Jane Austen Study Guide

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Article abstract: Austen's realistic rendering of dialogue and her satirical accuracy make her novels a matchless re-creation of upper-class English society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Her novels owe their lasting popularity, however, to Austen's understanding of human nature as it operates in everyday life.

Early Life

Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775, in Steventon, Hampshire, England, the seventh child and second daughter of George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen. Her father was the reactor of Steventon and nearby Deane. A member of an old but poor family, he had been reared by a wealthy uncle, who educated him at St. John's College, Oxford, where he was later a fellow. Austen's mother was the daughter of a clergyman of noble ancestry, also an Oxford graduate and also a former fellow.

Although Jane and her older sister, Cassandra Austen, spent several years in schools in Southampton and Reading, their real education took place at home. The Austens loved words and books. The children could roam at will through George Austen's impressive library. As they grew older, they staged amateur theatricals. The environment stimulated their curiosity, whether they were observing their mother's experiments in farming or hearing their aristocratic French cousin talk about life in prerevolutionary France. With an ever-increasing family and a wide circle of friends, the Austen children had ample opportunity to analyze human motivations and relationships; it is not surprising that two of Jane's brothers and her sister Cassandra all did some writing at one time or another.

The Austens also shared in remarkable good looks; Jane and Cassandra were sometimes called the best-looking girls in England. However flattering such comments may have been, it is true that Jane was a tall, slender brunette with brown, curly hair, hazel eyes, a good complexion, and a sweet voice. Although neither Jane nor Cassandra was ever married, it was not for lack of prospects. Indeed, both were engaged, Cassandra for some time, to a young clergyman who died in the West Indies, and Jane only overnight, to a family friend whom she rejected in the morning. There was evidently at least one other serious relationship for Jane, a holiday romance which was not pursued and which terminated when that young man, too, died.

Because Jane never left the family circle, her life has often been called uneventful. In fact, it was so busy that Jane had to snatch time to write. In addition to the normal social activities of her class, there were frequent visits to and from the brothers and their families, including lengthy stays by their children, several of whom were very close to their Aunt Jane. There were births, deaths, marriages, and remarriages; there was anxiety about Jane's cousin, whose husband was executed in the French Revolution, and about two brothers, who were British naval officers. Thus, Jane was immersed in life, grieving and rejoicing with family members and friends, mothering nieces and nephews, worrying about the effect of her unstable times on those she loved. As one may note from her letters, she was also a perceptive observer of human behavior, unimpressed by pomposity, unfooled by pretense, and always alert to the comic dimension of human relationships.

It was this comic sense which first led Austen to writing. Her three notebooks collect jokes, skits, and rudimentary character sketches dating from the time she was eleven or twelve, along with a later comic history of England and a brief, unfinished novel named "Catherine." By 1795, when she was twenty, Austen had produced "Elinor and Marianne" (which was later revised and published in 1811 as *Sense and Sensibility*). By 1797, she had completed "First Impressions," which the publisher Cadell refused even to read

but which, revised, became her most famous novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Although none of her novels was to be published until 1811 (six years before her death, when *Sense and Sensibility* made its public appearance), Austen was thus involved in her mature work before her twenty-first birthday. No longer a superficially amusing girl, she had become a serious woman of letters.

Life's Work

Austen's literary reputation rests on six novels, four of which were published during the last years of her life and two posthumously. Because she revised and retitled her early works before she was able to find a publisher for them, it is difficult to trace her development. Evidently, after a work was rejected, she would put it aside, begin another work, and then later revise the earlier one. Her most famous work, *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, was the product of twelve or fourteen years; *Sense and Sensibility* took at least sixteen years and two revisions between conception and publication.

Austen's creative maturity can be divided into two major periods. During the first, she wrote three novels and vainly attempted to get them published. During the second, she revised, completed, and published two of her early novels and wrote three more, two of which were published before her death. It was only during the last half dozen years of her life, then, that she received the recognition which her genius merited.

During her years at Steventon, Austen wrote the first version of what was to be her first published work. "Elinor and Marianne" was the story of two sisters whose lives were governed by two different principles. In every crisis, one tried to be sensible, while the other gave way to uncontrolled emotion. The theme was reflected in Austen's revision a year or two later, when she changed the title to *Sense and Sensibility*. It was under the second title that the novel, again revised, was finally published in 1811.

During 1797, Austen completed "First Impressions," which pointed out how foolish rash assessments of other people may be. Like *Sense and Sensibility*, this work told the love stories of two sisters; in this case, however, the prejudiced sister, with all of her faults, captures the reader, who can hardly wait for her to capture the proud nobleman. Tentatively, Austen's father offered the manuscript to a publisher, but the publisher refused even to read it. Austen put it away. In 1809, she revised it, and in 1813, it was published as *Pride and Prejudice*, which is still one of England's best-known and best-loved novels.

The third novel of the Steventon period, *Northanger Abbey* (1818; originally titled "Susan"), began as a satire of the gothic and sentimental novels which were so popular in the late eighteenth century. Like a gothic heroine, the central character is determined to find a murderer in the country house which she visits; her curiosity is interpreted as bad manners, however, and she very nearly loses the eligible man who had invited her. Yet Austen's genius could not be confined in a mere literary satire, and like her other works, *Northanger Abbey* is a full-fledged commentary on morals and manners.

Northanger Abbey is also interesting because it was the first novel actually sold for publication. The publisher who bought it in 1803, however, evidently changed his plans, and six years later Austen paid him for its return. It was published the year after her death.

In 1801, George Austen suddenly decided to retire and to move his household to Bath, where he and his family lived until his death in 1805. Despite her reluctance to leave Steventon, Austen was fascinated with the famous watering place, which was the setting both for *Northanger Abbey* and for *Persuasion* (1818). Whether her inability to publish discouraged her or she continued to work on her earlier manuscripts is a matter of conjecture; at any rate, *The Watsons*, begun in 1804, was never completed (although its fragment was published in 1871 in J. E. Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*). In 1809, Jane, Cassandra, and their mother moved back to Hampshire, to a house in the village of Chawton, which had been made available to them by Jane's brother Edward Knight. There Jane spent the remaining years of her life, years which at last brought

her success. In 1809, Jane revised *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Probably with the encouragement and help of her brother Henry Austen, who lived in London, in 1811 she found a publisher for *Sense and Sensibility*. Like all of her novels printed during her lifetime, it was anonymous. It was also highly successful. In 1813, it was followed by *Pride and Prejudice*.

Henry was too proud of his sister to keep her secret any longer, and in 1813 Jane had to acknowledge that she was known to be the author. By this point in time she had written another novel, *Mansfield Park* (1814), a serious work which deals with religious and ethical issues, particularly as they relate to clerical life. After its publication, she wrote *Emma* (1815), thought by many to be her best novel, even though Jane worried that her readers might dislike the spoiled, snobbish heroine. Drawing from the world of her naval officer brothers, Jane then wrote her final completed novel, *Persuasion*, whose noble but misled heroine had once rejected her true love, a navy captain. Tragicomic in tone, *Persuasion* has often been considered to be Austen's most moving book.

Happy in her Chawton home, surrounded by family and friends, admired by public and critics alike, and inspired with her ideas for another novel, at the end of 1816 Austen seemed destined for years of happiness. She was struck down, however, with a debilitating and crippling illness. By March, 1817, she put aside her novel; by May, she had moved to nearby Winchester, where her physician lived; on July 18, she died. She was buried in Winchester Cathedral.

Summary

Jane Austen has often been praised because of what she did not do: She did not write about characters or scenes with which she was unfamiliar; she did not attempt a scope which might have been above her powers; she did not indulge in self-conscious digressions, as did Henry Fielding and his imitator William Makepeace Thackeray, which displayed the author and delayed the novel; and she did not permit herself errors in plotting.

The genius of this restraint has become even more fully appreciated with time. A child of the neoclassical period, she was determined to point out the virtues of moderation in a period which was increasingly infatuated with excess, the need for reason at a time when emotion was increasingly enthroned. She had observed life; she had found that only the classical standards, combined with Christian virtues, could direct one toward happiness. She also had observed that the real dramas of life were played out in the everyday world of ordinary people. People were annihilated as hopelessly at Bath as in battle; families were destroyed as suddenly by foolish marriages as by the guillotine. Therefore, her themes were as profound as human life itself.

That restraint which Austen counseled was exemplified in her work. Every character she introduced was essential to her plot and theme. Every scene and every authorial comment were so carefully pruned that no word could be omitted. Thus, perhaps more than any previous novelist, she understood the artistic heights to which the novel could rise, and while in theme she reflected the age of Samuel Johnson, in technique she anticipated the twentieth century.

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Biography

Jane Austen, a nineteenth-century English novelist, is considered one of Britain's most important writers. Her talent has been compared to that of Shakespeare, and her work remains an integral and important part of what is commonly accepted as the canon of classic English literature.

Austen was born December 16, 1775, in Steventon, Hampshire, the seventh child and second daughter of Rev. George Austen and his wife Cassandra. As a clergyman's daughter, Austen was a member of the professional class. As she lived her entire life in the country, she wrote about her society and her surroundings, and she would become famous for her insightful portrayals of upper-class English country life.

The Austens, though plagued by debt, were a learned family of book lovers. Her mother wrote light poetry, and her brothers, in early adulthood, aspired to literary endeavors while they were at college. Their delight in language, puns, and witticisms is evident in Austen's works.

Except for brief stints at boarding schools, Austen was schooled largely at home, benefitting from her father's extensive library. She and her sister Cassandra, who remained her closest friend throughout her life, were given a proper girls' education in that they learned to play the piano and draw, but unlike their brothers, who attended Oxford, they were not afforded a formal, extended education.

Austen's novels often focus on the necessity of women of her society to marry for security. Although Austen did have several suitors throughout her early adulthood, she never did marry, either because of a lack of money on both sides or because of a lack of compatibility.

As a teenager, Jane wrote plays and stories, mostly satires and parodies of contemporary work, for the amusement of her family. She began the manuscripts for her serious novels in her early twenties, but she was hard-pressed to find publishers for any of them. Sixteen years after first beginning *Sense and Sensibility* as "Elinor and Marianne," a publisher finally agreed to take the manuscript—but the printing was done at the expense of Austen's brother. To avoid developing a scandalous reputation, for it was still frowned upon for women to indulge in literary endeavors, Austen published her first book anonymously. *Sense and Sensibility* proved to be successful: Austen netted 140 pounds. Encouraged, she went on to publish three more novels: *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1816). However, even after her work gained in popularity and demand, her brother Henry did not reveal his sister's identity until after her death.

Austen died in Winchester on July 18, 1817, after a gradual illness. Henry went on to publish Austen's final novels in 1818. They were *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*.

Biography

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in England, to George and Cassandra (Leigh) Austen. Her father was a clergyman in Steventon, a small town in Hampshire County. Her mother, whose ancestors were titled, was born into a higher social class. She and her husband settled into a comfortable but modest life, associating with the local gentry and raising eight children. Jane's close relationship with her siblings and her family's relationship with the local gentry would provide her with material for her plots and influence her creation of the settings and characterizations in her novels.

Austen received only five years of formal schooling; however, she continued her education at home. When she was in her teens, she wrote plays, verses, short novels, and other prose works, which were primarily parodies of sentimental fiction. Soon she began writing *Elinor and Marianne*, an early version of *Sense and Sensibility*, and after that, *First Impressions*, which later became *Pride and Prejudice*. Even though a London publishing house rejected the draft of the latter work after her father had submitted it, the novel was heartily enjoyed by her family and a wide circle of acquaintances.

Scholars divide Austen's literary career into an early and a late period separated by a writing hiatus of eight years. The first includes her early writings, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* (both published in 1811), and *Northanger Abbey* (written in 1803 but published posthumously in 1818). Her late period includes *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), and *Persuasion* (published posthumously along with *Northanger Abbey* in 1818. During the eight-year hiatus, Austen moved frequently with her family, staying in Bath, London, Clifton, Warwickshire, and Southampton, where they moved after her father died in 1805.

Austen started writing her last novel, which the family would later title *Sandition*, in 1817. She had not completed the novel when she died, most likely of Addison's disease, on July 18, 1817, in Winchester, England.

During her lifetime, Austen's works were well-received, especially *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, yet since all her works were published anonymously, she was not well-known by the public. After her death, when her brother revealed her authorship, scholars began critiquing her work. By the end of the nineteenth century, she came to be regarded as one of the most important English novelists, a position she retains today.

Biography

Jane Austen, the daughter of an English clergyman, was born in 1775 at her father's Hampshire Vicarage in South Central England. Austen had six brothers and one sister. Austen and her sister, Cassandra, were inseparable. After several attempts to find an appropriate boarding school, they were schooled at home. Their father taught his own children and several who boarded with the family. This education was by extensive reading of the classics. Both sisters were pretty and popular, and they enjoyed most of the social amenities portrayed in Austen's novels.

By the time she was in her mid-twenties, Jane's brothers, two of whom later became admirals, had careers and families of their own. After the father's death in 1805, the family lived temporarily in Southhampton before finally settling in Chawton.

A lively and affectionate family circle and a network of friends provided a stimulated context for her writing. It was the world of landed gentry and the country clergy that she used in her novels.

In the six novels published between 1811 and 1817, Austen revealed the possibilities of domestic literature. Her concentration on personality and character and the tensions between her heroines and their society make her works more closely related to the modern world than to the traditions of the eighteenth century. This modernity, together with the wit, realism, and timelessness of her prose style, helps to explain her continuing appeal to twentieth century readers.

Northanger Abbey, a satire on the romances, was sold for ten pounds in 1803, but as it was not published, was bought back by members of the family. It did not appear in print until after Austen's death.

Although her friends knew of her authorship, she received little recognition in her lifetime. She was quite aware of her special excellences and limitations, and often compared her style to that of a miniaturist painter. She ridiculed the silly, the affected, and the stupid, ranging in her satire from early, light portraiture to later, more scornful exposures.

Austen published several minor works and five major novels: Sense and Sensibility (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), Emma (1816), and posthumously, a collection of *Persuasion and Northanger Abbey* (1818). Other minor works included *Juenilia*, the novel, *Lady Susan*, and the fragments: *The Watsons* and *Sandition*. Her name never appeared on her title pages, therefore, she received little recognition until after her death in 1817.

Her comedies of manners depict the self-contained world of provincial ladies and gentlemen, and most of her works revolved around the delicate business of providing proper husbands and wives for marriageable offspring of the middle class. She is best remembered for her lively interplays of character, her meticulous care to style and plot, a sense of comic irony, and her moral firmness. The overall substance of this novel

concerns a small section of society locked into a timeless present in which little will change. The people involved are fixed, and the routines and social rituals are predetermined. Money is a problem when it is short. Successful courtships lead to satisfactory marriages. For the first two volumes of the book, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet are pre-judging and re-judging. It is a drama of insight that acts by revision and sees things as they really are and not what was presumed.

There is a whole vocabulary connected with the processes of decision, conviction, and opinion. People's varied and unstable judgments are exposed and analyzed. Opinions are constantly changing as characters' behaviors appear in a different light. The need to be aware of the difference between appearance and reality is made clear throughout the novel.

Austen writes about what she knows. Therefore, great areas of human experience are never mentioned. The male characters are not finely drawn. In contrast, the female characters are strong and stand out as intelligent and complex individuals. Extreme passions are avoided. This is demonstrated when Elizabeth accepts Darcy's second proposal. She says, "My sentiments have undergone such a material change as to make me receive with gratitude and pleasure your present assurances." There seem to be many important topics which Austen avoided.

Her greatest talents were her subtle insight into character and her precise dialogue. Each character's speech is appropriate. Collins is pompous, Mr. Bennet is cynical and sarcastic, Elizabeth is forthright and honest, Lydia is frothy and giddy, and Darcy is sensitive and sure of himself.

Although Romanticism was at its peak during Austen's life, she rejected this movement. She adhered more closely to the neo-classic style, and to its discipline, devoid of passion. Her style emphasizes plots that turn like gears on the intricacies of character interaction. Her work is often satiric but underlined with moral purport. She seemed to observe human conduct with an amused and good-humored consciousness.

