equally laughable--"bombast and pedantry, affectation, vanity, absurdity, falseness of

[1] Woolf, p. 194.

feeling, and offense against sound sense."[2] Knowing that people were not perfect, Jane Austen could only object to pictures of perfection, both moral and physical, in fiction. She objected to contrasts of character carried to ridiculous extremes, to poor motivation leading to absurd incident, to the insidious use of propaganda for moral reform. The same critical common sense that guided her reactions to the people she knew governed her appraisals of fiction.

A well-defined literary awareness--indeed, not lack of awareness as has sometimes been suggested-- was to isolate her from her contemporaries.[3] She began by doing what she was able to do so naturally--to laugh at the ridiculous. She must have delighted her brothers and sisters with thrusts of satire from Love and Freindship [sic], written when she was only fifteen: "I die a Martyr to my greif for the loss of Augustus . . One fatal swoon has cost me my Life . . Beware of Swoons Dear Laura . . . . . -- Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint--"[4] When Jane Austen set to work on Northanger Abbey

2 Annette Brown Hopkins, "Jane Austen, the Critic," PMLA, XL (1925), 398-425, p.425.

3 R. Brimley Johnson refers to the assumption often made about Jane Austen: "That no writer of equal genius ever owed so little to her predecessors, knew or cared so little about books." Johnson proceeds to show that this assumption is "fundamentally untrue." See "New Study of Jane Austen," in Leonie Villard, Jane Austen: Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre, trans. Veronica Lucas (London, 1924), pp.3-54, p.4.

4 See Minor Works, Vol. VI, The Works of Jane Austen, ed. R.W. Chapman (London, 1954), p.102.

and Sense and Sensibility, the same piercing common sense helped to outline her course. The first aims its attack at the exaggerations of the Gothic novel; Sense and Sensibility contains excellent satire on the novel of feeling. Richard Simpson seems to have been the first to remark on Jane Austen's turn of mind, saying in 1870 that she began as Shakespeare began,

> with being an ironical censurer of her contemporaries . . . by being an ironical critic; she manifested her judgment of them (the romances of the day) not by direct censure, but by the indirect method of imitating and exaggerating the faults of her models, thus clearing the fountain by first stirring up the mud.[5]

Jane Austen never lost her ironic point of view. When, for example, Mr. J.S. Clarke, Secretary to the Prince Regent, suggested that she write a historical romance about the House of Saxe-Cobourg, she wrote her sprightly reply:

> I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that; I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other.[6]

[5] Joseph Cady and Ian Watt identify Richard Simpson as the author of an article published in Lord Acton's North British Review in 1870. See Cady and Watt, p. 51

[6] 126. To James Stanier Clarke, 1 April, 1816, Letters, p. 452.

One must bear in mind, when writing of Jane Austen's irony, that "'total irony'--irony about everything--frustrates itself and becomes insipid."[7] The author herself was aware that total irony, lacking seriousness, could only be ineffectual. Mr. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, who is totally, ironic, remains an insignificant man and a morally deficient father. "'Principles' or 'seriousness' are essential to Jane Austen's art. Where there is no norm, nothing can be ridiculous . . . . Unless there is something about which the author is never ironical, there can be no true irony in the work."[8]

R.W. Chapman has been one to attend to the positive assumptions in Jane Austen's novels. "Her books are love-stories," he reminds his readers; "Jane Austen's affections centered in her young people." This sympathy is finally, "the secret of enduring fiction."

> That, and that alone, can make 'ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment.' But imaginative sympathy demands an abundant share of the qualities on which it is exercised.[9]

The novels do support Chapman, for the six heroines become the focal points of the stories and all marry happily at the end. It is not enough to say, however, that Jane Austen loved

[7] Lewis, p.370.

[8] Lewis, p.370. Lewis' comments about Jane Austen's seriousness may seem somewhat forced. A number of critics, however, allege that Jane Austen has no moral concern. See Villard, p.191. See also Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Princeton, 1952), p.1.

[9] Chapman, Jane Austen: Facts and Problems (London, 1948), p.101.

them all and wished them well. This kind of biographical evidence can only remain outside the artist's works. And, Northrop Frye remarks,

> What's important is not what he may have meant to say, but what the words themselves say when they get fitted together. With a novelist it's rather the incidents in the story he tells that get fitted together -- as D.H. Lawrence says, 'don't trust the novelist; trust his story.'[10]

One can indeed trust Jane Austen's stories for evidence of her moral-realistic view of life. "She thought you lived only to be good, that it was the first duty of everyone to be sincere, unselfish, and disinterested."[11] Her moral principles become the hard core of her fiction. She renders her moral vision in an artistic pattern that can satisfy the claims of life and art. "At her best, she keeps the balance between fact and form as no other English novelist has done. She neither twists reality to fit a logical scheme like Henry James, nor like Scott lets life tumble pell-mell about the reader's head in indeterminate confusion."[12]

In an article asking "In what sense, if any, is the serious novelist a moralist?," Derwent May suggests how some greater English novelists have led their readers to take up distinctively moral attitudes. He also comments on

[10] The Educated Imagination: The Massey Lectures, 2nd. Ser. (Toronto, 1963), p. 38.

[11] Lord David Cecil, Jane Austen (Cambridge, 1935), p. 32.

[12] Cecil, p. 20.

the possibility of criticizing the novel from a moral standpoint.[13] Although May does not refer to Jane Austen, his thesis might have been written for her and for the moral universe her novels represent. A fundamental distinction must first be made, however, between the responsible moral artist and the writer with an overt didactic purpose. Didacticism in fiction seems to come directly from the author to the reader, without being thoroughly developed in the work. It is, in a word, too voluntary. Jane Austen had denounced such moralistic simplifications in her criticism of contemporary fiction. The courtesy book tradition, especially, with which Miss Austen was familiar,

> gave scope to the inveterate moral purpose for which the age was noted. Although the field was by no means neglected by men -- by preachers, doctors, and 'old half-philosophers,' in particular -- the courtesy book offered an opportunity for female writers to express their ideas of moral reform and to fulfill the function assigned to them as refiners and critics of morals.[14]

If, then, Jane Austen is to be considered a responsible moral artist, she must objectify her serious purpose in her art. The moralist, concerned with the actions of men, must have essential facts before he can make a judgment. The novelist, writing about men in action, must make his characters convincing by showing how they act. The require-

[13] "The Novelist as Moralist and the Moralist as Critic," Essays in Criticism, X (1960), 320-328, p.320.

[14] Joyce Hemlow, "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books," PMLA, LXV (1950), 732-761, p.733.

ments are much the same. Just as a virtuous man must submit his principles to the test of experience, a fictional character must prove his value in his relationships with others in the course of the story. The novelist must "demonstrate" the conclusions he draws about his characters, for, May suggests, "in no novel that we can now take seriously does the author ask us to accept on his word the explicit assertion that a character is good or bad."[15] What the moral writer must do, in other words, if he is interested in creating moral attitudes in his characters and in his readers, is "to work a development," rather than simply to "propose a change" in these attitudes.[16] When a writer fails to work such a development, he tries to frighten his readers into ways that he thinks desirable for them.

The moral novelist belongs to a tradition of major literary importance that asks the question: "'What are a man's needs unto himself?' The tradition is not purely literary -- 'it feeds on the questions that men ask themselves in life at least as urgently as they ask themselves moral questions.'"[17] Jane Austen interprets these "needs unto oneself" in different ways in her novels.

15 May, p.320.
16 May, p.321.
17 May, p.323.

She was not always serious--"her fools, her prigs, her worldlings, her Mr. Collinses, her Sir Walter Elliotts, her Mrs. Bennetts,"[18] go on and on with their trivialities. They can only be ridiculous, and eternally ridiculous, for "even if the pangs of outraged vanity, or the heat of moral wrath, urged us to improve a world so full of spite, pettiness, and folly, the task is beyond our powers."[19] Jane Austen knew that people were just like that.

> Her fool is a fool, her snob is a snob, because he departs from the model of sanity and sense which she has in mind, and conveys to us unmistakably even while she makes us laugh. Never did any novelist make more use of an impeccable sense of human values. It is against the disc of an unerring heart, an unfailing good taste, an almost stern morality, that she shows up those deviations from kindness, truth, and sincerity which are among the most delightful things in English literature.[20]

Not all the people in Jane Austen's world are fools, though, and the author expects far more of those who have enough intelligence to be mature. The same impeccable sense of values demands people of integrity to think and act with kindness, truth and sincerity, These "needs unto oneself" become responsibilities and quite strictly moral. Jane Austen might have used Dr. Johnson's definition of 'candour' to explain what she meant by maturity--a harshness for oneself, and a generous tolerance toward others. She brings the question

[18] Woolf, p. 199.
[19] Woolf, p. 200.
[20] Woolf, p. 201.

of serious "needs unto oneself" to the centre of the novel by giving them to her heroines, who are always her most important figures. "Unless there is at least one figure in the novel with whose needs we can feel in active sympathy, the book is likely to be no more than a farce or a tirade."[21]

Readers who refuse to look beyond the surface plot situation fail to find the seriousness of Jane Austen's novels:

> The visible structure of Jane Austen's stories may be flimsy enough; but their foundations drive deep down into the basic principles of human conduct. On her bit of ivory, she has engraved a criticism of life as serious and as considered as Hardy's.[22]

The six stories announce their serious intention with the heroines themselves. They are not simply young women of an age and position to marry. The author makes it clear that all of them bear a responsibility to those surrounding them, and inevitably to themselves. They generally see things more clearly than the other characters, and if they act foolishly at times, they are never fools. It is precisely this maturity that makes them heroines, for "to achieve general understanding of oneself and the world is difficult, as we are reminded in the novels by seeing how few of the characters have done so

[21] May, p. 323.

[22] Cecil, Introduction to Sense and Sensibility (Oxford, 1931), p. xiii.

or ever will."[23] Jane Austen's world of Bath, of Highbury, of Mansfield, is peopled with foolish advisors, delinquent or simply small-minded parents, sometimes with dangerous intruders who threaten the happiness of the heroines with whom we are in sympathy. Mrs. Allen may be kind enough, but she thinks only about dresses and dances; Mr. Bennet may be perceptive enough, but he fails to become serious when his children need his advice; Mr. Woodhouse may be innocuous enough to be harmless, but he may prevent Emma from leaving Highbury Park. Deprived of intelligent guidance from those in authority, all the heroines must determine their own course. If they are to establish themselves as responsible individuals, they must deal intelligently with the situation in which they have been placed. There is no escape; all must bear the consequences of their acts. If they have been eluding their responsibilities by not seeing things as they should, they must learn to change. They must, in a word, become serious.