She once compared her writing style to that of a painter whose subjects are miniatures. This is particularly true of her immaculate attention to detail. She was a perfectionist, and re-wrote most of her novels at least twice.

Jane Austen died at the height of her creative potential at the age of 42. Researchers have suggested the cause to be either Addison's disease or tuberculosis. She spent the last weeks of her life in Winchester, Hampshire in South England and is buried in the cathedral there.

She gradually developed a following in England in the late 1800s, but became even more popular in America. Today, she is regarded as one of the great masters of the English novel.

Biography

Jane Austen, one of England's most cherished and frequently read novelists, was born into the landed gentry in the town of Steventon on December 16, 1775. She was the sixth of seven children raised by strong parents: Cassandra, the daughter of an Oxford University scholar, and George, an Oxford- educated country clergyman. Never married, Austen lived comfortably with her family in Steventon until 1800, and thereafter in Bath, Southampton, and Chawton.

Many of her biographers have written that Austen's life lacked dramatic or noteworthy incidents. She and her older sister Cassandra were educated primarily at home by their father. As a youth she read literature avidly, wrote fragments of novels and histories, and took part in standard social activities such as formal dances and visiting. In adulthood her daily life included assisting her parents at home and looking after her many nieces

and nephews. Two adult experiences do stand out: in 1801 a mysterious romantic interest of hers died, and in 1802 she accepted and then declined an offer of marriage from a man she did not love. Otherwise Austen seems to have lived happily and uneventfully. During her mature years, when she was an author of solid repute, she remained at home, preferring rural domesticity to the London literary scene. She died in Winchester of Addison's disease on July 18, 1817.

In her early twenties, Austen wrote in earnest, completing *Lady Susan*, *Elinor and Marianne*, and *First Impressions*, and drafting other works. Her father sent the novels to a publisher, but all were rejected, as was *Susan* in 1803. In 1804 she began *The Watsons* but abandoned it after her father's death. Perhaps because of these disappointments, Austen's interest in writing waned until 1809-1811, when she revised *Elinor and Marianne* and won it an anonymous printing as *Sense and Sensibility*. In 1812 she greatly revised *First Impressions* and saw it published, also Working intensely in a busy parlor in her Chawton home from 1813 to 1816, she composed *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* and revised *Susan* into *Northanger Abbey*, a spoof of the popular romance and horror novels of the era. At the time of her death she was working on a manuscript entitled *Sanditon*

All of these works deal with the lives of young, marriageable men and women in England's nineteenth-century rural landowning and aristocratic classes. Young readers have long admired Austen's endearing, if imperfect heroes and heroines, whose struggles to find the right partner are complex, moving, and often humorous. Austen's work is also known for its finely crafted plots, masterful language, and subtle irony, and for its vivid and sometimes satirical presentation of the only society in which Jane Austen lived.

Critical Essays

Critical Essays: Jane Austen Short Fiction Analysis

With unsurpassed charm and subtlety, Jane Austen's novels of country life present and appraise the manners, morals, and relationships of Regency England's prosperous middle class. In choosing to depict what she called her "bits of ivory," the segment of the world she knew best, Jane Austen steered the course of the English novel away from the melodramatic implausibilities that dominated popular fiction at the turn of the nineteenth century. Sir Walter Scott, who recognized the importance of Austen's choice, also praised her for the literary finesse that made such a choice workable, "the exquisite touch which renders commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment."

Although the subject of Jane Austen's novels was contemporary life, it was contemporary literature with its various excesses and deficiencies which inspired her earliest attempts at fiction. In the short pieces collected as her juvenilia—tales, miniature novels, and epistolary narratives—Austen applies the conventions of sentimental fiction, which she and her family read avidly but critically, with rigorous consistency and pushes them to their logical extremes to demonstrate that such standards produce slipshod literature and convey a false view of the world.

Austen's juvenile fiction differs from the novels in its audience as well as in its subject matter. The young author wrote these short pieces for the private amusement of her family, and as an experienced novelist never contemplated revising and publishing them. Consequently the reader familiar with the decorous elegance of the public prose sees a new side of Jane Austen in the short fiction which, like her letters, voices a tough candor and a blunt humor that the novels mute: Remarks such as "Damme Elfrida *you* may be married but *I* wont" seldom make their way from the nursery of Austen's short fiction to the drawing rooms of her adult novels.

Many of the apprentice pieces are literary parodies and burlesques poking fun at the distinctive features of the novel of sensibility: the high-flown language, incredible coincidences, instant friendships, immoderate loves, unaccountable lapses of memory, and sudden recognitions. For example, "Evelyn" amusingly points out the dangers of the cult of sensibility's much-vaunted "sympathetic imagination" unallied with judgment by portraying a village full of utterly and undiscriminatingly benevolent people. "The Beautifull Cassandra" achieves its comic effect by yoking two shortcomings of the popular novel: absurd, unmotivated action included to engage readers and trivial details supplied to convince them. A typical effusion from "Frederic and Elfrida" demonstrates the emptiness of the sentimental novel's stock praises and the egocentricity of its refined protagonists:Lovely & too charming Fair one, notwithstanding your forbidding Squint, your greazy tresses & your swelling Back, which are more frightfull than imagination can paint or pen describe, I cannot refrain from expressing my raptures, at the engaging Qualities of your Mind, which so amply atone for the Horror, with which your first appearance must ever inspire the unwary visitor. Your sentiments so nobly expressed on the different excellencies of Indian & English Muslins, & the judicious preference you give the former, have excited in me an admiration of which I alone can give an adequate idea, by assuring you it is nearly equal to what I feel for myself.

Love and Freindship

Perhaps the most wide-ranging and successful of the literary burlesques is *Love and Freindship* (1922), in which Laura, a paragon of sensibility, relates her adventures through a series of letters. Here, Jane Austen lampoons most of the conventions of the sentimental novel and its popular successor, the gothic romance: the convoluted plots, star-crossed loves, cruel families, and in particular the transports of emotion that, in the

world of sensibility, are the index of personal excellence. At the climax of this story containing enough harrowing incident for a triple-decker novel, Laura and her bosom friend Sophia discover "two Gentlemen most elegantly attired but weltering in their blood" who turn out to be their husbands. The heroines react in the prescribed manner:Sophia shreiked & fainted on the Ground—I screamed and instantly ran mad—. We remained thus mutually deprived of our Senses some minutes, & on regaining them were deprived of them again—. For an Hour & a Quarter did we continue in this unfortunate situation—Sophia fainting every moment & I running Mad as often. At length a Groan from the hapless Edward (who alone retained any share of Life) restored us to ourselves—. Had we before imagined that either of them lived, we should have been more sparing of our Grief—.

Sophia, in fact, literally dies of the sensibility that has engendered her "shreiks and faints," though not before warning Laura of the medical risks that she now, too late, knows attend on swoons: "Run mad as often as you chuse," Sophia concludes, "but do not faint." These last words undercut many a sentimental deathbed.

In *Love and Freindship*, Jane Austen's satire points out the weaknesses of the literary fashion of sensibility but extends its criticism to include the code of behavior as well. Sensibility as embodied by Laura and Sophia, who meddle, lie, and even steal with perfect complacency, is ethically bankrupt as well as absurdly unrealistic. In several of the juvenile pieces, among them *The Three Sisters* (1933), *Lesley Castle* (1922), and *Catherine* (1818), literary parody gives way to concern with the social and moral themes that pervade the mature novels; but the most sophisticated example of Austen's "serious" short fiction is *Lady Susan* (1871, 1925), an epistolary narrative written after the juvenilia but before the versions we now possess of the six novels.

Lady Susan

Lady Susan is unique among Jane Austen's works for several reasons. Lady Susan Vernon, the beautiful and brilliant main character, is Austen's only aristocratic protagonist, and her only *femme fatale*. Unlike the heroines of the novels, whose characters are being formed by experience and who will place themselves in society by the ultimate act of self-definition, marriage, Lady Susan possesses a character matured, even hardened, by years of social skirmishing in the Great World. Furthermore, as a titled widow she already has an established place in society, a most respectable public position she has every intention of retaining without sacrificing her private taste for amorous adventures. Whereas the heroines of the novels gradually learn what they need to know, Lady Susan knows from the start of the story exactly what she wants: "Those women are inexcusable," she observes, "who forget what is due to themselves and to the opinion of the World."

The substance of *Lady Susan* is social and romantic intrigue. Lady Susan balances the attentions of her kindly brother-in-law, her married lover, the rich and well-born fool she has marked out for her insignificant daughter, and the self-assured young man of fashion whose heart she wins for amusement and thinks of retaining as an investment, while two virtuous but worldly women, the brother-in-law's wife, Mrs. Vernon, and her mother, Lady De Courcy, do their best to frustrate her efforts. Although *Lady Susan'*s action, deftly manipulated by the protagonist until luck finally thwarts her, is interesting as pure narrative, its chief fascination is psychological revelation. Lady Susan is as honest with herself as she is false to others; and the epistolary format, often a clumsy way of presenting a story, is ideally suited to pointing up this contrast between her social roles and her true character. The letters Lady Susan's dupes and foes exchange with one another and with her show how easily she can identify and play on the follies of "virtuous" people; Lady Susan's candid letters to her confidante Mrs. Johnson let us see how far the scheming adventuress surpasses the other characters in the quality that is the first step to true virtue: self-knowledge.

Thus, this important piece of short fiction is more than a chronological transition from Jane Austen's juvenilia to her novels; it is a moral bridge as well. In *Lady Susan*, Austen moves from the realm of literary burlesque into sustained, serious treatment of moral problems, but the conclusion she leaves us to draw is more

completely ironic and hence more “literary” than any found in the later works. Never again in Jane Austen is vice so attractive and successful and virtue so unappealing.

Critical Essays: Jane Austen Long Fiction Analysis

Jane Austen’s novels—her “bits of ivory,” as she modestly and perhaps half-playfully termed them—are unrivaled for their success in combining two sorts of excellence that all too seldom coexist. Meticulously conscious of her artistry (as, for example, is Henry James), Austen is also unremittingly attentive to the realities of ordinary human existence (as is, among others, Anthony Trollope). From the first, her works unite subtlety and common sense, good humor and acute moral judgment, charm and conciseness, deftly marshaled incident and carefully rounded character.

Austen’s detractors have spoken of her as a “limited” novelist, one who, writing in an age of great men and important events, portrays small towns and petty concerns, who knows (or reveals) nothing of masculine occupations and ideas, and who reduces the range of feminine thought and deed to matrimonial scheming and social pleasantry. Though one merit of the first-rate novelist is the way his or her talent transmutes all it touches and thereby creates a distinctive and consistent world, it is true that the settings, characters, events, and ideas of Austen’s novels are more than usually homogeneous. Her tales, like her own life, are set in country villages and at rural seats from which the denizens venture forth to watering places or to London. True, her characters tend to be members of her own order, that prosperous and courteous segment of the middle class called the gentry. Unlike her novel-writing peers, Austen introduces few aristocrats into the pages of her novels, and the lower ranks, though glimpsed from time to time, are never brought forward. The happenings of her novels would not have been newsworthy in her day. She depicts society at leisure rather than on the march, and in portraying pleasures her literary preference is modest: Architectural improvement involves the remodeling of a parsonage rather than the construction of Carlton House Terrace and Regent’s Park; a ball is a gathering of country neighbors dancing to a harpsichord, not a crush at Almack’s or the duchess of Richmond’s glittering fete on the eve of Waterloo.

These limitations are the self-drawn boundaries of a strong mind rather than the innate restrictions of a weak or parochial one. Austen was in a position to know a broad band of social classes, from the local lord of the manor to the retired laborer subsisting on the charity of the parish. Some aspects of life that she did not herself experience she could learn about firsthand without leaving the family circle. Her brothers could tell her of the university, the navy in the age of Horatio Nelson, or the world of finance and fashion in Regency London. Her cousin (and later sister-in-law) Eliza, who had lost her first husband, the comte de Feuillide, to the guillotine, could tell her of Paris during the last days of the Old Regime.

In focusing on the manners and morals of rural middle-class English life, particularly on the ordering dance of matrimony that gives shape to society and situation to young ladies, Austen emphasizes rather than evades reality. The microcosm she depicts is convincing because she understands, though seldom explicitly assesses, its connections to the larger order. Her characters have clear social positions but are not just social types; the genius of such comic creations as Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Woodhouse, and Miss Bates is that each is a sparkling refinement on a quality or set of qualities existing at all times and on all levels. A proof of Austen’s power (no one questions her polish) is that she succeeds in making whole communities live in the reader’s imagination with little recourse to the stock device of the mere novelist of manners: descriptive detail. If a sparely drawn likeness is to convince, every line must count. The artist must understand what is omitted as well as what is supplied.

The six novels that constitute the Austencanon did not evolve in a straightforward way. Austen was, memoirs relate, as mistrustful of her judgment as she was rapid in her composition. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, readers can be grateful that when the Reverend George Austen’s letter offering the book’s first

incarnation, titled "First Impressions" (1797), to a publisher met with a negative reply, she was content to put the book aside for more than a decade. *Sense and Sensibility* was likewise a revision of a much earlier work. If Austen was notably nonchalant about the process of getting her literary progeny into print, one publisher with whom she had dealings was yet more dilatory. In 1803, Austen had completed *Northanger Abbey* (then titled "Susan") and, through her brother Henry's agency, had sold it to Crosby and Sons for ten pounds. Having acquired the manuscript, the publisher did not think fit to make use of it, and in December, 1816, Henry Austen repurchased the novel. He made known the author's identity, so family tradition has it, only after closing the deal. For these various reasons, the chronology of Austen's novels can be set in different ways; here they are discussed in order of their dates of publication.

Sense and Sensibility

Sense and Sensibility, Austen's first published novel, evolved from "Elinor and Marianne," an epistolary work completed between 1795 and 1797. The novel is generally considered her weakest, largely because, as Walton Litz convincingly argues, it strives but fails to resolve "that struggle between inherited form and fresh experience which so often marks the transitional works of a great artist." The "inherited form" of which Litz speaks is the eighteenth century antithetical pattern suggested in the novel's title. According to this formula, opposing qualities of temperament or mind are presented in characters (generally female, often sisters) who, despite their great differences, are sincerely attached to one another.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the antithetical characters are Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, the respective embodiments of cool, collected sense and prodigal, exquisite sensibility. In the company of their mother and younger sister, these lovely young ladies have, on the death of their father and the succession to his estate of their half brother, retired in very modest circumstances to a small house in Devonshire. There the imprudent Marianne meets and melts for Willoughby, a fashionable gentleman as charming as he is unscrupulous. Having engaged the rash girl's affections, Willoughby proceeds to trifle with them by bolting for London. When chance once again brings the Dashwood sisters into Willoughby's circle, his manner toward Marianne is greatly altered. On hearing of his engagement to an heiress, the representative of sensibility swoons, weeps, and exhibits her grief to the utmost.

Meanwhile, the reasonable Elinor has been equally unlucky in love, though she bears her disappointment quite differently. Before the family's move to Devonshire, Elinor had met and come to cherish fond feelings for her sister-in-law's brother, Edward Ferrars, a rather tame fellow (at least in comparison with Willoughby) who returns her regard—but with a measure of unease. It soon becomes known that Ferrars's reluctance to press his suit with Elinor stems from an early and injudicious secret engagement he had contracted with shrewd, base Lucy Steele. Elinor high-mindedly conceals her knowledge of the engagement and her feelings on the matter. Mrs. Ferrars, however, is a lady of less impressive self-control; she furiously disinherits her elder son in favor of his younger brother, whom Lucy then proceeds to ensnare. Thus Edward, free and provided with a small church living that will suffice to support a sensible sort of wife, can marry Elinor. Marianne—perhaps because she has finally exhausted her fancies and discovered her latent reason, perhaps because her creator is determined to punish the sensibility that throughout the novel has been so much more attractive than Elinor's prudence—is also provided with a husband: the rich Colonel Brandon, who has long loved her but whom, on account of his flannel waistcoats and his advanced age of five-and-thirty, she has heretofore reckoned beyond the pale.