Jane Austen, as moral artist, carefully remains within the province of moral criticism about matters that demand seriousness. Within this sphere, she can develop moral attitudes with certainty. She weaves the fabric of her stories on fundamental responses --" 'A shouldn't do

[23] John Mathison, "Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction," ELH, XXIV (1954), 138-152, p. 140.

this to B' or 'A should do this for B'."[24] From these moral responses, she sets forth evidence concerning her characters. Immediate examples present themselves: Emma should not be unkind to Miss Bates; Frank Churchill should not deceive Jane Fairfax; Marianne Dashwood should not use Mrs. Jennings, who is kind to her; Frederick Wentworth should not speak unkindly of Anne Elliot. The author can assume that her readers will consent to her judgments. "Her sense of justice is exquisite and implacable; neither pity nor anger can make it swerve from its course; she is never vindictive and never sentimental; she makes no exceptions in deference to public opinion or to her personal feelings."[25] The questions her heroines ask themselves may not be earth-shattering; she does, after all, build her plots around what Garrod disparagingly calls the "husband hunt."[26] But the questions central to the novel need not be momentous; that they be social or moral "does not alter the emphasis in this tradition on the satisfaction or lack of it, that the hero (or heroine) experiences in the way he handles his relationship with the creation about him."[27] And perhaps Emma's moment of

[24] May, p. 321.
[25] Cecil, p. 36.
[26] See p. 32.
[27] May, p. 323.

perception that she must marry Mr. Knightley may not be so trivial. She and Elizabeth Bennet, Catherine Moreland, and Marianne Dashwood, have had first to understand what they need to fulfill themselves in order to decide to marry a certain man. "It may be true," Elizabeth Bowen remarks, "that Jane Austen has drawn no rebels; her people expect and derive pleasure from the straightforward living of life. But they plan; they seek, with degrees of determination, ideal relationships inside that world they already know."[28] Fanny Price and Anne Elliot do not have to change and mature. They must wait, however, for their suitors to come to terms with themselves, before they can marry. The author manages to convey the conviction that the heroines and heroes deserve each other.

Most of the heroines have at least two suitors and must prove their maturity in the choice they make. They cannot settle for a marriage of convenience; Catherine is too wise to settle for a buffoon; Elizabeth is amazed by the arrogant proposal of Mr. Collins. Even Fanny Price refuses the charming Henry Crawford. Such decisions become more complex, certainly, when the demands of the heroine's situation are more insistent. Fanny might be doomed if Edmund does not realize that he loves her, and

[28] "Jane Austen", English Novelists (London, 1942), p. 26.

Anne Elliot is willing to risk becoming Lady Elliot for the possibility, but only the possibility, of Wentworth's returning to her.[29] Suddenly, then, the choice of a husband becomes far more than a "husband hunt." It becomes the heroine's chance for maturity as well as her chance to be happy. And Northrop Frye reminds us of a remark once made by E. M. Forster,

> that if it weren't for wedding bells or funeral bells a novelist would hardly know where to stop; he might have added a third conventional ending, the point of self-knowledge, at which a character finds something out about himself as a result of some crucial experience.[30]

Jane Austen provides both wedding bells and self-knowledge.

When one considers, too, what might happen to the heroine if she makes the wrong choice, the stories grow more meaningful. For the heroes may all be honest men of feeling, but the villains "all share the hypocritical mask of a more or less serious want of principle."[31] Readers know, too, how often women make a mistake and marry the wrong men. In Jane Austen's comic world, the heroines marry the men who are best for them. Arthur Sullivan is

[29] Joseph Wood Krutch comments that Jane Austen "held that only a fool undervalued either a good income or a good social position, but she despised heartily anyone who overvalued either. See "Manners Left by Their Mistress," Saturday Review (Jan.31, 1959), p. 17.

[30] Frye, p. 14.

[31] Andrew H. Wright, Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure (London, 1953), p. 84.

entitled to his wry comment that 'it is an unjust world and virtue happens only in theatrical performances.' Still, the artist's performance is his art. This is his own privileged domain where he can invite readers to enter, and expect them to realize that art has a pattern that life very often does not have. What readers cannot deny, however, is their system of moral responses: "the response of gratitude to those who do something for us that pleases us, and of repulsion from those that hurt us. Such responses are no doubt the first springs of morality throughout life -- we love and praise the loving, and hate and condemn the unkind."[32] Just so, Jane Austen guides her readers along her relentless path, judging her characters, and convincing her readers to like or dislike them. Occasionally, she forces her characters to make a 'right' choice almost against their own wills. In these instances, she becomes didactic. In the end, however, she satisfies the claims of both criticism and morality.

> The good novel cannot fail to please the moralist. For what does it do but show unfalteringly the consequences of men's actions and invite us with unique persuasiveness to share the feelings of all who are involved? Where the moralist may have grounds for complaint is where his own knowledge and imagination tell him the novelist has left out essential facts -- about the people

[32] May, p. 325.

involved in events described -- with the result that an action shown to us may please us, whereas if its full consequences were displayed, it would dismay.[33]

"The responsible artist," Eliot insists,

has no will to confuse emotion and thinking, sensibility and intellection, sincerity of feeling with adequacy of experience and reflection. The view of life which the responsible artist articulates perceptually is not, like most views which have popular success as 'propaganda', simple, and an adequately complex vision of life cannot, by hypnotic suggestion, move to premature or naive action.[34]

No one, and especially not Jane Austen, would attempt to influence one's morality through fiction. "What was the point, she felt, in expounding principles which must be obvious to any rational person. Besides, the spectacle of human ineptitude amused her too much for her to have any great wish to put an end to it."[35] Common sense is not, unfortunately, very common. For a space of time, however, readers may share Jane Austen's insight, and wonder what it might be like to live in a world of consistent justice, a world at once more kind and more cruel than our own.

[33] May, p. 326.

[34] See René Wellek and Austen Warren, Theory of Literature, 3rd. ed. (New York, 1956), p. 36, for their discussion of Eliot's thesis.

[35] Cecil, p. 35.

CHAPTER II

NORTHANGER ABBEY and SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

THE EARLY HEROINES

Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, though revised and published more than ten years after they were written, frequently present themselves as companion pieces.[1] Both novels represent many of the author's early reactions to and excercises in prose fiction. The similarity between the two novels cannot, however, extend very far beyond the early place they share in Jane Austen's development, for the books are essentially different. Although both contain elements of literary pastiche, Northanger Abbey will always remain more strictly 'literary', with its sustained mockery of recognizable fictional characters and clichés. The author's parodic point of view in Northanger Abbey recalls her earliest ironic impulse, for the novel echoes the high spirits of the Love and Freindship sketches. Sense and Sensibility, twice as long and far more serious, moves away from burlesque, and anticipates the more complex

[1] Although Northanger Abbey came after First Impressions (the original Pride and Prejudice) and after both Elinor and Marianne and its revision as Sense and Sensibility, it must contain more untouched early work than the other two. See Alan D. McKillop, "Critical Realism in Northanger Abbey," From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, (Minneapolis, 1958); reprinted in Watt, Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 52-61, p. 52.

interplay of character and situation in the later novels.[2]

Northanger Abbey relies on other sources not only for its conception but for much of its crisp satire. F.R. Leavis, who places Jane Austen at the beginning of his 'Great Tradition', claims that she developed already existing literary possibilities: "If the influences bearing on her hadn't comprised something fairly to be called tradition, she couldn't have found herself and her true direction; but her relation to tradition is a creative one."[3] The author herself, in fact, apologizes in an advertisement for 'those parts of the book which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete. The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books and opinions have undergone considerable changes.'[4]

If, in other words, the whole life of the first novel depended completely on contemporary material, the novel would be completely lost to modern readers. Northanger Abbey, almost in spite of itself, becomes far more than literary pastiche or burlesque.

[2] Sense and Sensibility and Mansfield Park are considered Jane Austen's most solemn novels.

[3] See The Great Tradition (London, 1962), p.13. See also Joseph Cady and Ian Watt who question Leavis's thesis -- "Direct evidence is certainly lacking of Jane Austen's work being in any way necessary to the later development of the tradition of the English novel," p.58.

[4] Chapman, Facts and Problems, p.75.

The insistent editorial voice, so prevalent in the early chapters, makes it clear that this heroine is not like the heroines of contemporary novels:

> No one who had ever seen Catherine Moreland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her. Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected, or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard--and he had never been handsome. (p.13)[5]

At the same time, though, Catherine is established as a wholesome, good-natured girl, a prototype for all the heroines that were to follow.

> She had neither a bad heart nor a bad temper; was seldom stubborn, scarcely ever quarrelsome, and very kind to the little ones, with few interruptions of tyranny; she was, moreover, noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness; and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house. (p.14)

When Catherine leaves for Bath with the Allens at the beginning of the story, her mother does not suffer the supposed anxiety of such a "terrific separation;" her father does not give her "an unlimited order on his banker;" her sister "neither insisted on Catherine's writing by every post, nor exacted her promise of transmitting the character of every new acquaintance, nor a detail of every interesting conversation that Bath might produce." (pp. 18-19)

[5] Northanger Abbey, Vol. V, The Novels of Jane Austen.

Catherine is not, on the other hand, neglected by her family--

> Every thing indeed relative to this important journey was done, on the part of the Morelands, with a degree of moderation and composure, which seemed rather consistent with the common feelings of common life, than with the refined sensibilities, the tender emotions which the first separation of a heroine from her family ought always to excite. (p. 19)

The point of view--making fun of Catherine and liking her at the same time--was one of Jane Austen's favourites. In the light of the author's common sense, Catherine soon indicates that she is an unassuming young woman. As she responds to people and situations, she will have to prove whether or not she has the moral character Jane Austen considered necessary for happiness. In allowing for some development in Catherine's character, however, Northanger Abbey moves away from parody, because "parody is by nature static, a rendering of a state of affairs rather than a course of action."[6] The state of affairs prepared for the author's wit are the trappings of the Gothic novel, and Mrs. Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) does come in for entertaining attack. But Jane Austen also turns her attention to the effect that novels of "horror" can have on the imagination of a young reader.

Catherine Moreland is a young girl with a vivid

6 W.A. Craik, Jane Austen: The Six Novels (London, 1965), p. 22. Craik thinks that as Catherine's character becomes more psychologically interesting, it becomes less so as a literary force. See p. 21.

imagination who loves to read novels. She has allowed her imagination to influence some of her reactions to her real situations. Like other Jane Austen heroines, she must be educated, but unlike Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse, she needs less instruction in terms of her situation, for she is essentially honest about herself and those about her. In some ways, Catherine shares more with Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, who can realistically accept and judge what they must do. Catherine may be naive, but her expectations can hardly be called romantic. Going to Bath, she looks forward to a change from home, but so far from hoping to meet a hero, she responds to Mrs. Allen's wish for a large acquaintance, "I wish we had any; -- it would be somebody to go to." (p. 22) In the little world of the Allens, Thorpes, and Tilneys at Bath, Catherine makes relatively few mistakes, proving herself capable of judging something of consequence and of acting sensibly. She gradually learns, for example, that Mrs. Allen is hardly a responsible guardian --

> 'Dear madam,' cried Catherine, 'then why did you not tell me so before? I am sure if I had known it to be improper, I would not have gone with Mr. Thorpe at all; but I always hoped you would tell me, if you thought I was doing wrong.' (p. 104)

Catherine may fail to realize that Isabella Thorpe is insincere, but she expects only the best in people. Her attitude is part of what Miss Austen called candour.

In fact, Catherine only responds with mistaken enthusiasm when something reminds her of what she has read. When, for example, the Thorpes mention a 'castle', Catherine's imagination is aroused. They decide to visit Blaize Castle and Catherine breaks her engagement with the Tilneys to go with them. She is not wrong in going, though, for John Thorpe has tricked her into thinking that the Tilneys have failed to keep their engagement with her. Where she does make her mistake is in so readily accepting John Thorpe's word. When a second trip is proposed, Catherine does not make the same mistake. She indicates that she has learned from it, even though it involves submitting to the criticism of her other friends.

> Away walked Catherine in great agitation, as fast as the crowd would permit her, fearful of being pursued, yet determined to persevere. As she walked, she reflected on what had passed. It was painful to her to disappoint and displease them, particularly to displease her brother; but she could not repent her resistance. Setting her own inclination apart, to have failed a second time in her engagement to Miss Tilney, to have retracted a promise voluntarily made only five minutes before, and on a false pretence too, must have been wrong. She had not been withstanding them on selfish principles alone, she had not consulted merely her own gratification; <u>that</u> might have been ensured in some degree by the excursion itself, by seeing Blaize Castle; no, she had attended to what was due to others and to her own character in their opinion. (p. 101)

Even Catherine's literary taste reflects a certain degree of discrimination. Her interest in reading novels, so consciously an echo of the author's own defense of fiction, will be reinforced by Henry Tilney, the hero of

the story and one of Jane Austen's most charming gentlemen. "The person, be it gentleman or lady," Tilney will remark to Catherine, "who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid." (p. 106) Although lacking Tilney's sophistication, Catherine proves that she knows literature is not life, that she does not see herself romantically. When she had first met Tilney at the Pump Room, she responded with liveliness to his teasing her with literary allusions:

'I see what you think of me,' said he gravely -- 'I shall make but a poor figure in your journal tomorrow.' (p. 26)

. . . . . .

'But perhaps, I keep no journal.' (p.27)

Henry Tilney, "the only one of Jane Austen's heroes to share her ironic point of view,"[7] frequently seems to assume the author's role in correcting Catherine.[8] His somewhat ambiguous position in Northanger Abbey, that is, as both hero of the story and spokesman for the author, tends to make him at times more a voice than a character. He has, in a word, too much to do, and fails to be totally convincing.

As heroine growing up, Catherine does not have to make the same deliberations over a husband that other heroines will have to make. She has really only one suitor. John Thorpe hardly provides opposition to Tilney, for Catherine soon judges him to be a fool, failing not only

[7] Wright, p. 102.

[8] See especially ch. XIO, pp. 106-115.

in good manners but in integrity. She dismisses him almost as soon as she knows him:

> Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable. (p. 66)

Catherine chooses Henry immediately, though unconsciously, and her interest and respect for him grow gradually and convincingly. She shows at the same time that she can act intelligently, making her a good choice for Tilney. They deserve and complement each other. By no means does Henry condescend in loving Catherine, for he appreciates her affectionate nature, and if he teases her about her romantic notions from novels, he delights in so doing. (pp. 157-160) Tilney has some of Mr. Bennet's ironic detachment, tending occasionally to misunderstanding. His sister reprimands him for his mild cynicism --

> 'And now, Henry,' said Miss Tilney, 'that you have made us understand each other, you may as well make Miss Moreland understand yourself -- unless you mean to have her think you intolerably rude to your sister, and a great brute in your opinion of women in general. Miss Moreland is not used to your odd ways. (p. 113)

Tilney may be charming, but he does not dominate the story; Catherine remains the sympathetic central character. She never fails in kindness to others and merits affection and respect.

By the time Catherine arrives at Northanger Abbey with the Tilneys, the satiric intention of the novel has almost totally disappeared, and the author concerns herself with "settling the business of Catherine and Henry."[9] Captain Tilney, however, remains a shadowy brooding character, and resembles, in some ways--the typical Gothic villain. As a character, he is the greatest failure in the book. When Henry discovers Catherine's suspicions that Captain Tilney had killed Mrs. Tilney, he reprimands her severely.

'If I understand you rightly, you have formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to--Dear Miss Moreland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you--Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies; and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open: Dearest Miss Moreland, what ideas have you been admitting?' (pp. 197-198)

Finally, Catherine concludes that her visions of romance are over. She has learned how dangerous an uncontrolled imagination can be. Commenting on Catherine's moment of perception, C.S. Lewis remarks:

The delusion from which Catherine Moreland has been awakened was an innocent one, which owed at least as much to girlish ignorance of the world as to folly. And being imaginative, it was a delusion from which an entirely commonplace or self-centered mind would

[9] Craik, p. 9.

> hardly have suffered. Accordingly, the expiation though painful while it lasts, is brief, and Catherine's recovery and good resolutions are treated with affectionate irony.[10]

The novel fails, moreover, to prove Catherine totally wrong. She was right, at least, in suspecting that Captain Tilney "was not perfectly amiable;" (p. 200) when he learns that she is not an heiress, as he had thought, he turns her away from Northanger without explanation. His action, though, forces Henry to come to Catherine's home to apologize and to ask her to marry him. Even though Henry's proposal is motivated by a configuration of the plot rather than by a conscious choice of his own, the novel has already established the affection between Catherine and him. Each deserves to be happy in Jane Austen's world, and marriage is their reward.

In some ways, Northanger Abbey, for all its sketchiness, prefigures Jane Austen's best work more closely than Sense and Sensibility. The novel centres on a single heroine and makes her moral responses the essential pattern of the story. Catherine's imagination scarcely threatens her good judgment, as, for example, Emma's scheming will threaten hers. Catherine remains young and delightful and entertaining. The author has yet to develop her most successful handling of point of view, for in Northanger Abbey, her intervening auctorial voice, delighting in its own wit, at times interrupts the progress of the story.

[10] Lewis, p. 361.

This editorial voice, though, pausing to emphasize certain positive assumptions, is a sign of the author's impulse that seeks to guide both characters and readers to judgment.

If Jane Austen's first novel provides an introduction to her subsequent work, Sense and Sensibility may be said to explore all the possibilities they were to develop.[11] The book may be seen as another beginning, but one far more mature and searching in analysis than Northanger Abbey.

As in Northanger Abbey, irony in Sense and Sensibility has its initial focus outside the novel. Here, the mockery is directed, early in the story, to the late eighteenth century interest in "sensibility."

> Readers in 1811 knew the connotations of the term 'sensibility,' a word which has all but disappeared from our vocabulary. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century certain British moralists and divines, defending human nature against Hobbes, the Puritans and the Stoics, asserted that man is not naturally sinful and selfish but naturally moved to benevolent action by his own feelings and formed to take pleasure in his tender sympathy with his fellow beings.[12]

Marianne Dashwood is another young reader who, like Catherine Moreland, allows her imagination to distort her judgment. Unlike Catherine, though, whose reactions remain candid and generous, Marianne has adopted from her reading

[11] Sense and Sensibility, Vol. I, The Novels of Jane Austen.

[12] Caroline Mercer, "Afterword," Sense and Sensibility (New York, 1961), pp. 307-314, p. 311.

of fiction and poetry a whole style of response to life. Her youthful egotism, Mercer suggests,

> is at once amusing, irritating, and engaging, because Marianne is a human being. She is trying, in the language and style of sensibility, to realize her youthful need to love, her wish to respond to nature and the arts, and her impulse to assert a contempt for the conventional or selfish standards of people around her.[13]

Marianne conceives a need for herself that is false, or at least, false in terms of Jane Austen's dictates of sound sense. Since the story soon introduces serious discussion of the dangers of Marianne's attitude, the literary joke can only be sustained with the reminder that "in sober sadness, many of Marianne's aberrations are to be attributed to her aesthetic notions."[14] She is, Christopher Gillie remarks, "not so mistaken in her feelings, as in her disregard for the use which ought to be made of the feelings."[15] But Jane Austen was always distrustful of any indulgence in emotion or imagination that was not plainly subservient to the resolve to do the right thing. When, for example, Elinor Dashwood questions Marianne's accepting a horse from Willoughby, whom she hardly knows, Marianne retorts in the language of sensibility:

13. Mercer, p. 312.

14. Robert Liddell, The Novels of Jane Austen (New York, 1963), p. 16.

15. See "Sense and Sensibility: An Assessment," Essays in Criticism, IX (1959), 1-9, p. 2.

'You are mistaken, Elinor,' said she warmly, 'in supposing I know very little of Willoughby. I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him than I am with any other creature in the world, except yourself and mama. It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy;--it is disposition alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others. (p. 59)

Convinced that her feelings are sufficient guides to morality, Marianne believes that to have and express strong feelings is a virtue and almost a duty.[16] Her indulgence in sensibility results, though, "in a parasitical exploitation of others. Marianne forces Elinor to take over all the unpleasant tasks of practical life, while at the same time scorning her sister's steady self-command because it demonstrates the inferiority of her sensibility."[17]

In the character of Marianne, the novel carries on its serious discussion of over-sentimentality:

To meet experience--whether in the form of a landscape, or literature, or a lover--with a quivering readiness to respond in the feelings; to deplore and indeed, deride the checks and reins of rational or merely conventional caution that would halt and therefore blunt the feelings; to love once superbly, and only once; these are some of the tenets of the cult of sensibility that control the conduct of 17-year old Marianne Dashwood.[18]

16 Mercer, p. 310.

17 Watt, "On Sense and Sensibility." From the Introduction to Sense and Sensibility, ed. Ian Watt (New York, 1961); reprinted in Jane Austen: Twentieth Century Views, pp. 41-51, p. 46.

18 Mark Schorer, General Introduction to Persuasion and Lady Susan (New York, 1959), pp. 5-25, p. 15.

The conflict in the novel remains largely external, with Elinor Dashwood, the other heroine, upholding the side of sense as rigidly as Marianne avows that of sensibility. The novel can be seen as a debate, "centering on two quite abstractable human predispositions; the moral is that Sense is more than its own reward; Sensibility less than its own promise."[19] Elinor provides the answering rhythm to Marianne's progress through the story, and her position as spokesman renders her rather like Tilney in Northanger Abbey, more a voice than a character. Yet the author's failure to bring Elinor to life is more significant than her inability to make Tilney convincing, since Elinor is the character to whom readers must respond if they are to accept the moral thesis of the book.

Only in Sense and Sensibility do two heroines become equally important to the plot. Their responses divide the reader -- "We experience the story mainly through the nerves of Marianne, but we are expected to judge it through the mind of Elinor."[20] Jane Austen obviously did not intend such a division of empathy between Elinor and Marianne. Elinor's position in the novel seems designed to show that good sense is not incompatible with true sensibility. Not intended to be less attractive than Marianne, she is her superior in both judgment and wit.

[19] Wright, p. 18.

[20] Gillie, p. 5.

She replies, for example, to Lucy Steele's effusive remarks about lively children--"I confess. . . that while I am at Barton Park, I never think of tame and quiet children with any abhorrence." (p. 123) Elinor has been said to resemble Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, both in her keen eye for the ridiculous, and for her sense of responsibility toward those about her. Elizabeth Bennet, though, wins her reader's interest and affection by her sheer presence in the story as a delightful young woman. Elinor's moments of sprightliness are limited, and many of her reactions are only indirectly rendered. Because the novel fails to demonstrate Elinor's appealing qualities, it conveys the impression that the author is using her as a mouthpiece to reprimand Marianne. "Unless," Derwent May has suggested, "there is one figure in the novel with whose needs we can feel in active sympathy, the book is likely to be no more than a farce or a tirade."[21] Sense and Sensibility does at times become a tirade. We cannot sympathize with Elinor, and she will not let us sympathize with Marianne.