The great flaw of *Sense and Sensibility* is that the polarities presented in the persons of Elinor and Marianne are too genuinely antithetical to be plausible or dynamic portraits of human beings. Elinor has strong feelings, securely managed though they may be, and Marianne has some rational powers to supplement her overactive imagination and emotions, but the young ladies do not often show themselves to be more than mere embodiments of sense and sensibility. In her second published novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen makes defter use of two sisters whose values are the same but whose minds and hearts function differently. This

book, a complete revision of “First Impressions,” the youthful effort that had, in 1797, been offered to and summarily rejected by the publisher Cadell, is, as numerous critics have observed, a paragon of “classic” literature in which the conventions and traditions of the eighteenth century novel come to full flowering yet are freshened and transformed by Austen’s distinctive genius.

Pride and Prejudice

The title *Pride and Prejudice*, with its balanced alliterative abstractions, might suggest a second experiment in schematic psychology, and indeed the book does show some resemblances to *Sense and Sensibility*. Here again the reader encounters a pair of sisters, the elder (Jane Bennet) serene, the younger (Elizabeth) volatile. Unlike the Dashwoods, however, these ladies both demonstrate deep feelings and perceptive minds. The qualities alluded to in the title refer not to a contrast between sisters but to double defects shared by Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a wealthy and well-born young man she meets when his easygoing friend Charles Bingley leases Netherfield, the estate next to the Bennets’ Longbourn. If so rich and vital a comic masterpiece could be reduced to a formula, it might be appropriate to say that the main thread of *Pride and Prejudice* involves the twin correction of these faults. As Darcy learns to moderate his tradition-based view of society and to recognize individual excellence (such as Elizabeth’s, Jane’s, and their Aunt and Uncle Gardiner’s) in ranks below his own, Elizabeth becomes less dogmatic in her judgments and, in particular, more aware of the real merits of Darcy, whom she initially dismisses as a haughty, unfeeling aristocrat.

The growing accord of Elizabeth and Darcy is one of the most perfectly satisfying courtships in English literature. Their persons, minds, tastes, and even phrases convince the reader that they are two people truly made for each other; their union confers fitness on the world around them. Lionel Trilling has observed that, because of this principal match, *Pride and Prejudice* “permits us to conceive of morality as style.” Elizabeth and Darcy’s slow-growing love may be *Pride and Prejudice*’s ideal alliance, but it is far from being the only one, and a host of finely drawn characters surround the heroine and hero. In Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley, whose early mutual attraction is temporarily suspended by Darcy and the Bingley sisters (who deplore, not without some cause, the vulgarity of the amiable Jane’s family), Austen presents a less sparkling but eminently pleasing and well-matched pair.

William Collins, the half-pompous, half-obsequious, totally asinine cousin who, because of an entail, will inherit Longbourn and displace the Bennet females after Mr. Bennet’s demise, aspires to marry Elizabeth but, when rejected, instead gains the hand of her plain and practical friend Charlotte Lucas. Aware of her suitor’s absurdities, Charlotte is nevertheless alive to the advantages of the situation he can offer. Her calculated decision to marry gives a graver ring to the irony of the novel’s famous opening sentence: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

The last of the matches made in *Pride and Prejudice* is yet more precariously based. A lively, charming, and amoral young officer, George Wickham, son of the former steward of Pemberley, Darcy’s estate, and source of many of Elizabeth’s prejudices against that scrupulous gentleman, first fascinates Elizabeth and then elopes with her youngest sister, the mindless, frivolous Lydia. Only through Darcy’s personal and financial intervention is Wickham persuaded to marry the ill-bred girl, who never properly understands her disgrace—a folly she shares with her mother. Mrs. Bennet, a woman deficient in good humor and good sense, is—along with her cynical, capricious husband, the ponderous Collins, and the tyrannical Lady Catherine De Bourgh—one of the great comic creations of literature. Most of these characters could have seemed odious if sketched by another pen, but so brilliant is the sunny intelligence playing over the world of *Pride and Prejudice* that even fools are golden.

Mansfield Park

Mansfield Park, begun in 1811 and finished in 1813, is the first of Austen's novels to be a complete product of her maturity. The longest, most didactic, and least ironic of her books, it is the one critics generally have the most trouble reconciling with their prevailing ideas of the author. Although *Mansfield Park* was composed more or less at one stretch, its conception coincided with the final revisions of *Pride and Prejudice*. Indeed, the critics who offer the most satisfying studies of *Mansfield Park* tend to see it not as a piece of authorial bad faith or self-suppression, a temporary anomaly, but as what Walton Litz calls a "counter-truth" to its immediate predecessor.

Pleased with and proud of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen nevertheless recorded her impression of its being "rather too light, and bright, and sparkling"—in need of shade. That darkness she found wanting is supplied in *Mansfield Park*, which offers, as Trilling observes in his well-known essay on the novel, the antithesis to *Pride and Prejudice*'s generous, humorous, spirited social vision. *Mansfield Park*, Trilling argues, condemns rather than forgives: "Its praise is not for social freedom but for social stasis. It takes full notice of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, only to reject them as having nothing to do with virtue and happiness, as being, indeed, deterrents to the good life."

Most of the action of *Mansfield Park* is set within the little world comprising the estate of that name, a country place resembling in large measure Godmersham, Edward Austen Knight's estate in Kent; but for her heroine and some interludes in which she figures, Austen dips into a milieu she has not previously frequented in her novels—the socially and financially precarious lower fringe of the middle class. Fanny Price, a frail, serious, modest girl, is one of nine children belonging to and inadequately supported by a feckless officer of marines and his lazy, self-centered wife. Mrs. Price's meddling sister, the widowed Mrs. Norris, arranges for Fanny to be reared in "poor relation" status at Mansfield Park, the seat of kindly but crusty Sir Thomas Bertram and his languid lady, the third of the sisters. At first awed by the splendor of her surroundings, the gruffness of the baronet, and the elegance, vigor, and high spirits of the young Bertrams—Tom, Edmund, Maria, and Julia—Fanny eventually wins a valued place in the household.

During Sir Thomas's absence to visit his property in Antigua, evidence of Fanny's moral fineness, and the various degrees in which her cousins fall short of her excellence, is presented through a device that proves to be one of Austen's most brilliant triumphs of plotting. Visiting the rectory at Mansfield are the younger brother and sister of the rector's wife, Henry and Mary Crawford, witty, worldly, and wealthy. At Mary's proposal, amateur theatricals are introduced to Mansfield Park, and in the process of this diversion the moral pollution of London's Great World begins to corrupt the bracing country air.

Just how the staging of a play—even though it be *Lovers' Vows*, a sloppy piece of romantic bathos, adultery rendered sympathetic—can be morally reprehensible is a bit unclear for most modern-day readers, especially those who realize that the Austens themselves reveled in theatricals at home. The problem as Austen presents it lies in the possible consequences of role-playing: coming to feel the emotions and attitudes one presents on the stage or, worse yet, expressing rather than suppressing genuine but socially unacceptable feelings in the guise of mere acting. In the course of the theatricals, where Fanny, who will not act, is relegated to the role of spectator and moral chorus, Maria Bertram, engaged to a bovine local heir, vies with her sister in striving to fascinate Henry Crawford, who in turn is all too ready to charm them. Mary Crawford, though it is "her way" to find eldest sons most agreeable, has the good taste to be attracted to Edmund, the second son, who plans to enter the clergy. Mary's vivacity, as evidenced by the theatricals, easily wins his heart.

Time passes and poor Fanny, who since childhood has adored her cousin Edmund, unintentionally interests Henry Crawford. Determined to gain the affections of this rare young woman who is indifferent to his charms, Crawford ends by succumbing to hers. He proposes. Fanny's unworldly refusal provokes the anger of her uncle. Then, while Fanny, still in disgrace with the baronet, is away from Mansfield Park and visiting her family at Portsmouth, the debacle of which *Lovers' Vows* was a harbinger comes about. The *homme fatal* Henry, at a loss for a woman to make love to, trains his charms on his old flirt Maria, now Mrs. Rushworth.

She runs away with him; her sister, not to be outdone in bad behavior, elopes with an unsatisfactory suitor. Mary Crawford's moral coarseness becomes evident in her casual dismissal of these catastrophes. Edmund, now a clergyman, finds solace, then love, with the cousin whose sterling character shines brightly for him now that Mary's glitter has tarnished. Fanny gains all she could hope for in at last attaining the heart and hand of her clerical kinsman.

Emma

Austen's next novel, *Emma*, might be thought of as harmonizing the two voices heard in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. For this book, Austen claimed to be creating "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like," an "imaginist" whose circumstances and qualities of mind make her the self-crowned queen of her country neighborhood. Austen was not entirely serious or accurate: Emma certainly has her partisans. Even those readers who do not like her tend to find her fascinating, for she is a spirited, imaginative, healthy young woman who, like Mary Crawford, has potential to do considerable harm to the fabric of society but on whom, like Elizabeth Bennet, her creator generously bestows life's greatest blessing: union with a man whose virtues, talents, and assets are the best complement for her own.

Emma's eventual marriage to Mr. Knightley of Donwell Abbey is the ultimate expression of one of Austen's key assumptions, that marriage is a young woman's supreme act of self-definition. Unlike any other Austen heroine, Emma has no pressing need to marry. As the opening sentence of the book implies, Emma's situation makes her acceptance or rejection of a suitor an act of unencumbered will: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."

Free though circumstance allows her to be, Emma has not been encouraged by her lot in life to acquire the discipline and self-knowledge that, augmenting her innate intelligence and taste, would help her to choose wisely. Brought up by a doting valetudinarian of a father and a perceptive but permissive governess, Emma has been encouraged to think too highly of herself. Far from vain about her beauty, Emma has—as Mr. Knightley, the only person who ventures to criticize her, observes—complete yet unfounded faith in her ability to judge people's characters and arrange their lives. The course of *Emma* is Miss Woodhouse's education in judgment, a process achieved through repeated mistakes and humiliations.

As the novel opens, the young mistress of Hartfield is at loose ends. Her beloved governess has just married Mr. Weston, of the neighboring property, Randalls. To fill the newly made gap in her life, Emma takes notice of Harriet Smith, a pretty, dim "natural daughter of somebody," and a parlor-boarder at the local school. Determined to settle her protégé into the sort of life she deems suitable, Emma detaches Harriet from Robert Martin, a young farmer who has proposed to her, and embarks on a campaign to conquer for Harriet the heart of Mr. Elton, Highbury's unmarried clergyman. Elton's attentiveness and excessive flattery convince Emma of her plan's success but at the same time show the reader what Emma is aghast to learn at the end of book 1: that Elton scorns the nobody and has designs on the heiress herself.

With the arrival of three new personages in Highbury, book 2 widens Emma's opportunities for misconception. The first newcomer is Jane Fairfax, an elegant and accomplished connection of the Bates family and a girl whose prospective fate, the "governess trade," shows how unreliable the situations of well-bred young ladies without fortunes or husbands tend to be. Next to arrive is the suave Mr. Frank Churchill, Mr. Weston's grown son, who has been adopted by wealthy relations of his mother and who has been long remiss in paying a visit to Highbury. Finally, Mr. Elton brings home a bride, the former Augusta Hawkins of Bristol, a pretentious and impertinent creature possessed of an independent fortune, a well-married sister, and a boundless fund of self-congratulation. Emma mistakenly flatters herself that the dashing Frank Churchill is in love with her and then settles on him as a husband for Harriet; she suspects the reserved Miss Fairfax, whose cultivation she rightly perceives as a reproach to her own untrained talents, of a

clandestine relationship with a married man. She despises Mrs. Elton, as would any person of sense, but fails to see that the vulgar woman's offensiveness is an exaggerated version of her own officiousness and snobbery.

Thus the potential consequences of Emma's misplaced faith in her judgment intensify, and the evidence of her fallibility mounts. Thoroughly embarrassed to learn that Frank Churchill, with whom she has shared all her hypotheses regarding Jane Fairfax, has long been secretly engaged to that woman, Emma suffers the deathblow to her smug self-esteem when Harriet announces that the gentleman whose feelings she hopes to have aroused is not, as Emma supposes, Churchill but the squire of Donwell. Emma's moment of truth is devastating and complete, its importance marked by one of Jane Austen's rare uses of figurative language: "It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!" Perhaps the greatest evidence of Emma's being a favorite of fortune is that Mr. Knightley feels the same as she does on this matter. Chastened by her series of bad judgments, paired with a gentleman who for years has loved and respected her enough to correct her and whom she can love and respect in return, Emma participates in the minuet of marriage with which Austen concludes the book, the other couples so united being Miss Fairfax and Mr. Churchill and Harriet Smith (ductile enough to form four attachments in a year) and Robert Martin (stalwart enough to persist in his original feeling).

Emma Woodhouse's gradual education, which parallels the reader's growing awareness of what a menace to the social order her circumstances, abilities, and weaknesses combine to make her, is one of Austen's finest pieces of plotting. The depiction of character is likewise superb. Among a gallery of memorable and distinctive characters are Mr. Woodhouse; Miss Bates, the stream-of-consciousness talker who inadvertently provokes Emma's famous rudeness on Box Hill; and the wonderfully detestable Mrs. Elton, with her self-contradictions and her fractured Italian, her endless allusions to Selina, Mr. Suckling, Maple Grove, and the *barouche landau*. Life at Hartfield, Donwell, and Highbury is portrayed with complexity and economy. Every word, expression, opinion, and activity—whether sketching a portrait, selecting a dancing partner, or planning a strawberry-picking party—becomes a gesture of self-revelation. *Emma* demonstrates how, in Austen's hands, the novel of manners can become a statement of moral philosophy.

Northanger Abbey

Northanger Abbey was published in a four-volume unit with *Persuasion* in 1818, after Austen's death, but the manuscript had been completed much earlier, in 1803. Austen wrote a preface for *Northanger Abbey* but did not do the sort of revising that had transformed "Elinor and Marianne" and "First Impressions" into *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The published form of *Northanger Abbey* can therefore be seen as the earliest of the six novels. It is also, with the possible exception of *Sense and Sensibility*, the most "literary." *Northanger Abbey*, like some of Austen's juvenile burlesques, confronts the conventions of thegothic novel or tale of terror. The incidents of her novel have been shown to parallel, with ironic difference, the principal lines of gothic romance, particularly as practiced by Ann Radcliffe, whose most famous works, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), had appeared several years before Austen began work on her burlesque.

Like *Emma, Northanger Abbey* is centrally concerned with tracing the growth of a young woman's mind and the cultivation of her judgment. In this less sophisticated work, however, the author accomplishes her goal through a rather schematic contrast. As an enthusiastic reader of tales of terror, Catherine Morland has gothic expectations of life despite a background most unsuitable for a heroine. Like the gothic heroines she admires, Catherine commences adventuring early in the novel. She is not, however, shipped to Venice or Dalmatia; rather, she is taken to Bath for a six-week stay. Her hosts are serenely amiable English folk, her pastimes the ordinary round of spa pleasures; the young man whose acquaintance she makes, Henry Tilney, is a witty clergyman rather than a misanthropic monk or dissolute rake. Toward this delightful, if far from gothic, young man, Catherine's feelings are early inclined. In turn, he, his sister, and even his father, the haughty, imperious

General Tilney, are favorably disposed toward her. With the highest expectations, Catherine sets out to accompany them to their seat, the Abbey of the novel's title (which, like that of *Persuasion*, was selected not by the author but by Henry Austen, who handled the posthumous publication).

At Northanger, Catherine's education in the difference between literature and life continues. Despite its monastic origins, the Abbey proves a comfortable and well-maintained dwelling. When Catherine, like one of Radcliffe'sprotagonists, finds a mysterious document in a chest and spends a restless night wondering what lurid tale it might chronicle, she is again disappointed: "If the evidence of her sight might be trusted she held a washing-bill in her hand." Although Catherine's experience does not confirm the truth of Radcliffe's sensational horrors, it does not prove the world a straightforward, safe, cozy place. Catherine has already seen something of falseness and selfish vulgarity in the persons of Isabella Thorpe and her brother John, acquaintances formed at Bath. At Northanger, she learns that, though the general may not be the wife murderer she has fancied him, he is quite as cruel as she could imagine. On learning that Catherine is not the great heiress he has mistakenly supposed her to be, the furious general packs her off in disgrace and discomfort in a public coach.