It can be suggested that the too rarely dissipated atmosphere of reproof about Elinor accounts for much of her dullness. Ian Watt appreciates the author's difficulty in making Elinor as attractive as her sister,

> for it is not only in this book, and it is not only in Jane Austen, that grave difficulties arise in making sensible characters vivid and attractive. Every novelist, surely, must feelingly echo the old prayer that the bad may be made

[21] May, p. 323.

good, the good nice, and the nice--interesting. Elinor is good and nice, but she is only intermittently interesting.[22] But Jane Austen did succeed elsewhere in making one of her heroines both very good and interesting. Anne Elliot in Persuasion is as much a serious confidante to others as Elinor is, but her maturity is tempered by her lingering feeling for a man she has been persuaded to give up. Her feeling for Wentworth arouses as much affection as her kindness calls for respect. Elinor fails to command the same affection.

The great problem in the novel is, of course, that of a very involved plot, where minor characters force major characters to act. Elinor must be silent about her feeling for Edward Ferrars, for her mother and Marianne would only falsify her hopes for an attachment. When Lucy Steele announces that she and Ferrars have been secretly engaged for four years, Elinor can have no hope. Constantly compelled to be a witness, Elinor must suffer in silence, without sympathy from Marianne, but perhaps with less sympathy from her readers. Not that readers are at all indisposed to sympathize with a deserving heroine who has been imposed upon by circumstances, but Elinor asks for little sympathy. So few direct references are made to her suffering disappointment, and so many are made to her controlling situations that other people cannot handle, that

[22] Watt, "On Sense and Sensibility," p. 48.

readers find it very difficult to identify with her. "Our modern literary feeling," Lionel Trilling has remarked, "is very strong against people who, when they mean to be virtuous, believe they know how to reach their goal and do reach it. . . . Our favourite saint is likely to be Augustine; he is sweetened for us by his early transgressions."[23] And Elinor Dashwood comes close to being one of those images of perfection that Jane Austen heartily professed to despise. Her part in Sense and Sensibility, though intellectually sound, remains impassionate and almost wooden.

The novel attempts to illustrate through its male characters that sense is better than sensibility. But the same unconvincing antithesis presents itself. Willoughby is everything that Ferrars and Brandon are not; lively, interesting, romantic. Although he is present for very little of the action, he always draws more attention than the other male characters. Sometimes he tends to be unkind, as for example, when he remarks about Brandon:

> 'I do not dislike him. I consider him, on the contrary, as a very respectable man, who has everybody's good word and nobody's notice; who has more money than he can spend, more time than he knows how to employ, and two new coats every year.' (p. 45)

[23] "Mansfield Park," The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism (London, 1955), pp. 206-230, p. 212.

Because Colonel Brandon does not prove to be otherwise, readers have to forgive Willoughby's laugh at his expense and admit that the appraisal is probably right. Next to Willoughby, who remains mysterious in his part as Gothic villain--Romantic hero,[24] Edward Ferrars is a wet blanket. Unattractive, without a profession, hampered by an ambitious mother,[25] he can never become an appealing hero. He does, like Elinor, have rare moments of wit, but these are far outnumbered by his modds of depression.[26] Ferrars seems to be a defeated man, far from the Fairy Prince that writers of comedy choose for their heroines.

In real life, no doubt, we continue to respect interesting women despite the preposterous men they sometimes marry. But in fiction it is usually fatal. Who can forgive Dorothea for marrying such a sugarstick as Ladislaw or Nellie Harding for becoming Mrs. Bold? Or, of course, David Copperfield for his first marriage?[27]

[24] Willoughby, almost in defiance of his creator, comes closer to being a Byronic hero than a Gothic villain. See Peter L. Thorsley, The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes (Minneapolis, 1962), p. 8.

[25] "It would be wrong," Ian Watt reminds us, "to regard Edward Ferrars as an irresponsible sponger; in the reign of George the Third, young gentlemen with expectations of inherited wealth were not supposed to work. If they took up a profession, it was usually only as a matter of social convenience or prestige, and so Ferrars' concern about his vocation deserves much more credit than it would today. Nor is he hypocritical in deciding upon holy orders; his modest degree of religious commitment was certainly as great as, if not greater than, that normally found among the Anglican clergy of his period." See "On Sense and Sensibility," p. 41.

[26] See Edward's comments to Elinor and Marianne on "crooked, twisted, blasted trees," p. 98.

[27] Lewis, p. 367.

Ferrars wins Elinor at the end of the story only because circumstances free him from Lucy Steele. If theirs may be called a romantic match, in that they only marry after much difficulty, it arouses little interest. One might admit that Elinor and Edward deserve each other, but silently add that perhaps Marianne has gained more in loving Willoughby.

Sense and Sensibility does succeed in portraying Marianne's feeling for Willoughby.

> Few writers have had the courage to represent a heroine in the grip of a passion as physical as influenza. Indeed, compared with Marianne, it may well be asked what character in English prose fiction may be said to be convincingly in love; Pip, perhaps, in Great Expectations.[28]

The novel fails to demonstrate how Marianne is wrong in thinking herself to be solemnly engaged to him "as if the strictest legal covenant had bound them to each other." (p. 188) What Jane Austen has done most convincingly has been to reveal what she was trying so hard to deny -- that the dictates of the heart are as dependable as those of the head. In his stagy confession to Elinor at the end of the story, Willoughby shows that he had and still does love Marianne. Even Elinor sympathizes with the circumstances that influenced him to marry Miss Grey. More realistic than Marianne, though, she sees that it was not "the blackest art" that had changed him; (p. 188) it was

[28] Liddell, p. 18.

rather that his dread of poverty had outweighed his affection. Elinor's judgment of him softens, but does not change, and Willoughby is kindly dismissed:

> That his repentance of misconduct, which thus brought its own punishment, was sincere, need not be doubted; --nor that he long thought of Colonel Brandon with envy, and of Marianne with regret. But that he was for ever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended upon--for he did neither . . . He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. (p.379)

The conclusion of the story with regard to Marianne is, however, unprepared for, both from a moral and a psychological standpoint. There are few indications that Brandon is the best choice for her. She does not change her opinion of him, and his interest in her seems to be only benevolent, hardly enough for marriage. Marianne, moreover, is more significant to the story than Brandon, so that a denouement that promises marriage between them seems to be a punishment rather than a reward. "Marianne," comments Marvin Mudrick, "has been betrayed; and not by Willoughby."[29]

Despite the obvious manipulation in Sense and Sensibility,

> Jane Austen developed for the first time a narrative form which fully articulated the conflict between the contrary tendencies of her age: between reason and rapture, between the observing mind and the feeling heart, between being sensible and being sensitive. The dissociation of sen-

[29] Mudrick, p. 93.

> sibility may or may not have been all but mortal for poetry, but in splitting the human mind into its component parts, and so making them available for inspection, both in themselves and in relation to the outside world, it brought life to the novel.[30]

Both Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility fall short of what Cecil has called "fact and form," that is, of demonstrating moral-realistic truths in a convincing artistic pattern. Captain Tilney can never be more than a melodramatic figure. Ferrars and Brandon will always be unconvincing suitors for Elinor and Marianne. The author has clearly twisted reality in order to make the stories end, as she thought, happily. It is true that Jane Austen does dismiss characters too hastily at times, but at least she does not ignore them or drop them, as for example, Dickens and Waughtsometimes do. Jane Austen's moral view that good sense was necessary for happiness was constant. Expression had to wait for Pride and Prejudice and Emma.

[30] Watt, "On Sense and Sensibility," p. 51.

CHAPTER III

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and EMMA: THE LIVELY HEROINES

In Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, the comedy essentially derives from the confusion in an immature mind between literature and life. In Pride and Prejudice and Emma, Jane Austen "proceeds to the dissection and exposure of the more normal follies and illusions of mankind."[1] She no longer depends on her intervening voice and on the defensive weapon of irony in presenting her heroines. Emma and Elizabeth never become merely advocates for the author's point of view. When they misinterpret and misjudge their own moral responsibilities toward themselves and others, they must redeem themselves through convincing humiliation and perception. The author's irony encompasses them too, and includes and subjects them to its correction. At the same time, it gives them the freedom that Catherine Moreland and Elinor Dashwood did not have. Jane Austen has allowed Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse to exist apart from her and live their own lives in their own world. In refusing to allow her moral to "hang like

[1] Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York, 1954), p. 118.

a tail, or preach from one character incessantly cocking an eye at the audience,"[2] the author challenges the perception of her readers.

Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse may be said to resemble the heroines of high comedy. Like Millamant who overshadows the sprightly Mirabel in Congreve's The Way of the World, both Elizabeth and Emma dominate the universe of Pride and Prejudice and Emma. Their liveliness is largely the source of their charm. They are too often mistaken to dominate the other characters by their judgments and opinions, and must win their position by more subtle means. It would be wrong, though, to say that Elizabeth's errors in judgment are as serious as Emma's. In the end, Elizabeth resembles Jane Austen's heroines who represent good judgment and sound feeling--she does at least approach the criterion far more effectively than most of the people she meets:

> The social world may have material power over her, enough to make her unhappy, but it hasn't the power that comes from having created or moulded her, and it can claim no credit for her being what she is. In this sense, the heroine is independent of those about her and isolated from them. She has only to be herself.[3]

[2] George Meredith uses this expression in discussing Molière's pervading comic spirit. "The source of his wit is clear reason," says Meredith, "it is a fountain of that soil, and it springs to vindicate reason, common sense, rightness, and justice--for no vain purpose ever." See "An Essay on Comedy," Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher (New York, 1956), p. 17.

[3] Harding, p. 356.

In Emma, Jane Austen "faces the far bolder conclusion that a heroine is likely to have assimilated many of the more unpleasant possibilities of the human being in society."[4] The progression of the story consists of Emma's gradual, humbling self-enlightenment, rather than her vindication.

Elizabeth and Emma are young women who attempt through trial and error to fulfill themselves. Meredith has commented on the heroines of comedy, saying that they are "not necessarily heartless from being clear-sighted--they seem so to the sentimentally reared, only for the reason that they use their wits, and are not wandering vessels crying for a captain or a pilot."[5] Jane Austen's liveliest young women fall short of clear-sightedness, but each one takes pride in the freedom to use her wits, a privilege that so many of Jane Austen's women fail to recognize or refuse to enjoy. They are constantly acting and responding, judging and allowing themselves to be judged. Elizabeth has proven to be as charming as her creator expected her to be. Jane Austen was not so confident that Emma would gain the reader's affection, and indeed, Frank Bradbrook has stated (and perhaps overstated): "That we can retain sympathy with Emma after her brutality and cruelty is one of the greatest

[4] Harding, p. 361.

[5] Meredith, p. 15.

triumphs of Jane Austen's art."[6]

Mark Schorer has written of Pride and Prejudice that "perhaps nothing at once so lucid and so intricate has been devised in the English novel before."[7] In its completeness, the novel achieves the proportion that Sense and Sensibility failed to realize. The major characters, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, who demand the greatest interest, receive the author's most detailed attention. Unlike the plots of Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility which tend to twist reality to suit the story, this plot fulfills the task it outlines for itself: "to develop and then release the antagonism between these two in such a way that they, themselves, made to realize the folly of their pride and their prejudice, are each released from each in an embrace."[8] It is as much a story of moral growth as it is a love story. Elizabeth is at her sprightliest in Darcy's company, speaking at times with the kind of insolence that confident witty women often permit themselves. In her conversation, Elizabeth reveals that she is the only intelligent woman among the company at Netherfield, and

[6] Frank W. Bradbrook, Jane Austen: Emma (London, 1961), p. 54.

[7] Schorer, p. 17.

[8] Schorer, p. 17.

she attracts Darcy almost immediately, for when he replies to Miss Bingley's criticism of such insipid society, he says: "My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow." (p.27)[9] The highly revealing moments of repartee between the hero and the heroine of Pride and Prejudice echo other lively interchanges between ladies and gentlemen of high comedy, such as Beatrice and Benedict in Much Ado About Nothing, and Millamant and Mirabel in The Way of the World. In these passages of dialogue, Jane Austen illustrates how "the bright and sparkling, seemingly centrifugal play of irony is dramatically functional."[10] Witty language, delightful in itself, also reveals character. "Here," Reuben Brower suggests, "if anywhere, Jane Austen met James' demand that the novel should give its readers the maximum of 'fun;' at the same time she satisfied the further standard implied in James' remark that the art of the novel is above all the art of preparations."[11]

Much of the "fun" in Pride and Prejudice depends on Elizabeth. She lets us know, before anything else,

[9] Pride and Prejudice, Vol.II, The Novels of Jane Austen.

[10] Reuben A. Brower, "Light and Bright and Sparkling: Irony and Fiction in Pride and Prejudice," The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading (Oxford, 1951); reprinted in Jane Austen: Twentieth Century Views, pp. 62-75, pp. 62-63.

[11] Brower, p. 63.

how she amuses herself by observing those around her. She suggests that

> the first decision we must make about anyone--is not moral but psychological, not whether he is good or bad, but whether he is simple or intricate; whether he may be disposed of as fixed and predictable or must be recognized as variable, perhaps torn between contradictory motives, intellectually or emotionally complex, unsusceptible to a quick judgment.[12]

Readers like to identify with Elizabeth because they can enjoy the distinctions she makes between people. They, too, like to feel superior to Mrs. Bennet and her nervous condition, to Mr. Collins and his repeated effusions. Elizabeth succeeds at the same time in "placing" other characters according to her own criteria, and most of the time, according to the situation they deserve. She considers Bingley, for example, a "good catch" for her sister, but beyond his potential position as brother-in-law, has little interest in him. She admits that her sister Jane is far better than she, but so far out-distances her in wit and discernment, that Jane never becomes more than a secondary figure. Jane Austen did not make the same mistake she had made with Marianne in Sense and Sensibility, allowing her to contend for the central position in the story. Elizabeth Bennet has no rivals.

The heroine of Pride and Prejudice has three suitors, which is convincing evidence that she is as

[12] Mudrick, p. 95.

attractive as she seems. Mr. Collins, the first gentleman to present himself, cannot be taken too seriously. His proposal to Elizabeth is one of the funniest scenes in the novel.[13] When Mrs. Bennet learns that Elizabeth has refused Mr. Collins, she calls to her husband: "You must come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will not have him. . . ."(p. 111) Mr. Bennet comments in characteristic fashion to his daughter:

'An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.' (p. 112)

Readers instinctively like Mr. Bennet early in the story, mainly because Lizzy is his favourite. Elizabeth resembles her father, inheriting his ability to detect and laugh at the inanities of others. She understands his limitations, though, especially after Lydia elopes with Wickham.

Elizabeth. . . had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. (p. 235)

Mr. Bennet is largely to blame for Lydia's forced marriage

[13] See Joyce Hemlow's article concerning Mr. Collins' reading of Fordyce's Sermons, pp. 735-736.

to Wickham. Elizabeth had urged him to supervise his third daughter more closely, but he had neglected to take her suggestion seriously. The relationship between Elizabeth and her father indicates that she knows that some situations demand serious attention. The author seems to recognize, too, that the habits of a middle-aged man will hardly change; better to concentrate on the follies of a young person who is not yet set in her ways.

Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas, decides to marry Mr. Collins only a week after Elizabeth has refused him. Elizabeth cannot understand why her discerning friend should accept him. Marvin Mudrick suggests that Elizabeth's disapproval represents a failure in her complete discernment--

> It is not that Elizabeth misjudges Charlotte's capabilities, but that she underestimates the strength of the pressures acting upon her. Charlotte is twenty-seven, unmarried, not pretty, not well-to-do, living in a society which treats a penniless old maid less as a joke than as an exasperating burden upon her family. But Elizabeth is inexperienced enough, at the beginning, to judge in terms of personality only.[14]

When Charlotte tells her that people make their own happiness on their own terms, Elizabeth does submit to her judgment. She does not cut her off from her friendship. But when she visits Mr. and Mrs. Collins in their "humble abode," she senses that Charlotte has

[14] Mudrick, p. 109.

brought some real difficulties on herself:

> Poor Charlotte!--it was melancholy to leave her to such society!--But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her house-keeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms. (p.216)

Elizabeth does not, at least, lose the respect of her readers for deploring a marriage of convenience, demanding, at least for herself, a marriage based on affection.

George Wickham presents a stumbling block for Elizabeth's game of analyzing people. According to Mudrick's thesis, "When complexity and a pleasing manner combine, as they do in Wickham, Elizabeth is at her least cautious."[15] In Wickham's case, however, Mudrick's remarks fail to be convincing. Wickham is certainly more eager to please than Darcy, but he is hardly complex. What Wickham does is tell Elizabeth what she wants to her about Mr. Darcy. He confirms her already closed judgment of him. Whereas Elizabeth had formerly only objected to Mr. Darcy's haughtiness, she too eagerly accepts Wickham's detractions of his integrity. Not only does Elizabeth break the rules of her favourite sport, in fixing her opinion of a character she had considered intricate, she has made her opinion a moral judgment. Elizabeth then proceeds to conjure up a pic-

[15] Mudrick, pp. 109-110.

ture of Darcy as a villain. The author indicates that Elizabeth is being unfair by allowing her to display poor taste in discussing someone's character with a person about whom she knows nothing.[16] Elizabeth assumes too quickly what she wants to assume, and fails to consider the possibility that Wickham might be lying.

Ironically, Wickham proves the villain of Pride and Prejudice, resembling, though with sufficient changes to be credible, the Gothic villain. "While Willoughby never does or says anything admirable, Wickham is even more emphatically presented as a hypocrite."[17] Later, when Wickham's mysterious past is disclosed, he shows himself in his worst colours. He has attempted to seduce Georgiana Darcy and has run off with Lydia Bennet. Like other Gothic villains, he has no sense of virtue or of human sympathy. When he and Lydia come to visit the Bennets, he remains totally insensible to Elizabeth's disgust with him. Elizabeth could never have guessed that the charming Mr. Wickham was such a reprobate, but she knows now how wrong she was to listen to him. Wickham allows Darcy to prove himself a true gentleman, since Darcy assumes the responsibility

16 See William E. Alderman, "Shaftesbury and the Doctrine of Moral Sense in the Eighteenth Century," PMLA, XLVI (1931), 1087-1094, for discussion of the relationship between aesthetic and moral taste.

17 Craik, p. 73.

that Mr. Bennet cannot. He provides the money that induces Wickham to marry Lydia.

Fitzwilliam Darcy will never compete with Elizabeth for a place in readers' memory and affection. She finds his social pride disagreeable when she declines his first offer of marriage.

> Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority -- of its being a degradation -- of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. (p. 189)

No one, however, could ever dispute Mr. Darcy's integrity. When Elizabeth learns that she has falsely accused him of being unfair to Wickham, she is deeply humiliated. In the face of what is really 'wise and good' Elizabeth always submits. She is right in not forgiving his social pride, and as a result of her displeasure, Darcy learns how false pride can be. Much of his subsequent reformation is done off-stage, by means of letters and benevolent actions, and when they meet again at Pemberley a marked change has taken place in both of them.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh, as great a caricature

as Mr. Collins, serves a social function in Darcy's change of attitude toward Elizabeth. He comes to realize, and the author supports his discovery, that genuine candour moves beyond social class. Even Elizabeth can appraise her family and their shortcomings in a way that she could not openly have appraised them before. She knows how much happier she will be in her new situation as Mrs. Darcy. By the time Mr. Darcy proposes for a second time, both he and Elizabeth have realized their errors and limitations. They have matured and learned far more than all the other characters in the story and have taught each other to change. It is indeed these two who lead the 'wedding dance' that is Pride and Prejudice. Their marriage, Walton Litz remarks, "is a complete fulfillment of the novel's artistic imperatives. Their lives have been the work's structure, and their marriage is a vindication of the artist's power to resolve complexities."[18] When Darcy finally confesses to Elizabeth that she had taught him a lesson "hard indeed at first, but most advantageous," (p. 369) he says what he has been learning to say from the beginning. He also reveals how the author has distanced both her heroine and hero from herself to make them totally convincing. Both Elizabeth and Darcy have faults but none so great as not to be eventually overcome, and in

[18] See Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development (New York, 1965), p. 103.

the end, they prove that a story of moral growth can indeed be sympathetic and interesting. Darcy tells Elizabeth, "You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased." (p. 369) For if ever there was a woman worthy of being pleased, surely that woman must have been Elizabeth Bennet.

Elizabeth Bennet would probably have had more fault to find with Emma Woodhouse than she did with many of the people she met in Pride and Prejudice. "Emma's personality includes some of the tendencies that Jane Austen most disliked: self-complacency for instance, malicious enjoyment in prying into embarrassing private affairs, snobbery, and a weakness for meddling in other people's lives."[19] Emma represents the author's most daring attempt with the moral-realistic novel, for it requires readers to respond as moralists and critics to a heroine 'inferior in good sense.' Such an attempt indicates that Jane Austen expected to challenge her readers far more subtly than ever before, or again. All her other heroines, despite their shortcomings, gain some part of their significance as central characters on moral grounds. Readers readily respond, May has suggested, to those who are good and kind, but they just as readily dislike the unkind.

[19] Harding, pp. 359-360.

Emma alone, of Jane Austen's heroines, proves to be as often wrong as right. Emma can be so selfish and unkind at times, that she comes dangerously close to being incorrigible. Such objective distance between Jane Austen and her heroine attests to the author's achieved control: "It was only with Emma that she fully developed those narrative techniques that enable her to exercise continuous -- and often adverse -- moral judgments on her heroine without detracting from the force of the heroine's personality."[20]

Jane Austen made sure that even if her readers could not always agree with Emma, they would never forget her. Emma Woodhouse fascinates even more than Elizabeth Bennet entertains, and had Elizabeth analyzed Emma, she could never have reduced her to simplicity. "By placing Emma's fine and interesting mind at the centre of the novel, Jane Austen has assured herself of our sympathy,"[21] writes Litz. Litz proceeds to suggest that Emma is the kind of central character that Henry James would have approved, for James thought the novel should have as its commanding centre a fine consciousness. Jane Austen's method in Emma does anticipate James' formulae, for the novel proceeds with a minimum of externalization, in what Frank O'Connor calls "closed circuit fashion,"[22] registering

[20] Litz, p. 133.

[21] Litz, p. 149

[22] O'Connor, p. 34.