With this proof that the world of fact can be as treacherous as that of fiction, Catherine returns, sadder and wiser, to the bosom of her family. She has not long to droop, however, for Henry Tilney, on hearing of his father's bad behavior, hurries after her and makes Catherine the proposal that he has long felt inclined to offer and that his father has until recently promoted. The approval of Catherine's parents is immediate, and the general is not overlong in coming to countenance the match. "To begin perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen is to do pretty well," observes the facetious narrator, striking a literary pose even in the novel's last sentence, "andI leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience."

Persuasion

Persuasion, many readers believe, signals Austen's literary move out of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. This novel, quite different from those that preceded it, draws not on the tradition of the novelists of the 1790's but on that of the lionized poets of the new century's second decade, Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron. For the first time, Austen clearly seems the child of her time, susceptible to the charms of natural rather than improved landscapes, fields, and sea cliffs rather than gardens and shrubberies. The wistful, melancholy beauty of autumn that pervades the book is likewise romantic. The gaiety, vitality, and sparkling wit of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* are muted. The stable social order represented by the great estate in *Mansfield Park* has become fluid in *Persuasion*: Here the principal country house, Kellynch Hall, must be let because the indigenous family cannot afford to inhabit it.

Most important, *Persuasion*'s heroine is unique in Jane Austen's gallery. Anne Elliott, uprooted from her ancestral home, spiritually isolated from her selfish and small-minded father and sisters, separated from the man she loves by a long-standing estrangement, is every bit as "alienated" as such later nineteenth century heroines as Esther Summerson, Jane Eyre, and Becky Sharp. Anne's story is very much the product of Austen's middle age. At twenty-seven, Anne is the only Austen heroine to be past her first youth. Furthermore, she is in no need of education. Her one great mistake—overriding the impulse of her heart and yielding to the persuasion of her friend Lady Russell in rejecting the proposal of Frederick Wentworth, a sanguine young naval officer with his fortune still to make and his character to prove—is some eight years in the past, and she clearly recognizes it for the error it was.

Persuasion is the story of how Anne and Frederick (now the eminent Captain) Wentworth rekindle the embers of their love. Chance throws them together when the vain, foolish Sir Walter Elliott, obliged to economize or rent his estate, resolves to move his household to Bath, where he can cut a fine figure at less cost, and leases Kellynch to Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who turn out to be the brother-in-law and sister of Captain Wentworth.

Initially cool to his former love—or, rather, able to see the diminution of her beauty because he is unable to forgive her rejection—the captain flirts with the Musgrove girls; they are sisters to the husband of Anne's younger sister Mary and blooming belles with the youth and vigor Anne lacks. The captain's old appreciation of Anne's merits—her clear insight, kindness, high-mindedness, and modesty—soon reasserts itself, but not before fate and the captain's impetuosity have all but forced another engagement on him. Being "jumped down" from the Cobb at Lyme Regis, Louisa Musgrove misses his arms and falls unconscious on the pavement. Obliged by honor to declare himself hers if she should wish it, Wentworth is finally spared this self-sacrifice when the susceptible young lady and the sensitive Captain Benwick fall in love. Having discovered the intensity of his devotion to Anne by being on the point of having to abjure it, Wentworth hurries to Bath, there to declare his attachment in what is surely the most powerful engagement scene in the Austen canon.

Though the story of *Persuasion* belongs to Anne Elliott and Frederick Wentworth, Austen's skill at evoking characters is everywhere noticeable. As Elizabeth Jenkins observes, all of the supporting characters present different facets of the love theme. The heartless marital calculations of Mr. Elliott, Elizabeth Elliott, and Mrs. Clay, the domestic comforts of the senior Musgroves and the Crofts, and the half-fractious, half-amiable ménage of Charles and Mary Musgrove all permit the reader to discern more clearly how rare and true is the love Anne Elliott and her captain have come so close to losing. The mature, deeply grateful commitment they are able to make to each other is, if not the most charming, surely the most profound in the Austen world.

Critical Essays: Jane Austen World Literature Analysis

In a letter written to her nephew several months before her death, Austen referred to her writing as "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush," a description of her work that conveys its essence with remarkable precision. Austen is not a writer whose books are characterized by sweeping dramatic action unfolding against a vivid historical backdrop; nor are her novels treatises on social ills or controversial contemporary issues. Austen wrote instead about the world she knew—a world of country villages, of polite middle-class society, of family life, of love and courtship—and her books offer a portrait of life as it was lived by a small segment of English society at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries.

Yet so great is her talent and her insight into the complexities of human nature that the seeming simplicity of her books belies the universality of their perceptions. In turning her writer's gaze on the world around her, Austen reveals deeper truths that apply to the world at large. Her portraits of social interaction, while specific to a particular and very carefully delineated place and time, are nevertheless the result of timeless human characteristics. If one looks beneath the details of social manners and mores that abound in Austen's novels, what emerges is their author's clear-eyed grasp of the intricacies of human behavior.

What is also readily apparent is that human behavior was a source of great amusement to Austen. Her novels are gentle satires, written with delicate irony and incisive wit. The famous opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice* capture her style at its best: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Courtship and marriage are the subject of all six of Austen's completed novels, and she treats the topic with a skillful balance of humor and seriousness. The elaborate social ritual of courtship and the amount of time and energy expended on it by the parties involved provide Austen with an ideal target for her satirical portraits. Dances, carriage rides, and country walks are the settings for the romances that unfold in her books, and the individual's infinite capacity for misconceptions and self-delusions provide the books' dramatic structure. Her heroes and heroines misjudge each other, misunderstand each other, and mistake charm for substance and reserve for lack of feeling with a determination that seems likely to undermine their chances for happiness—until at last they find their way through the emotional mazes they have built for themselves and emerge with the proper mate.

Yet while Austen is happy to amuse her readers with her characters' foibles and missteps, she brings an underlying empathy to her creations as well. Her heroines are never figures of fun—that role is left to the stories' supporting characters—but are instead intelligent, sensitive, amiable young women who are eminently likable despite the flaws they may exhibit. It is human nature in all its complexity that fascinates Austen, and she is capable of providing her novels with interesting, well-developed central characters who are believable precisely because they are flawed. Her amusement is not scorn but rather a tolerant awareness of the qualities, both good and bad, that constitute the human character. It is this awareness that lends Austen's work its relevance and contributes to her stature in the hierarchy of English literature.

Also central to the high critical regard in which she is held is Austen's extraordinarily eloquent and graceful literary style. Austen's use of language is as sure and as precise as her character development; indeed, the two are inseparable. Whether she is depicting the selfish, greedy Mrs. John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, who says of a proposed yearly allowance for her widowed mother-in-law, "people always live forever when there is any annuity to be paid them," or characterizing Edmund Bertram's pursuit of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* with the observation, "She was of course only too good for him; but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very steadily earnest in the pursuit of the blessing," Austen sketches her characters and relates their stories with the elegance and wit that are the unmistakable hallmarks of her style.

Austen's work offers ample proof that, in the hands of a gifted writer, stories of ordinary lives filled with everyday events can transcend their outward simplicity and capture the intricacies of human nature. Austen's ironic portraits of the world she knew are both a revealing look at her own time and a perceptive examination of the workings of the human heart and mind.

Sense and Sensibility

First published: 1811

Type of work: Novel

Two sisters, very different in nature, face obstacles as they find love.

Sense and Sensibility is a novel that is best understood within the context of the era in which it was written. Austen lived in that period of English history when eighteenth century rationalism was giving way to the increasing popularity of nineteenth century romanticism, as typified by William Wordsworth and the Romantic poets. The open embrace and deliberate cultivation of sensibility—deep feelings and passionate emotions—were perhaps a natural reaction to the admiration of reserve and practicality that had typified the preceding decades.

Austen's novel, her first published work, offers a portrait of two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, who embody the two qualities set forth in the title. Elinor, the elder of the two, is intelligent, loving, and wise enough to see the potential folly in failing to temper emotion with good sense. Marianne, although sharing many of these qualities, lacks her sister's wisdom; she is, as Austen describes her, "everything but prudent."

Marianne's insistence on giving her emotions free rein leads her into an unhappy romance with the fortune-hunting Willoughby when she mistakes his false expressions of sentiment for love. Although Marianne's own excessive displays of emotion spring from genuine feeling, they blind her to the realization that less fervently expressed emotions may also be heartfelt and true. Waiting patiently throughout the book is the quiet, steadfast Colonel Brandon, a man of deep but reserved feelings who loves Marianne and whose true worth she comes to recognize only after she is forced by her failed romance with Willoughby to reassess her views.

Elinor remains her sister's mainstay throughout her unhappy first love, assisting her toward maturity with patience and tenderness. She, too, is ín love, with her selfish sister-in-law's brother, Edward Ferrars. Both are restrained in their expressions of their feelings, Elinor out of modesty and a sense of propriety and Edward because he is secretly and unhappily engaged to another woman favored by his snobbish mother. Yet adherence to principles of rational thought and good sense does not prevent Elinor from suffering greatly when she believes that her hopes of marrying Edward are impossible. Their eventual union is as happy and full of emotion as that of any two people in love.

Although her own sympathies are perhaps most closely aligned with those of Elinor, Austen writes with affection for both sisters and her message is one of compromise. She is careful to show that a balance of both heart and intellect is necessary for a full life—a blending of sense and sensibility that both Elinor and Marianne possess by the novel's close.

Pride and Prejudice

First published: 1813

Type of work: Novel

A man and woman must reassess their first impressions of each other before they are able to find love.

Pride and Prejudice is the best known of Austen's six novels and ranks among her finest work. As in *Sense and Sensibility*, its story centers on two sisters, Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. Jane falls in love early in the book with the amiable, wealthy Charles Bingley. Bingley returns her sentiments but is temporarily persuaded to abandon the romance at the urging of his friend, Mr. Darcy, who does not detect love in Jane's discreet manner.

The book's true center, however, is the complex relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy. Both are intelligent and forthright, but their initial impressions blind them to the qualities in each other that will eventually form the basis for their love. Darcy is indeed proud and feels himself above the less refined country families in whose company he finds himself during his visit to Bingley. Elizabeth's mother, a vain, silly woman who is often a source of embarrassment to her daughter, is also an object of Darcy's scorn. When she overhears Darcy's assessment of her and her family, Elizabeth's own pride is wounded; she dismisses him as a proud, disagreeable man and is more than willing to believe the lies she is told about him by the charming, deceitful Wickham. For his part, Darcy's pride in his position and his family cause him at first to resist his attraction to Elizabeth and later to propose to her in a manner that she finds even more offensive than his initial hauteur.

Yet as time passes and their interest in each other continues, both Elizabeth and Darcy begin to see beyond their original judgments of the other's personality and character. Both possess a measure of pride and prejudice that must be overcome before they will fully understand one another, and Elizabeth's younger sister, Lydia, is unintentionally a catalyst for the change. Foolish and headstrong, Lydia runs away with Wickham, and it is only through Darcy's intervention that the two are married and the Bennet family is saved from disgrace. Elizabeth has already learned the truth behind Wickham's slander toward Darcy, and Darcy's willingness to help her family despite her own stinging refusal of his proposal offers her a glimpse of the true nature of his character. Darcy, too, has changed, losing some of the stiffness and pride that accompanied his wealth and social standing.

The substantial emotional shift experienced by Darcy and Elizabeth is indicated by Mr. Bennet's reaction to the news of Darcy's second proposal: "'Lizzy,' said he, 'what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this man? Have you not always hated him?'" Mr. Bennet's reaction is understandable, given the

disdain with which Elizabeth had expressed her initial reaction to Darcy. What her father has not been witness to—and the reader has—is Austen's gradual revelation of the qualities that Darcy and Elizabeth share and the manner in which each has come to appreciate these qualities in the other.

That theirs is a meeting of the mind and heart is clear, and those qualities that at last draw them to each other and impel them to overcome their early misunderstandings will form the basis for a strong and happy marriage.

Mansfield Park

First published: 1814

Type of work: Novel

A timid young girl living with wealthy relations falls in love with her cousin.

There are several points that set *Mansfield Park* apart from the rest of Austen's work. Chief among them is Austen's depiction of her heroine, Fanny Price, a frail, quiet young woman who has none of the high spirits or wit of Elizabeth Bennet or Marianne Dashwood. Reared from the age of ten among wealthy relatives, Fanny is an unobtrusive presence in the household at Mansfield Park, useful and agreeable to everyone and steadfast in her secret affection for her cousin, Edmund Bertram.

Fanny's manner contrasts sharply with the livelier, sometimes careless behavior of her cousins and their friends. Only Edmund spends time with the gentle Fanny, although his own affections have been captivated by the sophisticated Mary Crawford. With Fanny's uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram, away on an extended stay in the West Indies, the cousins and their friends decide to put on an amateur theatrical production of a scandalous French play. Only Fanny refuses to participate, out of natural modesty and a certainty that her absent uncle would not approve. Sir Thomas returns unexpectedly and does not approve, much to his children's chagrin, but Fanny quickly falls from his favor when she refuses the proposal of Mary Crawford's brother, Henry, who had begun an unwelcome flirtation with her after Fanny's cousin Maria married another man.

Distressed by her uncle's disapproval, Fanny visits her parents and her eight brothers and sisters, only to discover that her years at Mansfield Park have left her unable to fit easily into her noisy, often vulgar family. She is summoned back by Sir Thomas when Maria leaves her husband for Henry Crawford and Maria's sister, Julia, elopes. Now fully appreciated by her uncle, Fanny comes into her own, winning the love of Edmund Bertram.

Because Austen's novels often adopt the tone of their heroines, *Mansfield Park* is a more somber, less satirical book than *Pride and Prejudice*. Fanny is a young woman who has been shaped by both her separation from her family and her awkward position as a poor relation in a wealthy household. Yet, it is her alienation from her cousins that has perhaps saved her from taking on their faults. They have been spoiled while she has been grateful; she has grown in sensitivity and moral strength while they have been indulged. In Austen's world, true worth is always recognized in the end, and Fanny's resistance to the more worldly pursuits of her cousins and their friends wins for her the love of her adored Edmund.

Fanny is also alone among Austen's heroines in her uncertainty as to her position in society. Catherine Moreland of *Northanger Abbey* may visit wealthy friends, but she enjoys a secure place in her own family, as do the Dashwood and Bennet sisters and Emma Woodhouse of *Emma*. Only Anne Elliot of *Persuasion*, unappreciated by her self-centered father and sister, somewhat approximates Fanny's experience. It is a situation that lends great poignancy to Fanny's experiences and one which Austen conveys with great feeling

and perception.

Mansfield Park is perhaps the most controversial of Austen's novels. While some critics fault its author for abandoning the irony and elegant wit that characterize most of her work, others praise her for her willingness to undertake a variation on her usual themes. In Fanny Price, Austen has created a heroine who must engage the reader through her gentleness rather than her spirit, and Fanny does that with admirable success.

Emma

First published: 1815 (dated 1816; book came out in December, 1815)

Type of work: Novel

A good-hearted but indulged young heiress misguidedly plays matchmaker for her friends.

The forces that shape the dramatic action in *Emma* are described by Austen in the book's opening paragraphs; they are the qualities possessed by Emma Woodhouse herself. In this novel, Austen turns her satiric talents to a portrait of a wealthy young woman with "a disposition to think a little too well of herself," who has yet to acquire the sensitivity to realize that the emotional lives of her companions are not toys for her own amusement.