Emma's reactions and impressions. Emma is so much at the centre that readers can almost chart her responses to people and events. Emma is the first lady of Highbury society, and she measures herself and unconsciously allows herself to be measured in terms of her social situation. She enjoys by birth a position of power, one that permits her to do whatever she chooses. Within her world, she "aspires to a god-like role."[23]

Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's widowed, hypochondriacal father, remains for all purposes a little child who must be pampered and cajoled. Emma knows exactly how to handle him and to have things her own way. She has indeed "been mistress of his house from a very early period." (p. 5)[24] But Emma's kindness toward her father, her constant daily attention to his little whims, prove that she can be more than self-sacrificing. Her warm-heartedness has also won the affection of Mrs. Weston, her former governess. As her governess, however, Mrs. Weston had actually influenced Emma very little:

> The mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint; and the shadow of authority being now long passed away, they had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached, and Emma doing just what she liked, highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment but directed chiefly by her own. (p. 5)

[23] Litz, p. 135.

[24] Emma, Vol. IV, The Novels of Jane Austen.

The dangers of Emma's situation on her character are immediately outlined: "The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself." (p. 5)

The novel opens with Emma congratulating herself on planning the match between Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor. She insists to her father and Mr. Knightley, their neighbour from Donwell Abbey, that "it is the greatest amusement in the world." (p. 9) She adds, "I promise you to make none for myself, papa; but I must, indeed, for other people," (p. 12) and so provides an insight into her attitude toward herself. Too complacent with her present good fortune, she turns for her amusement to other people's concerns. Emma thinks she is helping those who are less fortunate, but is actually more interested in advancing her own private schemes. Her first undertaking, to elevate Harriet Smith, "the natural daughter of somebody," (p. 22) would, she thinks, be "an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers." (p. 24) Only Mr. Knightley disapproves of Emma's interest in Harriet. He is convinced that Harriet's ignorance is "hourly flattery" to Emma, (p. 38) and tells Mrs. Weston, "I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would

do her good." (p. 41) He predicts exactly what will happen without knowing that he will be the gentleman.

Even though Emma is Jane Austen's most 'central' character, she does not monopolize the story. Mr. Knightley becomes almost as important as she. Initially unaware that he wants to marry Emma, he clearly speaks "not only for the author but for Emma's heart, for the natural charity which is the source of her charm."[25] Whenever Emma thinks seriously, she considers Mr. Knightley's opinion, and whenever she acts, Mr. Knightley comments on her action. Only his disapproval can upset her. When he learns, for example, that she has dissuaded Harriet from marrying Robert Martin, his reprimand vexes her: "She did not always feel so absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her adversary's wrong, as Mr. Knightley." (p. 67) Mr. Knightley's censure grows more severe as Emma's involvements become more perverse. The relationship between heroine and hero provides a contrapuntal movement to Emma, creating a "constant process of emotional miscalculations and rational corrections."[26] The author invests only Mr. Knightley with influence over Emma, but his power grows very gradually. Emma stubbornly refuses to say he is right, but comes to realize and to admit how right he is.

[25] Litz, p. 141.

[26] Litz, p. 134.

The heroine of Emma only begins to involve herself personally in the story when Frank Churchill arrives in Highbury. Churchill is Mr. Weston's son by his first marriage, but he has never visited his father before. When his visit is announced, Emma admits the possibility of his being a suitor. "She had frequently thought -- especially since his father's marriage with Miss Taylor -- that if she were to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition." (p. 119) Mr. Knightley is less pleased by the prospect of the visit, and criticizes Churchill before he meets him. He does not know he is jealous, but guesses fairly clearly the kind of young man Churchill will prove to be. At the same time he sets himself up against him: "He may be very 'amiable', have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him." (p. 149) Frank Churchill does prove to act mysteriously. His engagement to Jane Fairfax, though hinted at and suspected by Knightley, remains a secret until the end of the story. Frank Bradbrook offers a brilliant suggestion concerning the author's model for the villain (who is hardly a villain), of Emma.

> Frank Churchill himself embodies the classical ideal of 'suaviter in modo, fortiter in re' (gentle in manner, resolute in deed) recommended by Lord Chesterfield in his Letters to His Son, the standard eighteenth

century conduct book for young gentlemen, together with the French equivalent of douceur and the cultivation of the 'aimable' that Lord Chesterfield also inculcated.[27]

Bradbrook thinks that the realism of Chesterfield, his cynicism and disenchanted worldy wisdom must have appealed to Jane Austen. Yet there was a fundamental disagreement between them about moral principles.[28] In opposing Mr. Knightley's oppnness to Churchill's duplicity, the author supports all that the ideal English gentleman represents.

Emma shares some of Churchill's tendencies--to be often "more merry than wise"--but his game with her becomes morally reprehensible. He has already committed himself to Jane Fairfax, but he pays very little attention to her while he is in Highbury. Frank Churchill entertains Emma at Jane's expense, and also continues to annoy Mr. Knightley. "Without some feeling, Mr. Knightley would approach even closer the monitor-lover level of rational perfection than he does. But his jealousy of Churchill, his half-concealed fits of admiration for Emma, and finally his real need for Emma emphasize the incompleteness of rationality."[29]

[27] Bradbrook, p. 29.

[28] Bradbrook, p. 30.

[29] Edmund M. White, "Emma and the Parodic Point of View," Nineteenth Century Fiction, VIII, No.2 (1963), 55-63, p. 62.

Emma begins to make comparisons and judgments for herself. She tells Mrs. Weston, for example, that Mr. Knightley does nothing mysteriously, obviously comparing him to Churchill. Although she miscalculates once again in thinking that Churchill is in love with her, Emma decides for herself that she does not love him. In rejecting him, she rejects some of the tendencies they have in common, such as thinking more about themselves than others. Emma shows that she is beginning to see life as more than a game; rather, as an involvement that demands total response. She must, though, suffer her greatest humiliation before she finally recognizes how greatly she esteems Mr. Knightley and cherishes his approval. His remonstrance to her for her unkindness to Miss Bates at Box Hill deeply mortifies her. She can no longer deny that he is right. In her moment of perception, Emma is even more displeased with herself because she has incurred Mr. Knightley's ill-opinion. Finally, Emma understands that certain responses to others have to be made if one is to be happy. Her self-confession redeems her and speeds the action to its conclusion.

When Emma learns that Mr. Knightley wants to marry her, her story has come full circle. Mr. Knightley, always present, always caring, has been the reason for her growth, and is to become the source of her future happiness. One

cannot be sure that Emma will always remember her limitations, but should she err again, she could find no better husband to correct her and set her on the right path.

> Within Emma Woodhouse we discern the forces that will produce Emma Bovary, and all those other nineteenth-century heroines whose illusions can only end in tragedy. Jane Austen carefully limits the tragic potential of her heroine, imposing 'classic' restraint upon the 'romantic' imagination, but she does not obscure the dangers of Emma's illusions.[30]

What the author has done with Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse has been to allow them to discover for themselves that self-fulfillment demands self-restraint.

[30] Litz, p. 135.

CHAPTER IV

MANSFIELD PARK and PERSUASION: THE PLACID HEROINES

Mansfield Park and Persuasion are clearly the work of the author's maturity.[1] Mansfield Park, although written when the author was revising Pride and Prejudice, seems designed as a counterbalance to it. On February 4, 1813, Jane wrote to Cassandra concerning Pride and Prejudice:

> The work is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte, or anything that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style.[2]

Mansfield Park expresses criticism of the lightness of Pride and Prejudice. Persuasion, the author's last completed work, tells the often melancholy story of a lonely heroine who is no longer young. In Mansfield Park and Persuasion, the author does not seek to entertain as she had so brilliantly entertained in Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, and Emma. Mansfield Park, in fact, negates "entertainment" in favour of steadfast virtue and character. Persuasion, where there is little gaiety,

[1] Walton Litz suggests that the attitudes and tone of Mansfield Park reflect the problems of Jane Austen's middle life. See p. 114.

[2] Letters, pp. 299-300.

suggests that even those who deserve happiness must suffer and wait for it. These two novels indicate that life for the author has become too complex to be gaily resolved in art; that in the end, the claims of art fail to be the more important.

The heroines of Mansfield Park and Persuasion differ from Jane Austen's other heroines who must undergo a process of awakening in the course of the novel. Catherine, Marianne, Elizabeth and Emma must learn to reconcile what they want to do with what they must do; essentially, to accept their situation and adopt a candid attitude toward its demands. These are the author's active heroines, always delighting the reader because their errors, which never become real evils, inevitably provide entertainment. Their stories satisfy all claims of wish-fulfillment because the endings happily comply with their improvement, rewarding them with marriage to the men they respect and love. In these novels, justice operates according to merit, just as every person instinctively feels it should but knows that in life it often does not operate so. This balance between justice and merit, one has to admit, is the divine grace that is art.

Henry James was to object to what he called the complacency of Jane Austen's conclusions, insisting that life, to be truly represented, could not proceed in such regulated fashion. Emma, perhaps the best of the six

novels, comes closest to representing life in an artistic pattern because the heroine's self-awakening is so convincing. In Mansfield Park and Persuasion, the author amplifies the difficulties that life can force on individuals, refusing to grant them the justice they deserve. Lionel Trilling, who has written perhaps the best commentary on Mansfield Park, suggests that the novel "at times violates its own beauty by introducing some of the prosy actuality of the world."[3] Persuasion includes the author's most severe observations on family and social relationships. Unpleasant characters are no longer laughed away or reduced to harmless wooden figures. Their actions and the influence they exert become central to the story, because they force the heroines still further into a Cinderella-like situation.

Fanny Price and Anne Elliot are Jane Austen's most perfect and most solitary heroines. The author uses her familiar outline, presenting them as norms for sympathy and moral response. Since, however, they have no faults to lose, the subject of the novels can no longer be the reform of a single heroine. Fanny Price, though very young, "is firm in the Christian virtues, uncorrupted by selfishness, a stranger to ambition--naive by accident, proper by intuition."[4]

[3] Trilling, p. 213.

[4] Mudrick, p. 156.

Anne Elliot begins where Catherine and Emma and Elizabeth end, for she has spent seven years regretting an error of judgment. She had, seven years before, allowed herself to be persuaded against marrying the man she loved.[5] The two heroines remain largely static throughout Mansfield Park and Persuasion, for neither their character nor their thinking changes. Consequently, the novels must develop a change in their situation.[6] Dominated by circumstances, neither Fanny nor Anne can control her situation. Fanny comes to stay with her cousins at Mansfield Park only to be treated as a social inferior. Anne is not so much preyed upon by her family as she is ignored. Both Fanny and Anne are, in addition, reserved and passive. "Fanny," W.A. Craik suggests, "is passive by inclination and personality as well as by her status; even though she acts decisively it is only to resist, to repel other's actions, not to initiate her own."[7] Anne, though perhaps less passive by nature, is caught in a situation that seems hopeless. She has learned that her resistance must be

[5] Since Anne has had to suffer to reach maturity, she is more convincing and more sympathetic than Fanny, whose virtue, Mudrick suggests, can only be explained as intuitive.

[6] See R.S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones," Critics and Criticism: Essays in Method (Chicago, 1957).

[7] Craik, p. 97.

silent. Neither girl, then, has a purpose that will dominate her life. Each is a placid character who has only a faint hope for happiness.[8] Fanny's fate depends on whether Edmund Bertram will turn his affections from another woman and Anne must wait for Frederick Wentworth to realize that he still loves her. These heroines must, in a word, be vindicated. Such vindication, a new kind of justice for Jane Austen, is slower in coming, and must take its toll on the heroines and on the readers who are in sympathy with them.