With an adoring, widowed father and an indulgent companion, Emma has reached early adulthood secure in the belief that she knows what is best for those around her. When her companion marries, Emma replaces her with Harriet Smith, an impressionable young girl from a local school, and quickly decides that the girl's fiancé, a farmer, is beneath her. Persuading Harriet to break off the engagement, despite the misgivings of Emma's admiring friend, Mr. Knightley, Emma sets in motion a chain of romantic misunderstandings that will come close to ruining Harriet's chances for happiness. After playing with the romantic futures of several of her acquaintances, Emma at last recognizes the dangers of her interference and realizes that her own chance for happiness has existed within her grasp for some time in the person of Mr. Knightley.

Emma is one of Austen's best novels, with some critics holding it in higher regard than *Pride and Prejudice*. In Emma Woodhouse, Austen has created one of her most memorable heroines, a willful, headstrong, yet fundamentally well-intentioned young woman whose intelligence and energy need the tempering of experience before she can be judged truly mature. She gains this experience through her relationship with Harriet when her manipulations backfire and she finds that Harriet believes herself to be in love with Mr. Knightley. With the force of a revelation, the truth of what she has done comes to Emma, along with the realization that she loves Knightley herself. As Austen writes, "Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes." Seeing herself and her actions clearly for the first time, Emma is forced into difficult but necessary self-doubt and self-examination, a new but ultimately valuable experience for a young woman who has never before had cause to doubt her own judgment.

That Emma will learn from her mistakes is clear, and her happiness with Knightley, who has known and admired her since childhood, seems assured. *Emma* is Austen's commentary on how little anyone knows about the workings of another's heart and affections, and her heroine's painful lesson is evidence of her creator's wisdom.

Critical Essays: Sources for Further Study

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Austen, Jane: Introduction

Austen is best known as a consummate novelist of manners. The author of six novels, Austen depicted a small slice of English life during the Regency period, a time marked by the Napoleonic Wars, the early growth of the English Empire, and an economic and industrial revolution that was countered by a cultural emphasis on all things proper, elegant, genteel, and truly "English." Austen captured this moment in great detail, focusing narrowly on the lives of the landed gentry in rural England and—more particularly—the little triumphs and defeats faced by the young women attempting to secure their future survival through respectable marriage. In such works as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1816), and *Mansfield Park* (1814), Austen employed wit, irony, and shrewd observation to advance the literary status of the women's novel and to address the social and political concerns of nineteenth-century men and women.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The daughter of the Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen, Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775. She was the seventh of eight children and the youngest of two daughters in the middle-class family, then living at Steventon Rectory in Hampshire, England. As the parson's daughter, Austen mixed frequently and easily with the landed gentry of rural England. Among the Austens's neighbors was Madam Lefroy, wife to a parson and sister to an aristocratic squire fond of books. Lefroy, who wrote and published poetry, took a special interest in Austen's education, and encouraged her intellectual development. At home, Reverend Austen entertained the family by reading literature aloud and guided Austen in choosing books from his large library and local circulating libraries, while James Austen, Austen's eldest brother, directed the family in amateur theatricals. Between 1783 and 1786, Austen received formal schooling, first at a boarding school at Oxford, then at the Abbey School in Reading. Around the age of twelve, Austen began writing children's stories. She stayed at Steventon until 1801, reading, writing, and participating in the Hampshire social rounds of balls, visits, and trips to Bath. Austen never married, but in 1795 fell in love with Thomas Langlois Lefroy, the nephew of her mentor Madam Lefroy. Madam Lefroy, however, disapproved of the match, thinking Thomas would lose his inheritance if he married the penniless daughter of a clergyman, and sent her nephew away. During these last years at Steventon, Austen began several early drafts of her mature works. She wrote her first novel in 1796 and 1797; "First Impressions" was sufficiently polished that her father attempted to

publish it, but it was turned down. She would eventually revise it as *Pride and Prejudice.* Her next attempt was a novel she titled "Susan," and though she was able to sell it to a publisher in 1803, it was never published in its initial form. She eventually revised it further, and the book was published posthumously as *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Austen's authorial efforts were interrupted by a series of tragedies: in 1804 Madam Lefroy, who had remained her close friend, died in a riding accident, and in 1805 her father died, leaving Austen, her sister, and her mother with no means of support. They became dependent on her brothers, who jointly maintained the women in Bath until 1806, when Frank, a naval officer, invited them to live at his home in Southampton. In 1809, they moved to Chawton Cottage, on her brother Edward's estate in Kent. There, Austen worked on *Sense and Sensibility,* finally succeeding in getting her first novel published in 1811. As with all her works, *Sense and Sensibility* was published anonymously, "By a Lady." That year, she also worked on the final version of *Pride and Prejudice* and began *Mansfield Park.* She was unusually secretive about her writing for some time, even insisting that the door to the chamber she used for writing not be repaired, so that the squeak of the hinges would alert her to intruders. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* both sold out their first printings and went into second editions and *Mansfield Park* sold out its first printing as well. Now a literary success, Austen began work on *Emma* in 1814. The Prince Regent (later George IV) invited Austen to meet with him in November 1815, expressing his admiration for her work and asking her to dedicate her next novel to him. She reluctantly agreed, and *Emma* was released with a dedication to the prince just over a month later. During that year, Austen also began work on *Persuasion* (1818), the last novel she would complete. She began the novel *Sanditon* in 1817 but was forced to leave it unfinished due to illness. In May of that year, she moved with her sister Cassandra to Winchester to obtain medical care but died on July 18. The obituary in the Hampshire newspaper contained one of the first public acknowledgements of her authorship.

MAJOR WORKS

Austen's novels are peopled with characters drawn from her sphere of life: ladies and gentlemen of the landed gentry. The plots of her novels revolve around the intricacies of courtship and marriage between members of the upper class. Austen's novels consider a narrow scope, using wit and irony to develop and further her plots. In many of her novels, women suffer, at least temporarily, for the joint distinctions of sex and class. Jane and Elizabeth Bennett, in *Pride and Prejudice,* are nearly prevented from marrying their wealthy suitors because of social codes forbidding it. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, in *Sense and Sensibility,* similarly find themselves prohibited from marrying men for lack of adequate resources and social standing to make the connections respectable. As Austen's heroines painfully recognize, being female puts them in a precarious position: the Bennett family's estate will pass into the possession of a male cousin, and the Dashwood sisters and their mother are at the mercy of a half-brother's beneficence after the death of Mr. Dashwood. *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* are more complex works and have been considered less accessible to readers. The satirical aspect of *Mansfield Park* is less clear than in other novels; in particular, critics have found the heroine Fanny difficult to sympathize with, and it is not clear if her unusually moralistic thought and behavior is meant as a model to be emulated or one to be avoided. The heroine of *Persuasion,* Anne Elliot, has been characterized as a departure from Austen's usual characters. *Persuasion*'s tone is more subdued and poetic than Austen's earlier work, possibly a reflection of the author's increasing interest in Romanticism and an indication of her greater attention to the pain inflicted by the social mores she examined in her earlier works.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

During the first several decades after Austen published her novels, her work received little commentary. After the 1870 publication of her nephew's *Memoir of Jane Austen,* however, interest in her works increased. James Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* inaugurated a worshipful, nostalgic brand of Austen criticism. Adoring critics praised Austen's characteristic authorial traits, especially the elegance of her prose, but offered no thorough critical analysis of her works. Subsequent studies of Austen therefore reacted strongly to counter this tendency, emphasizing the technical flaws in the novels and dismissing what scholars considered the narrow, trivial

world about which she wrote. A pronounced move toward a more balanced, objective mode of criticism came in 1939 with Mary Lascelles's focused attention on the technical and thematic aspects of Austen's work. With the advent of feminist criticism, critics again reexamined Austen's novels. Margaret Kirkham portrays Austen as a proto-feminist who purposefully argued in her novels against the social, political, and economic limitations placed on women by patriarchal English society. Susan Fraiman differs in her assessment of Austen's treatment of women's issues. She notes that although Austen's heroines are often witty and independent, offering an observer's perspective on women's inferior position in society, by the end of the works the heroines are reincorporated back into patriarchal society, no longer free agents and independent thinkers but wives subsumed by their husbands' households. Political and feminist scholarship on Austen's novels was further invigorated by the rise of postcolonial criticism. Moira Ferguson contends that Austen's novels offer a reformist critique of imperialism and finds a close link between the reformist impulse and women's status in English society.

Austen, Jane: Principal Works

Sense and Sensibility (novel) 1811

Pride and Prejudice (novel) 1813

Mansfield Park (novel) 1814

Emma (novel) 1816

Northanger Abbey: And Persuasion (novels) 1818

Lady Susan (novel) 1871

The Watsons (unfinished novel) 1871

Love & Freindship, and Other Early Works (juvenilia) 1922

The Novels of Jane Austen. 5 vols. (novels) 1923; republished with revisions to notes and appendices, 1965-66

[Sanditon] Fragments of a Novel (unfinished novel) 1925

Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others (letters) 1932

Volume the First (juvenilia) 1933

Volume the Third (juvenilia) 1951

Volume the Second (juvenilia) 1963

Primary Sources: Jane Austen (Letter Date 18 November 1814)

SOURCE: Austen, Jane. "Letter to Fanny Knight, November 18, 1814." In *Jane Austen's Letters,* 2nd ed., edited by R. W. Chapman, pp. 407-12. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

In the following excerpt from a letter to her niece dated November 18, 1814, Austen expresses in detail her opinions on love and marriage.

I feel quite as doubtful as you could be my dearest Fanny as to *when* my Letter may be finished, for I can command very little quiet time at present, but yet I must begin, for I know you will be glad to hear as soon as possible, & I really am impatient myself to be writing something on so very interesting a subject, though I have no hope of writing anything to the purpose. I shall do very little more I dare say than say over again, what you have said before.—I was certainly a good deal surprised *at first*—as I had no suspicion of any change in your feelings, and I have no scruple in saying that you cannot be in Love. My dear Fanny, I am ready to laugh at the idea—and yet it is no laughing matter to have had you so mistaken as to your own feelings—And with all my heart I wish I had cautioned you on that point when first you spoke to me;—but tho' I did not think you then so *much* in love as you thought yourself, I did consider you as being attached in a degree—quite sufficiently for happiness, as I had no doubt it would increase with opportunity.—And from the time of our being in London together, I thought you really very much in love—But you certainly are not at all—there is no concealing it.—What strange creatures we are!—It seems as if your being secure of him (as you say yourself) had made you Indifferent.—There was a little disgust I suspect, at the Races—& I do not wonder at it. His expressions there would not do for one who had rather more Acuteness, Penetration & Taste, than Love, which was your case. And yet, after all, I *am* surprised that the change in your feelings should be so great.—He is, just what he ever was, only more evidently & uniformly devoted to *you.* This is all the difference.—How shall we account for it?—My dearest Fanny, I am writing what will not be of the smallest use to you. I am feeling differently every moment, & shall not be able to suggest a single thing that can assist your Mind.—I could lament in one sentence & laugh in the next, but as to Opinion or Counsel I am sure none will ‹be› extracted worth having from this Letter.—I read yours through the very even[g] I received it—getting away by myself—I could not bear to leave off, when I had once begun.—I was full of curiosity & concern. Luckily your Aunt C. dined at the other house, therefore I had not to manœuvre away from *her*;—& as to anybody else, I do not care.—Poor dear Mr. J. P.!—Oh! dear Fanny, your mistake has been one that thousands of women fall into. He was the *first* young Man who attached himself to you. That was the charm, & most powerful it is.—Among the multitudes however that make the same mistake with yourself, there can be few indeed who have so little reason to regret it;—*his* Character and *his* attachment leave you nothing to be ashamed of.—Upon the whole, what is to be done? You certainly *have* encouraged him to such a point as to make him feel almost secure of you—you have no inclination for any other person—His situation in life, family, friends, & above all his character—his uncommonly amiable mind, strict principles, just notions, good habits—*all* that *you* know so well how to value, *All* that really is of the first importance—everything of this nature pleads his cause most strongly.—You have no doubt of his having superior Abilities—he has proved it at the University—he is I dare say such a scholar as your agreable, idle Brothers would ill bear a comparison with.—Oh! my dear Fanny, the more I write about him, the warmer my feelings become, the more strongly I feel the sterling worth of such a young Man & the desirableness of your growing in love with him again. I recommend this most thoroughly.—There *are* such beings in the World perhaps, one in a Thousand, as the Creature You and I should think perfection, Where Grace & Spirit are united to Worth, where the Manners are equal to the Heart & Understanding, but such a person may not come in your way, or if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a Man of Fortune, the Brother of your particular friend, & belonging to your own County.—Think of all this Fanny. Mr. J. P.—has advantages which do not often meet in one person. His only fault indeed seems Modesty. If he were less modest. he would be more agreable, speak louder & look Impudenter;—and is not it a fine Character of which Modesty is the only defect?—I have no doubt that he will get more lively & more like yourselves as he is more with you;—he will catch your ways if he belongs to you. And as to there being any objection from his *Goodness,* from the danger of his becoming even Evangelical, I cannot admit *that.* I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest & safest.—Do not be frightened from the connection by your Brothers having most wit. Wisdom is better than Wit, & in the long run will certainly have the laugh on her side; & don't be frightened by the idea of his acting more strictly up to the precepts of the New Testament than others.—And now, my dear Fanny, having written so much on one

side of the question, I shall turn round & entreat you not to commit yourself farther, & not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection; and if his deficiencies of Manner&c&c strike you more than all his good qualities, if you continue to think strongly of them, give him up at once.—Things are now in such a state, that you must resolve upon one or the other, either to allow him to go on as he has done, or whenever you are together behave with a coldness which may convince him that he has been deceiving himself.—I have no doubt of his suffering a good deal for a time, a great deal, when he feels that he must give you up;—but it is no creed of mine, as you must be well aware, that such sort of Disappointments kill anybody.—Your sending the Music was an admirable Device, it made everything easy, & I do not know how I could have accounted for the parcel otherwise; for tho' your dear Papa most conscientiously hunted about till he found me alone in the Dinᵍ-parlour, your Aunt C. had seen that he *had* a parcel to deliver.—As it was however, I do not think anything was suspected.—We have heard nothing fresh from Anna. I trust she is very comfortable in her new home. Her Letters have been very sensible & satisfactory, with no *parade* of happiness, which I liked them the better for.—I have often known young married Women write in a way I did not like, in that respect.

You will be glad to hear that the first Edit: of *M. P.* [*Mansfield Park*] is all sold.—Your Uncle Henry is rather wanting me to come to Town, to settle about a 2ᵈ Edit:—but as I could not very conveniently leave home now, I have written him my Will and pleasure, & unless he still urges it, shall not go.—I am very greedy & want to make the most of it;—but as you are much above caring about money, I shall not plague you with any particulars.—The pleasures of Vanity are more within your comprehension, & you will enter into mine, at receiving the *praise* which every now & then comes to me, through some channel or other.

FROM THE AUTHOR

AUSTEN'S IRONIC RESPONSE TO WRITING ADVICE FROM JAMES STANIER CLARKE, LIBRARIAN TO THE PRINCE REGENT, REGARDING THE LIMITATIONS OF HER EXPERIENCE AS A WOMAN

I am quite honoured by your thinking me capable of drawing such a clergyman as you gave the sketch of in your note of Nov. 16th. But I assure you I am *not.* The comic part of the character I might be equal to, but not the good, the enthusiastic, the literary. Such a man's conversation must at times be on subjects of science and philosophy, of which I know nothing; or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations and allusions which a woman who, like me, knows only her own mother tongue, and has read very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving. A classical education, or at any rate a very extensive acquaintance with English literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your clergyman; and I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress.

Austen, Jane. Letter to James Stanier Clarke of December 11, 1815. In *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others,* 2nd ed. Edited by R. W. Chapman, pp. 442-43. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.

Primary Sources: Jane Austen (Novel Date 1817)

SOURCE: Austen, Jane. "Chapter 8." In *Fragment of a Novel,* pp. 102-112. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925.

In the following excerpt from her unfinished novel Sanditon, *written in 1817, Austen directs her satire towards the type of novel popularized by Samuel Richardson—who was nonetheless among her stylistic influences.*

The two Ladies continued walking together till rejoined by the others, who as they issued from the Library were followed by a young Whitby running off with 5 vols. under his arm to Sir Edward's Gig—and Sir Edw: approaching Charlotte, said "You may perceive what has been our Occupation. My Sister wanted my Counsel in the selection of some books.—We have many leisure hours, & read a great deal.—I am no indiscriminate Novel-Reader. The mere Trash of the common Circulating Library, I hold in the highest contempt. You will never hear me advocating those puerile Emanations which detail nothing but discordant Principles incapable of Amalgamation, or those vapid tissues of ordinary Occurrences from which no useful Deductions can be drawn.—In vain may we put them into a literary Alembic;—we distil nothing which can add to Science.—You understand me I am sure?" "I am not quite certain that I do.—But if you will describe the sort of Novels which you *do* approve, I dare say it will give me a clearer idea." "Most willingly, Fair Questioner.—The Novels which I approve are such as display Human Nature with Grandeur—such as shew her in the Sublimities of intense Feeling—such as exhibit the progress of strong Passion from the first Germ of incipient Susceptibility to the utmost Energies of Reason half-dethroned,—where we see the strong spark of Woman's Captivations elicit such Fire in the Soul of Man as leads him—(though at the risk of some Aberration from the strict line of Primitive Obligations)—to hazard all, dare all, achieve all, to obtain her.—Such are the Works which I peruse with delight, & I hope I may say, with amelioration. They hold forth the most splendid Portraitures of high Conceptions, Unbounded Views, illimitable Ardour, indomptible Decision—and even when the Event is mainly anti-prosperous to the high-toned Machinations of the prime Character, the potent, pervading Hero of the Story, it leaves us full of Generous Emotions for him;—our Hearts are paralized—. T'were Pseudo-Philosophy to assert that we do not feel more enwraped by the brilliancy of his Career, than by the tranquil & morbid Virtues of any opposing Character. Our approbation of the Latter is but Eleemosynary.—These are the Novels which enlarge the primitive Capabilities of the Heart, & which it cannot impugn the Sense or be any Dereliction of the character, of the most anti-puerile Man, to be conversant with."—"If I understand you aright—said Charlotte—our taste in Novels is not at all the same." And here they were obliged to part—Miss D. being too much tired of them all, to stay any longer.—The truth was that Sir Edw: whom circumstances had confined very much to one spot had read more sentimental Novels than agreed with him. His fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned, & most exceptionable parts of Richardsons; & such Authors as have since appeared to tread in Richardson's steps, so far as Man's determined pursuit of Woman in defiance of every opposition of feeling & convenience is concerned, had since occupied the greater part of his literary hours, & formed his Character.—With a perversity of Judgement, which must be attributed to his not having by Nature a very strong head, the Graces, the Spirit, the Sagacity, & the Perseverance, of the Villain of the Story outweighed all his absurdities & all his Atrocities with Sir Edward. With him, such Conduct was Genius, Fire & Feeling.—It interested & inflamed him; & he was always more anxious for its Success & mourned over its Discomfitures with more Tenderness than c^{d} ever have been contemplated by the Authors.—Though he owed many of his ideas to this sort of reading, it were unjust to say that he read nothing else, or that his Language were not formed on a more general Knowledge of modern Literature.—He read all the Essays, Letters, Tours & Criticisms of the day—& with the same ill-luck which made him derive only false Principles from Lessons of Morality, & incentives to Vice from the History of it's Overthrow, he gathered only hard words & involved sentences from the style of our most approved Writers.

General Commentary: Mary Lascelles (Essay Date 1939)

SOURCE: Lascelles, Mary. "Style." In *Jane Austen and Her Art,* pp. 87-116. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939.

In the following excerpt, Lascelles discusses the origins and development of Austen's style.

[Austen] did not look to the novelists for direction as to style; and this was well, for the great novels of the mid-eighteenth century had too strong individuality, and their successor, the novel of sentiment, did not know

its own business. It wanted, not merely a grand style for its more ambitious passages, but also an unaffected, level style for plain relation of fact and circumstance. This is Fanny Burney's notion of a matter-of-fact introductory statement:

> 'In the bosom of her respectable family resided Camilla. Nature, with a bounty the most profuse, had been lavish to her of attractions; Fortune, with a moderation yet kinder, had placed her between luxury and indigence. Her abode was the parsonage-house of Etherington.…The living, though not considerable, enabled its incumbent to attain every rational object of his modest and circumscribed wishes; to bestow upon a deserving wife whatever her own forbearance declined not; and to educate a lovely race of one son and three daughters, with that liberal propriety, which unites improvement for the future with present enjoyment.'[1]

Fanny Burney takes pains to be ridiculous. Her followers are often merely slovenly. Jane Austen neither strains after grandiloquence[2] nor slips into slovenliness. She practises but one grammatical irregularity which is uncomfortable to the ear now—what may be called the dislocated clause.[3] Of this I have found instances in the prose of every one of those writers who seem likely to have influenced her—as a slip; it is occasional, and usually to be found in casual writing—in Goldsmith's task-work, in Gibbon's letters. Jane Austen, however, uses it as freely as though she had never heard it condemned; and Beckford parodies it savagely as an habitual fault of style in women's novels.[4] Was it a licence which had been tacitly permitted to them? Did James and Henry Austen regard it as a fault which they would not have allowed to stand had they noticed it in their own writings, but which might be passed over in their sister's with the apology that Fielding had offered for faults of style in *David Simple*?—'… some small Errors, which Want of Habit in Writing chiefly occasioned, and which no Man of Learning would think worth his Censure in a Romance; nor any gentleman, in the writings of a young Woman'.[5] At all events, it may fairly be said that Jane Austen's sentences are rarely if ever ambiguous; a pronoun may sometimes go astray, but the drift of the paragraph always makes the writer's intention clear. Beckford's general satire of the novelists' style does not in fact apply to her.

To the essayists and historians, on the other hand (to adopt Henry Austen's division), his sister seems to have apprenticed herself, even in childhood. Already in *Love and Freindship* echoes of Goldsmith's voice are heard—echoes, at least, of some of those tones of his voice that belong to his task-work for booksellers. This summary account of Edward IV—'His best qualities were courage and beauty; his bad, a combination of all the vices'[6]—might equally well come from his *History of England* or from the pert little burlesque version of it in *Love and Freindship,* in which I seem to hear a tinkling echo of this very phrase: 'This Monarch [Edward IV] was famous only for his Beauty and his Courage, of which the Picture we have here given of him,[7] and his undaunted Behaviour in marrying one Woman while he was engaged to another, are sufficient proofs.'[8]

This tone of sly simplicity is not, however, audible to me in Jane Austen's later writing. The simplicity of her novels, with that other quality, slyness or shrewdness, which gives this simplicity its value, seems to belong to another tradition and, even so, to belong with a difference. The essayists of the eighteenth century had been kindly masters to the young Jane Austen; the turn of wit, the phrasing, of their lighter moods had come easily to her—and this may perhaps account for that precocious assurance in style which has half hidden her later development. Even in her childish burlesque pieces every sentence is almost as deliberately and neatly turned (on its small scale) as are those of her masters. From the lightest piece of nonsense—'Our neighbourhood was small, for it consisted only of your Mother'[9]—to the sharpest prick of satire—'I expect nothing more in my wife than my wife will find in me—Perfection'[10]—each stands firmly, its weight exactly poised. Here already is the sharp definition of *Lady Susan,* and here the promise which *Pride and Prejudice* was to fulfil. 'Next to being married,' Mr. Bennet says to Elizabeth, when he hears of Jane's cross fortunes, 'a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives her a sort of distinction among her companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Jane. Now is your time. Here are officers enough at Meryton to disappoint all the young ladies in the country. Let Wickham be *your*

man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably.'

'Thank you, Sir, but a less agreeable man would satisfy me. We must not all expect Jane's good fortune.'[11] This, like many other passages in Jane Austen's novels, tingles with a rhythm which stage comedy[12] could never quite forget, though it might sound but faintly for a generation at a time—rhythm which is justified (as prose rhythm needs to be) by excitement. Instant perception of the absurd charges word and phrase with all the forces which in ordinary talk are dissipated, giving an impression of speed and simplicity not alien from the temper of verse. Such an impression must be elusive; no reader can vouch for more than his own experience. To me this rhythm seems audible in every one of Jane Austen's novels—even where I should least expect it, where no pulse of bodily well-being keeps time with it, in *Sanditon.* For it is appropriated by no one kind of comic dialogue. It tingles in the wit of Mr. Bennet—'Wickham's a fool, if he takes her with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship.'[13] It is perceptible in the shrewd or droll saying that may be occasionally allowed to 'plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aim at wit of any kind'—'And very nice young ladies they both are; I hardly know one from the other.'[14] And yet it is not out of place in the merely absurd talk of fools. '*We* ', Mr. Parker assures his wife, when she envies their more sheltered neighbours, 'have all the Grandeur of the Storm, with less real danger, because the Wind meeting with nothing to oppose or confine it around our House, simply rages & passes on.'[15] For it is their creator's delight in absurdity that vibrates in their talk. But if Jane Austen learnt from the dramatists the turn of phrase proper to comedy she learnt also, in writing *Pride and Prejudice,* how to differentiate her dialogue from that sort she would associate with the stage; how to make it more reflective on the one hand, more inconsequent on the other, according to the bent of the speaker. And what she learnt from the essayists she likewise transmuted to her own use; that, indeed, is the way in which they were good masters, and she an apt pupil—they taught her to make something of her own. Lady Middleton and Mrs. Dashwood 'sympathised with each other in an insipid propriety of demeanour, and a general want of understanding'.[16] That might come from one of the early periodical essays. It has the formality, the preponderance of general and abstract terms, which seems to have repelled Mrs. Meynell[17]—but which we are less likely to take amiss. To us Jane Austen appears like one who inherits a prosperous and well-ordered estate—the heritage of a prose style in which neither generalization nor abstraction need signify vagueness, because there was close enough agreement as to the scope and significance of such terms.[18] Character and motive, for example, might be presented in them—a practice best illustrated, and very likely familiar to Jane Austen herself, in the *Lives of the Poets.* 'His mind was not very comprehensive, nor his curiosity active; he had no value for those parts of knowledge which he had not himself cultivated.'[19] This, surely, and countless passages like it, represent the school in which she trained herself. Lady Russell forms and expresses her judgement on Mr. Elliot in these terms: 'Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart … He was steady, observant, moderate, candid'; he possessed 'sensibility', and 'a value for all the felicities of domestic life'[20]—and so on. Here, of course, the ear catches an inflexion of irony in the use of such exact and emphatic terms for a misapprehension; but that implies no dissatisfaction with the terms themselves. They are used to express the opinions on their fellow characters of all the *reflective* heroines (Catherine being a child, and Emma, as she calls herself, an 'imaginist'): for Elizabeth Bennet's criticism of her father's 'ill-judged … direction of talents … which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife';[21] for the shrewd observations of Elinor Dashwood and Charlotte Heywood; even for Anne Elliot's gentler judgements. But, more and more freely, they are combined with other kinds of expression in that interplay of formal and colloquial, abstract and concrete, general and particular, to whose interaction are due the firmness and suppleness of the style in which the great prose writers of the eighteenth century could address the Common Reader. Fanny Price, eager to find in her own shortcomings the reason for her mother's early neglect of her, supposed that 'she had probably alienated Love by the helplessness and fretfulness of a fearful temper, or been unreasonable in wanting a larger share than any one among so many could deserve'.[22] Sometimes there is a humorous purpose in the juxtaposition: 'They had a very fine day for Box Hill; and all the other outward circumstances of arrangement, accommodation, and punctuality, were in favour of a pleasant party.…Nothing was wanting but to be happy when they got

there.'[23] Sometimes it marks the centre of a comic episode—as in Sir Thomas's attempt to give 'Mr. Rushworth's opinion in better words than he could find himself'—and his author's comment: 'Mr. Rushworth hardly knew what to do with so much meaning.'[24] That commonplace turn of expression—the neutral verb mobilized by the preposition—goes with the grain of the language, would not be out of place in dialogue, yet is wholly in keeping with the narrative passage to which it belongs. Scott, the only one of Jane Austen's contemporaries who has a lively appreciation of the prose tradition they inherited, is at a drawback here: the language of his narrative passages must always remain distinct from the dialogue of his Scots-speaking characters, and from the Ossianic drone by which he distinguishes his Gaelic speakers.

If Jane Austen trained herself in Johnson's school, that was not, I think, the limit of her debt to him; something more personal remains—some tones of his voice seem to be echoed in her style. An echo is too elusive to be certainly identified; but conjecture may be worth offering. I think I see in her familiarity with, and love of, his work the explanation of her aptitude for coining pregnant abstractions—such phrases as Miss Bates's *desultory good-will,* of which the sounds pursued her visitors as they mounted her stairs;[25] Mrs. Elton's *apparatus of happiness,* her large bonnet and basket;[26] and Sir Walter's advance towards his grand cousins 'with all the eagerness compatible with anxious elegance';[27] these, surely, may be called Johnsonian phrases and may fairly remind us of such passages in *The Rambler* as the description of the leisurely travellers who 'missed … the Pleasure of alarming Villages with the Tumult of our Passage, and of disguising our Insignificancy by the Dignity of Hurry'.[28] From Johnson she may have learnt also a liking for antithetic phrasing, coming to perceive his antitheses closing on his subject as large hands may close on a creature which must be held before it can be set free; coming to distinguish this formality as one congenial to English idiom. Anne Elliot, advising Captain Benwick, 'ventured to hope that he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly'.[29] I will suggest another small accomplishment which Jane Austen may possibly owe to 'her dear Dr. Johnson': while he has been criticized for making all the fictitious correspondents in his periodical essays address him in his own stately language, his lively mimicry of idiom in *oblique oration* has passed unnoticed. Thus Anthea, who thought nothing so elegant as a display of timidity, 'saw some Sheep, and heard the Weather clink his Bell, which she was certain was not hung upon him for nothing, and therefore no Assurances nor Intreaties should prevail upon her to go a Step farther; she was sorry to disappoint the Company, but her Life was dearer to her than Ceremony'.[30] Now Jane Austen has an aptitude, not very common among the earlier novelists, for these satirically reported conversations: Mrs. Elton on strawberries, and Lady Bertram on the ball, are probably the best-remembered; but these merely confirm impressions already made; her slighter essays in this kind are quite as shrewd, and, within small compass, create the impression in our minds of the talk of some minor character who would otherwise be silent—of Mrs. Philips with her promise of 'a little bit of hot supper',[31] or Mr. Shepherd, with his account of his chosen tenant—'quite the gentleman'.[32]

Among these elusive echoes of the tones of voice of her favourites I seem to detect one that may be worth a moment's notice. The train of possibilities begins with Richardson's realization that a parenthetical phrase, most often built upon a present participle, if introduced abruptly into the midst of a speech—that is, not qualifying the introductory 'he said' or its equivalent, but indicating change of tone or gesture as a stage-direction might do—gives the air of eyewitness to any one who reports the speech; and since, in his novels, the narrator is always, for the moment, autobiographer, that reporter is always supposed to be an eyewitness, and therefore needs this illusion. (Thus, conversations reported by Miss Harriet Byron are not seldom interrupted by the parenthesis 'Snatching my hand'.) Fanny Burney appears to perceive this advantage and follow Richardson, so long as she also lets one of the characters tell the story—that is, in Evelina's letters. (Need it be said that here, too, 'Snatching my hand' is a not infrequent parenthesis?) But it seems to be Boswell who, in his own double character of author and eyewitness reporting an affair, introduces this device into direct narration, in his *Tour to the Hebrides* and, still oftener, in his *Life of Johnson.* Thus, in Johnson's speeches occur such parenthetical phrases as: '(looking to his Lordship with an arch smile)'. Whether or no

Jane Austen's ear really caught from one of these three among her favourite authors the impression of immediacy which this device is able to lend to dialogue, her frequent and apt use of it is worth remarking. Nancy Steele's tale of her sister is brought within earshot by such parentheses as '(Laughing affectedly)' and '(giggling as she spoke)',[33] and poor Miss Bates's of her niece by '(twinkling away a tear or two)';[34] while we seem indeed to see Captain Harville's attention divided between Anne and Captain Wentworth: 'There is no hurry on my side', he tells Wentworth. '"I am only ready whenever you are.—I am in very good anchorage here," (smiling at Anne) "well supplied, and want for nothing.—No hurry for a signal at all.—Well, Miss Elliot," (lowering his voice) "as I was saying, we shall never agree I suppose upon this point."'[35]

Evidence as to Jane Austen's *dislikes* in word or phrase is less elusive, for it consists not only in her avoidance of such habits of expression but also in her ridicule of them in her burlesque writings, and in her warnings to Anna against them. Any close observer of her ways must have noticed that she is, so to speak, *shy* of figurative language, using it as little as possible, and least of all in her gravest passages. I do not think it extravagant to find some suggestion of the amusement and discomfort which idle use of figurative expressions caused her in this small quip to Cassandra: 'He … poor man! is so totally deaf that they say he could not hear a cannon, were it fired close to him; having no cannon at hand to make the experiment, I took it for granted, and talked to him a little with my fingers.…'[36] For this use of stale, unmeaning figures of speech is a common mark of insincerity in her disagreeable people—in Mrs. Elton, with her borrowed plume of poetic image, her chatter of 'Hymen's saffron robe';[37] in General Tilney, whose imagery belongs to the conventions of a heartless gallantry: '"I have many pamphlets to finish," said he to Catherine, "before I can close my eyes; and perhaps may be poring over the affairs of the nation for hours after you are asleep. Can either of us be more meetly employed? *My* eyes will be blinding for the good of others; and *yours* preparing by rest for future mischief"'[38]—a manner of speech that almost seems to excuse Catherine's suspicions; above all, in Mrs. Norris: 'Is not she a sister's child?' she asks, rhetorically, of Fanny Price; 'and could I bear to see her want, while I had a bit of bread to give her?'[39] And one sees a grotesque vision of those two—the child and the woman—confronting one another across the shining expanse of the parsonage dining-table, with a 'bit of bread' between them. But Mrs. Norris did not see that vision; she saw nothing—metaphor was to her a screen for the meaninglessness of her generous words.