Mansfield Park is frequently compared to Pride and Prejudice. Trilling draws the clearest distinction between the tone of the two novels:

> One of the striking things about Pride and Prejudice is that it achieves a quality of transcendence through comedy. The comic mode typically insists upon the fact of human limitation, even of human littleness, but Pride and Prejudice makes comedy reverse itself and yield the implication of a divine enlargement. The novel celebrates the traits of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, and associates them with happiness and virtue. Its social doctrine is a generous one, asserting the right of at least one good individual to define himself according to his own essence. It is animated by an impulse to forgiveness.
>
> Almost the opposite can be said of Mansfield Park. Its impulse is not to forgive but to condemn. Its praise is not for social freedom but for social stasis. It takes full notice of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, but only to reject them as having nothing to do with virtue and happiness, as being, indeed, deterrents to the good life.[9]

[8] See Harold Weston, Form in Literature: A Theory of Technique and Construction (London, 1934), for a discussion of negative form.

[9] Trilling, p. 211.

Fanny Price does initially seem to represent the antithesis of Elizabeth Bennet. In Mansfield Park, she is set in contrast to Mary Crawford, a lively young woman from London who has many of Elizabeth's qualities.[10] Mary's vitality and sophistication make her far more charming and more interesting than Fanny. Indeed, next to Mary who always attracts attention, Fanny seems to be one of those virtuous characters for whom modern readers tend to have little sympathy. Nevertheless, Trilling insists that "this strange, this almost perverse rejection of Mary Crawford's vitality in favor of Fanny's debility lies at the very heart of the novel's intention."[11] The problem of sympathy in Mansfield Park resembles that in Sense and Sensibility, where Marianne's sensibility must be condemned if Elinor's sense is to be respected. But Mansfield Park demands that readers choose between a virtuous young woman, and a woman who has little respect for virtue. The author clearly endorses Fanny's judgments,

[10] Mary Crawford has the ironic point of view so characteristic of Elizabeth Bennet and of Jane Austen herself. There are certain fundamental differences, however, that must be recognized, and Mudrick seems to force the issue when he compares some of Mary's statements to isolated examples from Jane Austen's Letters. See pp. 169-170.

[11] Trilling, p. 213.

self-righteous though they seem, and makes them the unifying power of the novel. She provides at the same time moral evidence against Mary Crawford. Mary is not simply Marianne Dashwood who falls unwisely in love. Nor is she Elizabeth Bennet, who always recognizes and submits to what she knows to be irrevocably true. Scoffing at authority and delighting in games and half-truths, Mary Crawford comes close to resembling Frank Churchill in Emma. She is, however, more cynical than Churchill, and therefore more reprehensible. She shows, for example, only disdain when she learns that Edmund Bertram is to be a clergyman.[12]

'Indolence and love of ease--a want of all laudable ambition, of taste for good company, or of inclination to take the trouble of being agreeable, make men clergymen. A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish--read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine.'(p. 110)[13]

She accepts her brother Henry's flirtations with little moral concern, because, she tells Fanny, "very few ladies have any affections worth caring for." (p. 363)

The author seems to have intended the Crawfords to be as witty and charming as readers have found them. Edmund and Fanny are convincingly attracted to them and to their

[12] Walton Litz suggests that there "is some evidence that Jane Austen had overcome her early objections to Evangelical religion and was even attracted by it." See p. 114 and also Notes, p. 191.

[13] Mansfield Park, Vol. III, The Novels of Jane Austen.

London sophistication. Nor do the Crawfords lack good qualities. Henry deserves Fanny's gratitude for finding a place for her brother William. And even though his initial interest in Fanny is only a scheme, he does genuinely fall in love with her. There is, in fact, less doubt of Henry's affection for Fanny than there is of Edmund's at the end of the story. In Mansfield Park, however, Fanny is always the pivot of the action. She has watched disapprovingly Henry's flirtations with Maria and Julia Bertram, and she rejects his first proposal of marriage on rigid moral grounds. Craik remarks, moreover, that

> there are no artistic grounds--of construction or treatment--for thinking [Henry] may marry Fanny; Jane Austen has made it impossible. Having done so she can allow him considerable psychological accuracy, and can even risk the probability--new to her work--that in reality, such a woman as Fanny might marry such a man as him.[14]

Perhaps the greatest polarization between judgment and character, represented by Fanny and Edmund, and imagination and charm, represented by Mary and Henry, becomes evident with the introduction of Mr. Yates and his play, Lovers' Vows.[15] When the young people decide to perform Kotzebue's play, only Edmund and Fanny object.

[14] Craik, p. 109.

[15] See Lovers' Vows--A Play, in Five Acts, 5th ed. (London, 1798); reprinted in Vol. III of The Novels of Jane Austen, pp. 476-538.

Mary and Henry are delighted. Superficially, Fanny and Edmund seem to object simply because Sir Thomas Bertram would not approve. It is not surprising, then, that the hero and heroine of Mansfield Park have been considered spokesmen for orthodox genteel morality. Walton Litz, however, suggests that the issue of the play is more intricate than as first appears.

> On a more general level, Lovers' Vows poses the basic moral problems of the novel. In Kotzebue's play the sympathetic imagination runs riot, resulting in a drama of sentimental pathos. Moral judgment and "poetic justice" have been washed away in a flood of uncontrolled feeling. No general standard of conduct rules the work, good intentions are equal to good actions, and--to use Coleridge's words--the play appeals 'by a pathos not a whit more respectable than the maudlin tears of drunkenness.' With its emphasis on feeling and disregard for traditional restraints, with its contempt for social form, Lovers' Vows stands as an emblem of those forces which threaten the neoclassical security of Mansfield Park.[16]

Trilling sees the incident of the play as central to the cultural significance of Mansfield Park. He reasons that objections to the amateur theatrical may be attributed to "the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator, that, indeed, the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the real self."[17] Trilling refers to the observations of the American philosopher George Mead--that the "assumption of roles" was one of the most

[16] Litz, pp. 124-125.

[17] Trilling, p. 218.

important elements of Romanticism; it was in addition, "the self's method of defining itself."[18] Trilling recognizes the objections of modern readers to Jane Austen's attacks on impersonation as "dangerous to the integrity of the self as a moral agent," but suggests that Keats and Wordsworth stand in her support. He summarizes his interpretation of Miss Austen's point of view:

> And of course not only the poet but the reader may be said to be involved in the problems of identity and of (in the literal sense) integrity. Literature offers the experience of the diversification of the self, and Jane Austen puts the question of literature at the moral center of her novel.[19]

Miss Austen, in dramatizing the distinction between genuine feeling and impersonation of feeling, upholds Fanny and Edmund. She also makes use of this moral crisis to elucidate Mary's and Henry's amorality, specifically, their insincerity. The outcome of the story can only be that Fanny and Edmund will marry.

Fanny and Edmund are the author's least romantic lovers, and the happy ending of Mansfield Park can at best be called muted. Fanny has convincingly loved and respected Edmund from the beginning, but has had little hope of his returning her love. The author devotes only

[18] Trilling, pp. 218-219.

[19] Trilling, p. 219.

one chapter to Edmund's awakening to Mary Crawford's hypocrisy. This last interview between Edmund and Mary in London is so exaggerated that Mudrick comments cryptically: "Mary has suddenly become Satan: poor noble, overheated Edmund smells the brimstone, and beats an ecclesiastical retreat."[20] There can be no doubt that Edmund and Fanny deserve each other on ethical grounds, representing as they do, the novel's moral argument that "Wisdom is better than Wit."[21] But there is so little evidence of his interest in Fanny that readers must take Fanny's (and the author's) word for it. The novel's concern has not, however, been romantic, and Miss Austen's tone does not alter:

> I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that everyone may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary as to time in different people.--I can only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (p. 470)

Fanny, demanding so little for herself, has been rewarded. Small consolation, perhaps, with no exuberance, but Jane Austen must have come to know how uncompromising and sometimes how dull virtue could be.

20 Mudrick, p. 165.

21 Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra, 18 November 1814 . . . "Wisdom is better than Wit, and in the long run will certainly have the laugh on her side." See Litz, Notes, p. 191.

Persuasion is Jane Austen's only real love story. Although it recalls the author's tendency to oppose two schemes of values, specifically, those of prudence and love, the emphasis of the story falls on the possibility of a reconciliation between Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth. The author ensures for her heroine the sympathy and interest that Fanny Price failed to attract in Mansfield Park. "Jane Austen," Craik comments, "agrees with her heroine much more than she has ever done before."[22] She adds that Anne "is just as right as her author. When Anne forms opinions, she has no prejudices to mislead her like Emma and Elizabeth, and so she sees quite clearly even the things that concern her closely."[23] She emerges as the central character by the end of the third chapter, when the author shifts from the position of the omniscient narrator to present Anne's point of view. By now, the Elliot family has been so clearly presented that its members are familiar figures. There can be little question in the reader's mind about them and their effect on one another.

Anne's unfortunate situation is that of being the daughter of a vain, silly man, Sir Walter Elliot of

[22] Craik, p. 167.

[23] Craik, p. 167.

Kellynch Hall, and sister to Elizabeth Elliot, a replica of her father. Anne, the second daughter, has "an elegance of mind and sweetness of character which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding," but is "nobody with either father or sister." (p. 5)[24] Her father is a positive, if unthinking man, and he dictates the activities of Kellynch Hall. Anne's position as heroine of the story, then, recalls Harold Weston's discussion of a "negative character" as one "who is not only dominated by circumstances, but fate driven, with no definite intention."[25] The author devotes considerable time to Anne's state of mind, for she tends to react rather than act, and her thoughts constitute an essential part of the story. Readers can sympathize with her suffering and hopelessness.

Anne seems to awaken only when the name of Captain Wentworth is mentioned. His name has called forth no reaction from the others, but Anne "left the room, to seek the comfort of cool air for her flushed cheeks; and as she walked along a favourite grove, said, with a gentle sigh, 'a few months more, and, he, perhaps may be walking here.' " Whenever she thinks about Wentworth, Anne shows

[24] Persuasion, Vol. VI, The Novels of Jane Austen.

[25] Weston, p. 251.

signs of having changed since she decided against marrying him. She realizes now that she "should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it." (p. 29) If she was weak enough to be persuaded then, she is no longer weak.

Although there can be no doubt that the author's sympathies rest with Anne, the action of Persuasion centres on Wentworth. When he returns to Kellynch, which his brother-in-law and sister have rented from Sir Walter, Anne's reaction is to spare him all the embarrassment she can. Her feeling for him has always been generous; she had thought she was consulting his own good even more than her own in yielding to her father's wishes. Her consolation in suffering had been that she had acted wisely for his advantage. His reaction to her dilemma, proud and abrupt, suggests that he had been immature. Frederick announces to his sister that he is quite ready to make a foolish match "with anybody between fifteen and thirty," and adds to himself, "excepting Anne Elliot." (p. 61) His attitude toward Anne has not changed; he still cannot forgive her or comprehend her reasons for having declined him, and he tries to dismiss her from his mind. He qualifies his impulsive urge to ignore Anne when he admits to himself that she was "not

out of his thoughts when he more than seriously described the woman he wished to marry." (p. 62) From the beginning of the story, the author hints at the possibility of a reconciliation between them. Frederick has a deeper side, an underlying perceptiveness that does not always find its way to the surface. His brief memories of Anne, though indirect and indeliberate, create expectations that he will perhaps change, and admit, as she has admitted, that he has made a mistake.