I suspect that it was Jane Austen's practice of denying herself the aid of figurative language which, as much as any other of her habits of expression, repelled Charlotte Brontë, and has alienated other readers, conscious of a dissatisfaction with her style that they have not cared to analyse. What prompted her to such a denial? Did she distrust all figurative language because she was sharply aware of the aptitude of the most languid figurative expressions for persisting as a mere habit of speech, after they have lost even the feeble life they had for the imagination?—a not unreasonable distrust, so large is the element of figurative idiom in our tongue. And was she further aware that, since such language commonly carries in the first using some emotional suggestion, it cannot *fossilize* without turning into a lie? Even if this should seem a rashly conjectural explanation of her apparent distrust of all figures of speech, her evident dislike of all that are *ready made,* it is certainly worth while to notice her quick ear for all those ready-made phrases, whether figurative or no, which creep so insidiously into our habitual speech. She had always held aloof from slang:[40] 'Miss Fletcher and I were very thick', she writes to Cassandra in Steventon days, 'but I am the thinnest of the two.'[41] She makes fossil phrases the staple of Lady Bertram's accustomed style of letter-writing—'a very creditable, commonplace, amplifying style':[42] 'We shall greatly miss Edmund in our small circle', she writes to Fanny when he has gone to fetch his sick brother; 'but I trust and hope he will find the poor invalid in a less alarming state than might be apprehended …'[43]—a style that breaks up and dissolves under the influence of real feeling: 'He is just come, my dear Fanny, and is taken up stairs; and I am so shocked to see him, that I do not know what to do.'[44] They are a mark also of the talk of Mr. Parker—who was not 'a man of strong understanding':[45] 'Here were we, pent down in this little contracted Nook, without Air or View, only one mile and 3 q^{rs} from the noblest expanse of Ocean between the South foreland & the Land's end, & without the smallest advantage from it. You will not think I have made a bad exchange, when we reach Trafalgar House—which by the bye, I almost wish I had not named Trafalgar—for Waterloo is more the thing now.'[46] And she is at pains to

emphasize this habit: 'The Growth of my Plantations is a general astonishment'[47]—*that* was substituted in revision for 'My Plantations astonish everybody by their Growth'.

What it is that disgusts in Mrs. Elton's speech is not so obvious. It is not merely the idle figurative expressions—the recluse torn reluctant from her instrument and crayons, and the rest, though they are many; nor the slang, with its uneasy pretensions, nor the wilful use of concrete and particular expressions where there is no occasion for them: 'A most pitiful business!—Selina would stare when she heard of it.'[48] It is rather a general and insidious misuse of language in the interests of an ugly smartness, which produces much the same sort of unpleasant sensation as seeing a tool misused.

Jane Austen's sharpest critical satire is aimed, however, at the contemporary novelists' peculiar phraseology—commonly a rank weed in the aftermath of a great age of fiction. Miss Clavering, who was to have collaborated with her friend Miss Ferrier, noticed it. 'I don't like those high life conversations', she says shrewdly; 'they are a sort of thing by consent handed down from generation to generation in novels, but have little or no groundwork in truth … [they] could at best amuse by putting one in mind of other novels not by recalling to anybody what they ever saw or heard in real life.…'And she is pretty severe on her friend's more ambitious writing in this kind, 'which is the style of conversation of duchesses only in novels'.[49] A conversational style handed down from one generation of novelists to another—that is a pitfall, as Jane Austen gently reminds Anna: 'I do not like a Lover's speaking in the 3^{d} person;—it is too much like the formal part of Lord Orville, & I think is not natural.'[50] She had made fun of fossilized phraseology in her earliest pieces, sometimes tilting a fragment of it gently to let the light fall on it: 'his Mother had been many years no more'.[51] Even more unobtrusively it makes its way into her early novels: 'the lenient hand of time did much for [Catherine] by insensible gradations in the course of another day.'[52] Beckford had parodied these stock phrases; but his hand had been heavy: '… the finer feelings of the celestial Arabella suffered a new and more terrible shock, which the lenient hand of time could alone hope to mollify. The original breaking of his collar bone, by the fall from his famous hunter, which had once so cruelly alarmed the ladies in the park, was no longer an object of material magnitude, but … the innumerable difficulties he might labour under, was indeed a stroke which required the utmost fortitude, and every religious consideration to combat and sustain.'[53] Where he makes nonsense, Jane Austen with a lighter touch makes something that is *almost sense.* She sees where exaggeration is not needed, where demure imitation will serve. She allows Henry Tilney to hit off the style of Mrs. Radcliffe's descriptive passages in his mock forecast of Catherine's arrival at the Abbey,[54] and of the novel of sentiment in his pretended investigation of Catherine's feelings upon the arrival of Isabel-la's letter.[55] She never lost her taste for mimicry, but her later novels gave her less scope for it. Her consciousness of this particular pitfall is most forcibly expressed in her watchful avoidance of it, most pointedly in that stricture on Anna's novel in which she comes nearest to severity: 'Devereux Forester's being ruined by his Vanity is extremely good; but I wish you would not let him plunge into a "vortex of Dissipation". I do not object to the Thing, but I cannot bear the expression;—it is such thorough novel slang—and so old, that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened.'[56]

Behind this explicit expression of aversion we can perceive her steady rejection of 'novel slang', and behind this consistent practice her sensitiveness to the entity of the word. Her corrections show her mind moving among words, arranging and rearranging them, until she gets them phrased to her liking; and so every one of them remains exquisitely whole, like a falling drop of water, and no two or three are allowed to run together and settle into stagnant pools.

Delicate precision, resulting from control of the tools chosen—one could almost be content to claim no more than this for Jane Austen's style, surmising that she would hardly claim as much. She might have been willing to accept Richardson's compliment to Lady Bradshaigh: 'The pen is almost as pretty an implement in a woman's fingers as a needle.'[57] She would probably have been puzzled by John Bailey's tribute: 'She wrote … well, because she could write well and liked it, and all the better because she did not know how well she wrote.'[58] For I think that she would have been satisfied to transfer to her style her playful boast of her own

manual dexterity: 'An artist cannot do anything slovenly.'[59]

Notes

1. *Camilla,* ch. i.
2. Her rare inversions sound to me Johnsonian; that is, an unconscious reflection of her reading.
3. e.g. Lady Catherine, speaking of her daughter and Darcy, says: 'While in their cradles, we planned the union' (*Pride and Prejudice,* p. 355, ch. lvi).
4. *Modern Novel Writing* (under the pseudonym of Lady Harriet Marlow), 1796.
5. Sarah Fielding, *David Simple,* 1744 (2nd edit.)—with a preface by Henry Fielding, in which he mentions his correction of these errors. (They are seldom worse than colloquialisms or awkwardnesses.)
6. Goldsmith, *History of England* (1771), ii. 250.
7. i.e. one of Cassandra's medallions, made, perhaps, in playful imitation of those in the 1771 *History.*
8. *Love and Freindship,* p. 86; *Minor Works,* pp. 140, 141.
9. Ibid., p. 7; *Minor Works,* p. 78.
10. *Volume the First,* p. 46; *Minor Works,* p. 26.
11. *Pride and Prejudice,* pp. 137, 138, ch. xxiv.
12. J. A. was probably an habitual reader of plays.
13. *Pride and Prejudice,* p. 304, ch. xlix.
14. *Persuasion,* p. 92, ch. x.
15. *Sanditon,* p. 48; *Minor Works,* p. 381.
16. *Sense and Sensibility,* p. 229, ch. xxxiv.
17. Alice Meynell, 'The Classic Novelist' in *The Second Person Singular* (1921).
18. It is, I believe, want of realization of this element in Jane Austen's style that has made critics such as Mr. Forster find a reflection of her point of view in the thoughts of all her heroines; see *Abinger Harvest* (1936), p. 149.
19. *Life of Shenstone.*
20. *Persuasion,* pp. 146, 147, ch. xvi.
21. *Pride and Prejudice,* p. 237, ch. xlii.
22. *Mansfield Park,* p. 371, ch. xxxvii.
23. *Emma,* p. 367, ch. xliii.
24. *Mansfield Park,* p. 186, ch. xix.
25. *Emma,* p. 239, ch. xxvii. I think this is not a very common idiom in women's writings, though Mrs. Thrale learnt it from the same master.
26. Ibid., p. 358, ch. xlii.
27. *Persuasion,* p. 184, ch. xx.
28. *The Rambler,* number 142.
29. *Persuasion,* pp. 100, 101, ch. xi.
30. *The Rambler,* number 34.
31. *Pride and Prejudice,* p. 74, ch. xv.
32. *Persuasion,* p. 22, ch. iii.
33. *Sense and Sensibility,* pp. 274, 275, ch. xxxviii.
34. *Emma,* p. 378, ch. xliv.
35. *Persuasion,* p. 234, ch. xxiii.
36. *Letters,* p. 242.
37. *Emma,* p. 308, ch. xxxvi.
38. *Northanger Abbey,* p. 187, ch. xxiii.
39. *Mansfield Park,* p. 7, ch. i.
40. It is Mary Crawford's slang that persuades me she was never meant to be very agreeable.
41. *Letters,* p. 14.

42. *Mansfield Park,* p. 425, ch. xliv.
43. Ibid., p. 426, ch. xliv.
44. Ibid., p. 427, ch. xliv.
45. *Sanditon,* p. 23; *Minor Works,* p. 372.
46. Ibid., p. 44; *Minor Works,* p. 380.
47. Ibid., p. 46; *Minor Works,* p. 381.
48. *Emma,* p. 484, ch. lv. I think that Jane Austen positively disliked this idiosyncrasy—of which she gives variants to Sir Edward Denham and John Thorpe.
49. *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier,* ed. J. A. Doyle, pp. 114-118 (letter of 10 May 1813).
50. *Letters,* pp. 387, 388. Charlotte Brontë slipped back into this awkward practice.
51. *Love and Freindship,* p. 10; *Minor Works,* p. 80.
52. *Northanger Abbey,* p. 201, ch. xxv.
53. *Modern Novel Writing,* ch. i.
54. *Northanger Abbey,* ch. xx.
55. Ibid., p. 207, ch. xxv.
56. *Letters,* p. 404.
57. *Correspondence,* ed. Barbauld (1804), vi. 120 (no date).
58. *Introductions to Jane Austen,* 1931, p. 25.
59. *Letters,* p. 30.

References

In referring to Jane Austen's six novels, I give the number of the page as it appears in Dr. Chapman's edition, followed by the number of the chapter as it would appear in any other modern edition. For her letters and other unpublished writings, I refer likewise to his editions. References to the letters are simple; those to the other writings require a little explanation. When I completed my book, Dr. Chapman had already edited (in separate volumes) practically all of Jane Austen's unpublished work other than those three note-books of juvenilia entitled *Volume the First, Second,* and *Third*; but of these we had only the *First* from his hand. *Volume the Second* had appeared (with a preface by G. K. Chesterton) under the title of its principal content, *Love and Freindship,* and it was by this name, therefore, that I referred to it, and to all that it contained. *Volume the Third* had not been printed, nor was it accessible to me in manuscript; it had therefore to be left out of my account. This latter note-book had since been edited by Dr. Chapman, who has moreover now gathered all these and some smaller pieces into a single volume of *Minor Works.* Thus, for Jane Austen's tales, fragments, and drafts, except the contents of *Volume the Second,* we have two earlier editions from his hand; differing in that the earlier records the traces of revision discernible in her manuscripts. Mindful of the diverse needs of readers possessing these different editions, I have retained my original page-reference for every passage quoted, but added another, to the *Minor Works—except* where the subject under discussion was Jane Austen's practice in revision.

For her brother's *Biographical Notice* and her nephew's *Memoir* also I refer to Dr. Chapman's editions, except in those instances where it was necessary to use the first edition of the *Memoir,* or a passage from that part of the second which his edition does not reproduce.

For other books I have, of course, referred to the first editions, except where an authoritative collected edition of the author's works seemed preferable. In references to novels, mindful of the difficulty of getting access to a first edition of many of those I cited, I have given the number not of the page but of the chapter.

In my necessarily brief account of Jane Austen's life (intended only as a foundation to the critical part of this book) I have, I hope methodically, preferred the earliest source of information, except where a later source of equal authority gave fuller detail—for example, where the *Life* was fuller that the *Memoir.*

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Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader,* 1925.

General Commentary: Margaret Kirkham (Essay Date 1983)

SOURCE: Kirkham, Margaret. “Allusion, Irony and Feminism in the Austen Novel.” In *Jane Austen, Feminism, and Fiction,* pp. 81-98. Brighton, England: Harvester Press Limited, 1983.

In the following essay, Kirkham asserts that Austen’s novels are both comic and feminist.

Comedy and the Austen Heroines: The Early Novels

F. R. Leavis placed Jane Austen as the inaugurator of the ‘great tradition’ of English nineteenth-century fiction. But she is unlike the later novelists of this tradition in that she writes *comedies,* that is, her novels preserve, and call attention to, certain formal features proper to comedy in its theatrical sense, and this is used to distance what is represented from life itself, even though character and events are made, for the most part, to look natural and probable. In George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad, the distinction between comedy and tragedy is no longer of importance, for their form of realism attempts to embrace the whole of life under a single vision. Auerbach speaks of the *comédie larmoyante* and *Sturm und Drang* as opening the way to the realism of Balzac and the naturalism of Zola, in which ‘random individuals from daily life in their dependence upon historical circumstances’ are made the subject of ‘serious, problematic and even tragic representation’.[1] But the Austen heroine is not realistic in quite this way, for what is ‘serious, problematic and dependent upon historical circumstances’ about her is subsumed under the formal, comic role which she is required to play. In the Austen novels the narrator, at crucial moments, when everything has been made to look natural and probable, draws the reader’s attention to the way in which character and action also fulfil the

formal requirements of comedy and, in this way, directs us *not* to mistake what is represented for a straightforward imitation of life itself. Sometimes the conventions adhered to are mocked and this, as Lloyd W. Brown has shown, is especially true of the 'happy endings'.[2]

Some critics with a social conscience, including feminist ones, have found the Austen novels complacent in their optimism, but Jane Austen's vision does not seem complacent or superficial if we take the formal comic features of her novels seriously, as part of their total meaning. The comic vision is partial, but it need not be untruthful provided it is not mistaken for more than it is. Jane Austen puts pressure on the limits of comedy, but she does not seek to break down the distinction between tragedy and comedy, only to enlarge the scope of comedy in prose fiction, by making it capable of embodying a serious criticism of contemporary manners and morals *and of contemporary literature.* As a feminist moralist, Jane Austen criticises sexist pride and prejudice as embedded in the laws and customs of her age, but she was also a critic of the same faults in literature itself. Her interest in the conventions of art is not a means of escaping from her central moral interest, but a way of showing, through drawing attention to them, that they must be questioned critically if true understanding is to be achieved. As her work developed she became more, not less, aware of literary form as in need of the conscious critical attention of the discerning reader. In her later novels she relies upon a greater awareness of contemporary conventions and their accustomed meanings than the modern reader always possesses, and this has led to the belief that she became more conservative in her outlook, whereas she became more radical and more subtle, demanding more in the way of intelligent, critical co-operation in the reader.