Craik suggests, "it is as though Jane Austen's usual hero and heroine had changed places: Anne, like Mr. Knightley is steady and unobtrusively right, while Wentworth, like Emma, is wrong, and just as Emma nearly ruins her chances of marriage to the right person, so does he."[26] Frederick will not, however, dominate the story, for the interest centres on Anne. Anne's hope, even though at first she only shows kindness to Frederick, is the thread which strings the incidents together. Anne's generosity is tangled up with another emotion which helps intensify the action. She still thinks Frederick's opinion of her important, and finds herself nervous in his company. By this time, she ought to be hardened to him, unless of course, she still cares for him.

In the first half of the novel, there is little

[26] Craik, p. 184.

inter-action between the two main characters. Frederick carries forth his intention to find a wife, and begins to pursue the two Musgrove girls. Anne, observing and judging, knows that he will not marry either of them because he is so much their superior. When she overhears him asking Louisa about her, there was "just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner, which must give her extreme agitation." (p. 119) Despite the hints that an alteration in Frederick's feelings would not be unexpected, the author insists on keeping them apart and seems to have slowed the action, or at least subordinated its importance, as a theme, to the development of Anne's maturity. In devoting this time to her heroine, Jane Austen makes Anne's feelings so central that the significance of her heroine will more surely achieve its object. The author seems to make Anne's emotional needs so insistent that the reader can only respond with sympathy and affection.[27]

[27] The author makes use of place in Persuasion to provide atmosphere. Often this emotional atmosphere surrounding Anne amplifies the story. "Persuasion," writes Mary Lascelles, "is rich in the chiaroscuro of these contrasts; the atmosphere of Kellynch, then that of Uppercross, and then the elegant air of Bath." Miss Lascelles thinks that Jane Austen's use of place is "screwed deep into the story," which, she suggests, "is not only the reconciliation of Anne and Wentworth, but also the bursting open, for Anne of the prison that Sir Walter and Elizabeth have made of Kellynch . . . the expansion of her world." See p. 181.

Frederick Wentworth begins to recognize and appreciate Anne when they visit Lyme with the Musgroves. He sees another gentleman regarding her with admiration and notices how well she is looking. Only when Louisa Musgrove falls at the Cobb, however, does he truly realize that Anne is the most competent member of the group, capable of handling the situation calmly and intelligently. He depends totally on her advice. The incident at Lyme marks the beginning of his re-awakening to her. Soon, however, Anne must leave for Bath, and with the disappearance of Wentworth from her circle, her hope disappears. She leaves thinking he will marry Louisa. Returning to her family, she is more dissatisfied with their complacency than she had ever been before. She is especially surprised at their complete disregard for the past. When she arrives, she learns that they have completely forgotten about Kellynch: "it was all Bath." (p. 137) Anne is no longer psychologically dominated by her family--perhaps because she has just come from people who are more perceptive of her value. Anne's attitudes and character may not change in Persuasion, but she puts her views to the test of experience, and is more firmly convinced of them. By her reflections, which

become a pattern of repetitions and variations, Anne becomes Jane Austen's deepest heroine.

At Camden Place, Anne is presented with an ostensible suitor in Mr. William Elliot, heir to Sir Walter's estate. Anne can appreciate him as a welcome addition to the company, for he "improved their conversation very much." (p. 143) She does, however, have misgivings about his past. Twelve years before, he had disgraced the Elliots by playing false to Elizabeth just as they were thinking he might propose to her. Anne does not blame him for having left Elizabeth, because she knows the person her sister is, but she does wonder about his motives for leaving her to marry a rich woman and for returning to her now only seven months after his wife's death. But Anne fails to be interested in him for a more significant reason: "Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,--but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection." (p. 161) Anne's feelings are clearly adverse to any man save one, and Mr. Elliot is actually superfluous to the story.[28] When Anne learns that

[28] Because Elliot is introduced so late in the story, he can only be what Austin Wright calls "a red herring." See p. 169.

Louisa Musgrove has married Captain Benwick, she feels the stirring in her heart that was "too much like joy, senseless joy!" (p. 172) Frederick is now free; all that remains is for him to propose to Anne.

Jane Austen dismisses Elliot by providing new evidence that he is a reprobate and a villain. Such a sudden dismissal, though unnecessary, seems to indicate that the author lacked confidence in the expectations she had developed between Anne and Wentworth.[29] She had never made a relationship more convincing. The author develops fully, as she had rarely done before, the final part of the reconciliation between her lovers. Frederick is still less mature than Anne, but he has realized how stubborn he had been:

> 'I could not derive benefit from the late knowledge I had acquired of your character. I could not bring it into play; it was overwhelmed, buried, lost in those earlier feelings which I had been smarting under year after year. I could think of you only as one who had yielded, who had given me up, who had been influenced by anyone rather than me.' (p. 245)

[29] Certain allowances must be made for Jane Austen's health at the time of writing Persuasion. "It is difficult to believe," Craik writes, "that in her days of health and mature judgment she would have thought these two volumes, with their imperfect plot, sketchy characters, lightly drawn scenes and their dependence on the author's narrative, could constitute a finished work." See p. 166. It seems important, nevertheless, to add that many of the novel's imperfections are minor, concerning only secondary characters.

For her own part, "At last Anne was at home again." (p. 245) She has come slowly, steadily, without causing excitement to anyone but herself, back to the man whom she has always loved. "Persuasion reveals that Jane Austen was moving towards a more introspective kind of writing, toward a study of the individual and of his moral growth within himself, rather than within his society."[30] Readers can put the book down, satisfied more thoroughly than ever before, that these two lovers bring well-earned maturity to their marriage.

[30] Craik, p. 200.

CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Bennet must have been speaking for her creator when she said in Pride and Prejudice: "I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and whims divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can." Jane Austen filled her novels with wisdom and whimsy. Like Elizabeth Bennet, she could always detect and laugh at what she considered ridiculous. But her favourite heroine only hoped to recognize what was wise and good. Jane Austen always knew. For her, clarity of mind was the beginning of seriousness.

Jane Austen also realized what could be expected of the people she drew in her novels. She knew that fools would never change and she wisely refrained from trying to reform them. Mr. Collins, issuing homilies to his cousins, Mr. Woodhouse, advising everyone to stay indoors, Sir Walter Elliot, perusing the Baronetage for his own name--they all end as they began. Their eyes are never opened. As Jane Austen grew older, she suffered fools less gladly, and her laughter became more astringent. Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Musgrove are forever fixed, defined, and dismissed. The author knew that there would always be

fools to make life irritating. They had to be tolerated, but not taken very seriously. Jane Austen expected much more, though, of persons who were able to face the facts of living intelligently. She did not allow them to retreat into illusion and vanity. She always asked those who could understand what was serious to recognize and respond to what was wise and good.

Jane Austen directed her greatest attention to young women, young enough to be attractive and charming, but old enough to understand their responsibilities. She gave them responsibilities, too, and insisted that they deal with them maturely. All the heroines have to rely on their own judgment in making their choices and solving their problems. The novels tell the story of how they cope with their situations. In this way, Jane Austen's young women illustrate that, with a certain amount of maturity, people can act intelligently and kindly. The more often they act in this way, the more mature they become. They can expect, in Jane Austen's world, the best kind of happiness.

The author knew that marriage was probably the most important decision a young woman ever made. She was willing to allow that marriages might be made in heaven, but, preferring sound judgment to sentiment, she

insisted that they must be lived on earth. The choice of a husband, then, demanded serious consideration.

In the six novels, the prospect of marriage presents an essential test of the heroines' moral value. Some of the young women come to realize that they can only fulfill themselves by marrying a certain man. Their realization is sometimes difficult and painful. Marianne Dashwood is asked to finally admit that, in choosing a husband, good sense is a better guide than powerful feeling. Elizabeth Bennet has to overcome her stubbornness and see that she has misjudged Mr. Darcy. Emma Woodhouse finally understands that marriage is not a game, and that life requires very serious thinking and complete honesty. Sometimes, choices in marriage are beyond the heroines' control. In these cases, marriage is a proof, rather than a test, of maturity. Anne Elliot and Fanny Price cannot settle for a convenient match; they must have enough self-respect to expect what is best for them. In the end, all the heroines understand that kindness and goodness are the best foundations for happiness.

What Jane Austen expected of her intelligent characters, she expected of her readers. As critic and novelist, she knew that a story had to be convincing

in order to attract her readers to share her point of view. In developing the pattern of her stories on fundamental moral choices, she knew that her readers would respond as moral judges, and not simply assume that her heroines should come automatically to a happy end. At her best, she brings her heroines convincingly through their choices and decisions. She makes their actions central to her stories by allowing them to be credible norms for sympathy and moral response. If her heroines are not yet perfect, all of them can still learn to change. As they develop and grow, she exposes them to the readers' moral judgments. Neither artist nor moralist has to give way. Her heroines do not ask much for themselves, so that they can reach happiness by doing what is demanded of them. At the same time, Jane Austen expected her readers to agree with her. In sympathizing with her heroines, they, too, recognize and respond to what is wise and good. Jane Austen persuades them to share her view that goodness and sincerity should be rewarded.

Notwithstanding Jane Austen's popularity, it is not surprising that some readers have considered her world too narrow to be significant. They argue that

life is far too complicated to spend reading about balls and picnics. Their objections to Jane Austen's scope may be legitimate. But her insights into three or four families in a country village were not narrow. She knew that people would always dream of romance and excitement, but they always had to contend with every day problems. In her six novels, she suggested that the world might be a better place if people only acted rationally.

A P P E N D I X

Chronology of Composition and Publication

I. STEVENTON, 1775 - 1801

c. 1788-93	Juvenilia
1794 or 1795	Lady Susan (without the Conclusion)
c. 1795	Elinor and Marianne, the earliest version of Sense and Sensibility, cast in epistolary form
October 1796-August 1797	Composition of First Impressions, original of Pride and Prejudice
November 1797	Sense and Sensibility begun "in its present form"
1798-99	Drafting of Northanger Abbey (then called Susan, later Catherine)

II. BATH AND SOUTHAMPTON, 1801-09

1803	Susan prepared and offered for publication
1803-04	The Watsons (unfinished)
c. 1805	Fair copy of Lady Susan (and possibly composition of the Conclusion)

III. CHAWTON, 1809-17

1809	Reawakening of interest: inquiries to the publisher concerning Susan, later Northanger Abbey (which had been sold to Crosby and Co. in 1803 but never published); scattered revisions in the Juvenilia; possibly a retouching of Susan.
1809-11	Sense and Sensibility revised and prepared for publication
November 1811	Publication of Sense and Sensibility
c. 1812	Radical revision of Pride and Prejudice, based on the almanacs of 1811-12
February 1811-Summer 1813	Composition of Mansfield Park
January 1813	Publication of Pride and Prejudice
May 1814	Publication of Mansfield Park
January 1814-March 1815	Composition of Emma
c. 1815	Plan of a Novel
December 1815	Publication of Emma
August 1815-August 1816	Drafting of Persuasion
1816	Advertisement to Catherine (later Northanger Abbey)
January-March 1817	Work on the fragment Sanditon
December 1817	Posthumous publication of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion

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