The full strength of Austen's feminist criticism of life and literature, and the consistency with which she went on developing new ways of making it, does not appear unless one takes account of literary and theatrical irony as controlling the total meaning of the major late novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma,* as well as of the earlier ones. Part Three of this study is mainly about allusion, irony and feminism in these two novels but, before discussing that, a little more needs to be said about the character of the Austen comedy, and the way in which it accommodates both an ideal vision—the *idyllic* element which Lionel Trilling[3] saw in it—together with forceful and sometimes *subversive* (to use D. W. Harding's[4] word) criticism of life and letters as they actually were.

FROM THE AUTHOR

AUSTEN GIVES THE OUTLINE FOR A NOVEL PARODYING THE UNREALISTIC CONVENTIONS OF THE POPULAR ROMANCES OF THE TIME

Early in her career, in the progress of her first removal, heroine must meet with the hero—all perfection, of course, and only prevented from paying his addresses to her by some excess of refinement. Wherever she goes somebody falls in love with her, and she receives repeated offers of marriage, which she always refers wholly to her father, exceedingly angry that *he* should not be first applied to. Often carried away by the anti-hero, but rescued either by her father or the hero. Often reduced to support herself and her father by her talents, and work for her bread; continually cheated and defrauded of her hire; worn down to a skeleton, and now and then starved to death. At last, hunted out of civilized society, denied the poor shelter of the humblest cottage, they are compelled to retreat into Kamschatka, where the poor father, quite worn down, finding his end approaching, throws himself on the ground, and, after four or five hours of tender advice and parental admonition to his miserable child, expires in a fine burst of literary enthusiasm, intermingled with invectives against holders of tithes. Heroine inconsolable for some time, but afterwards crawls back towards her former country, having at least twenty narrow escapes of falling into the hands of anti-hero; and at last, in the very nick of time, turning a corner to avoid him, runs into the arms of the hero himself, who, having just shaken off the scruples which fettered him before, was at the very moment setting off in pursuit of her. The tenderest and completest *éclaircissement* takes place, and they are happily united.

Austen, Jane. Excerpt from *Plan of a Novel.* In *Sandition, The Watsons, Lady Susan, and Other Miscellanea,* p. 5. London: Dent, 1934, 1979.

Jane Austen is the major comic artist in English of the age we call 'Romantic', her scepticism about Romanticism being largely a product of her feminism, but, in her confidence that the comic vision remained capable of bringing enlightenment, and of reaching towards the ideal, she is the representative of that true comic spirit which the Romantics admired in Shakespeare, and which Shelley thought lost in a corrupt age, like that in which he and Jane Austen lived. Where 'the calculating principle' predominates, he tells us, in *A Defence of Poetry,*

> Comedy loses its ideal universality: wit succeeds to humour; we laugh from self-complacency and triumph, instead of pleasure; malignity, sarcasm and contempt succeed to sympathetic merriment; we hardly laugh, but we smile.

There is, in the Austen comedy, a great deal of wit, some sarcasm and a trace of malignity here and there (for example, in the portrayal of Aunt Norris and Sir Walter Elliot) but there is more sympathetic merriment than sarcasm, and the wit is tempered by humour. Jane Austen's comic vision includes a glimpse of something ideal and universal, together with a sharp, ironic awareness of how far short we mostly are of it, especially when 'dressed in a little brief authority'. The feminism is in the laughter, sometimes rather harsh laughter, but it is also in the visionary ideal, for Austen manages to create a few brief oases where men and women experience equal relationships with one another, and where it would appear that the idea of their being otherwise, at least for those of such superior mind as her heroes and heroines, has never been heard of.

This is not to say that the Austen heroines lead extraordinary lives, or are endowed with extraordinary genius. The difficulties they experience are not, in many instances, the same as those experienced by men, but the way they learn to solve them is what matters. Mary Wollstonecraft, arguing that 'for man and woman . . . truth must be the same', says:

> Women, I allow, may have different duties to fulfil; but they are *human* duties, and the principles that should regulate the discharge of them, I sturdily maintain, must be the same.[5]

That is the central moral principle developed in the Austen novels and, though it goes against Rousseau and Richardson, it does not go against the author's Butlerian, secularised Christianity. Gilbert Ryle, observing that Jane Austen's

> heroines face their moral difficulties and solve their moral problems without recourse to religious faith or theological doctrines. Nor does it ever occur to them to seek the counsels of a clergyman,

suggests that Austen 'draws a curtain between her Sunday thoughts, whatever they were, and her creative imagination'.[6] Perhaps she did think more about revealed religion on Sundays than other days, but even so there would have been no reason for her Sunday thoughts to come into conflict with her weekday ones. The Austen heroines act as independent moral agents because that is the way in which the Creator intended those with powers of reason to act. Since the novelist wishes to show us heroines capable of learning morals through experience and the exercise of their own judgement, she does not send them off to get the advice of the few rational clergymen available in her fiction, for to do so would prevent her showing that, while the Church of England ordains such moral teachers as Mr Collins, Mr Elton and Dr Grant, the natural moral order of things allows Miss Bennet, Miss Wood-house and Miss Price (under Providence) to do very well without them, having within themselves, as Miss Price puts it, 'a better guide . . . than any other person can be' (*Mansfield Park,* p. 412).

Jane Austen's heroines are not self-conscious feminists, yet they are all exemplary of the first claim of Enlightenment feminism: that women share the same moral nature as men, ought to share the same moral status, and exercise the same responsibility for their own conduct. As Austen's understanding of the problem of presenting heroines fit to take the place of central moral intelligence in her novels increased, so did their moral stature. It is all done, apparently without effort, as though it were perfectly natural for young women to think, to learn through what passes under their own observation, and to draw conclusions the author thinks valid from it. It looks natural, but it is done by playing with the mirror of art and producing an illusion. The illusion is both visionary and salutary, for it suggests how we might live, and criticises the way we actually live, in a world where women, however marked their abilities, are not thought of (except by a few, mostly *heroes*) as equals and 'partners in life'.

E. H. Gombrich, in his study of *Art and Illusion,* takes John Constable's *Wivenhoe Park,* painted in 1816, as an illuminating example of how what appears an unpremeditated representation of natural landscape is the outcome of lengthy testing of the painter's fresh vision against models of landscape painting in his immediate tradition. Gombrich speaks of Rousseau's assertion that Emile must copy nature and never other men's work as 'one of those programmes charged with explosive ignorance', since a greater appearance of fidelity to Nature is achieved through adaptation and adjustment of earlier models or, as he summarises it, through '*schema* and correction'. *Wivenhoe Park*

> looks so effortless and natural that we accept it as an unquestioning and unproblematic response to the beauty of the English countryside. But, for the historian there is an added attraction to this painting, he knows that this freshness of vision was won in a hard struggle.[7]

These remarks are apposite to Jane Austen as well as to Constable, for her fresh vision of how things might be in a more natural social order was arrived at in a comparable way, and her art is no more an 'unquestioning and unproblematic response' to English society than Constable's was to the English landscape. There is, however, an important difference between the painter and the novelist: Constable wished it to be thought that he drew directly from Nature and played down his debt to Cozens.[8] Austen, being less disturbed than Constable by awareness of how 'the tradition' of any art impinges upon 'the individual talent', and sometimes has to be consciously resisted, draws attention to the models or schemas employed in the formation of her distinctive, feminist vision, expecting the reader better than a 'dull elf' to see their point.

In her earlier work, Jane Austen came up against a major difficulty: the literary models which she needed to use could not, even when adjusted and corrected, be easily freed of anti-feminist bias. It came naturally to her, as her earliest writings show, to write burlesque, and two of her early novels—*Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* —develop out of well established burlesque plots. But such burlesque plots, which turn on the early folly of the heroine, make it difficult to establish her as the central moral intelligence of the novel in which she appears. An alternative model, taken from the moralistic tradition of female writing in which contrasting sister-heroines are portrayed, and utilised in *Sense and Sensibility,* also proved to have intractable difficulties. Austen's earlier attempts at the adjustment and correction of such schemas must be considered before going on to *Mansfield Park* and *Emma.*

Sense and Sensibility

The schema used in *Sense and Sensibility*— that of contrasted heroines, one representing female good sense and prudence, the other led into error and difficulty by impulsiveness and excesses of feeling and conduct—was to be found in many women novelists, especially those of an 'improving' tendency. In Maria Edgeworth's *Letters of Julia and Caroline* (1795) and Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) this schema is used in a straightforward, didactic way. The sensible sister judges aright all the time and eventually, partly as a result of the homilies she delivers, the imprudent sister is brought to acknowledge her faults and amend her ways. The purpose is simply to recommend prudence and self-control without emphasis upon the abilities of

the heroines, which make them the proper judges of what is prudent and how self control should be exercised.

Sense and Sensibility is an early work, probably less drastically revised than *Northanger Abbey* or *Pride and Prejudice,* and Jane Austen shows some uncertainty about her own purposes in employing the schema, but she modifies it in two important ways, both of which increase the stature of her pair of heroines. She shows that both sisters have superior abilities, neither being totally lacking in either sense or sensibility, and she introduces a range of other characters against whose defects Elinor and Marianne shine.

In the first chapter, we are told that Elinor 'possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgement', and that 'she had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong, but she knew how to govern them'. Marianne, although over-eager and immoderate, is not represented as lacking more solid powers of mind: 'She was sensible and clever.'

As the novel develops, Marianne and Elinor each begin to take on the rounded character of a single, central heroine. Elinor's response to the contrite Willoughby goes beyond what is quite appropriate in a representative of Sense. Marianne's critical self-analysis after her illness, which is induced by her own reflections and not the moralising of her sister, is too intelligent to fit a representative of Sensibility. Austen may have started off with the intention of using this type of schematic plot and characterisation much as it had been used before, merely pruning it of its tendency to encourage moralising and solemnity. But, because she creates heroines fully representative of human nature in a larger sense than the schema allows, she discovers its inadequacies. They become particularly clear in the final chapters, where Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon fulfils the requirements of the schematic design, but is felt as a betrayal of the developed character she has become. The schema entailed the showing up of one sister against the other, rather than the endorsements of their superior judgement in the face of prejudice and error in less sensitive and sensible people. It did not therefore permit the adequate representation of a single heroine with a good head and a sound heart.

Northanger Abbey

Northanger Abbey is developed from a schema used by Charlotte Lennox in *The Female Quixote* (1752), by Beckford in *The Elegant Enthusiast* (1796), and by Eaton Stannard Barrett in *The Heroine* (1813), which Austen was later to enjoy, and by a number of other eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers of burlesque. It presented particular difficulties for a feminist since, although it turned on the condemnation of romantic illusions inspired by literature, it characteristically made a heroine the victim of such delusions, and called on a hero of sense, perhaps aided by a sensible clergyman, to dispel them. *Northanger Abbey* follows the schema in making its heroine the subject of absurd delusions following on the reading of romantic novels, but it corrects the schema in several important ways. First, the heroine, although young and naïve, is always shown as possessing sound, healthy affections and a good deal of native common sense. Her errors, it is pretty plain, are not likely to be long-lasting, for her own abilities, with a little experience, are bound to correct them. Second, the hero, although he is also a clergyman, is not shown as always superior in his judgements. He has the sense to value novels, saying—in reply to Catherine's suggestion that 'gentlemen read better books'—'"The person, be it gentleman or lady, who had not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid."' He knows how to admire and how to read Ann Radcliffe:

> 'I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure. *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* when I had once begun it, I could not lay down again;—I remember finishing it in two days—my hair standing on end the whole time.'
>
> (p. 106)

And he learns to see in Catherine's unaffected character qualities which inspire true affection. But he is not without some of the affections of a clever young man as is shown in his strictures on Catherine's use of 'nice', and in his expounding of the fashionable doctrines of the 'picturesque' in chapter XIV. In both instances he is clever, rather than sensible. Third, although the heroine's delusions about General Tilney and the 'forbidden gallery' at Northanger are exposed as absurd, they lead the reader to something more substantial. Austen's handling of this episode amounts to a major criticism of assumptions associated with the schema of the burlesque novel in which a heroine learns that her romantic notions are all mistaken, and that the world of the everyday is better ordered than that of imagination. Catherine accepts the truth of things as Henry Tilney puts them to her, and is bitterly ashamed of herself for having indulged in wild fantasies about the General's conduct to his late wife but, as events show, she was not so far out as might at first appear.

Henry Tilney's account of his mother's life and death makes it clear that she did suffer greatly during her years as the General's wife and his abstract arguments, in support of the idea that English wives in the Midland counties of England are protected by better laws and more humane customs than those to be found in Mrs Radcliffe's Alps and Pyrenees, ought to raise doubts in the intelligent reader's mind, though they satisfy Catherine. Dismissing her dreadful suspicions, he says:

> '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 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 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 everything open?'
>
> (pp. 197-8)

This is a powerful rejection of the gothic fantasy of the wicked husband who secretly murders his wife, or locks her up for years on end in a turret, and Catherine, on reflection, accepts it. However things might be in Italy, Switzerland and France,

> in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist.
>
> (p. 200)

This can be read as a complete dismissal of Catherine's nonsense, yet there is something really evil about the General, and his wife had, in a sense, been imprisoned by her marriage to him, perhaps even brought to an early grave through unhappiness; for General Tilney is allowed by the laws of England and the manners of the age to exert near absolute power over his wife and daughter, and he does so as an irrational tyrant. What must a more experienced Catherine see in observing what passes around her? What do our marriage laws connive at? What does our education prepare us for? A wife not beloved cannot easily be murdered, but perhaps the 'laws of the land and the manners of the age' do little to protect her as an equal citizen. Servants are not slaves, but how does a wife's status differ from that of a slave? Is she not her husband's property?

In view of the General's subsequent conduct, it is clear that the correct answers to these questions are not quite so straightforward as Henry Tilney thinks. As to the matter of sleeping potions, as Austen was to show through Lady Bertram, these are scarcely needed in a country where a woman, if 'well married', may pass away thirty years half asleep on a sofa, with a lap-dog, and a tangled, useless bit of needlework, and still be

reckoned a respectable wife of a respected public man.

Northanger Abbey includes some of Austen's strongest criticism of the society in which she lived, but the schema does not permit her to make the heroine herself sufficiently aware of its real defects. Ann Radcliffe's novels, which ought, according to the schema, to be exposed as foolish, are here made into something more complex: a test of the literary intelligence of the hero and heroine. Henry Tilney shows his superiority by responding to Radcliffe's powers of invention and imagination without supposing that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is an imitation of life. Catherine also shows her responsiveness, but is required to make a childish confusion of life and art. Austen then, through her own more realistic invention, shows that there is a further truth which neither of them has quite seen. This modifies and correct the schema, but at risk of confusing readers.

15 Pride and Prejudice

Under its earlier title of *First Impressions* what was to become *Pride and Prejudice* was thought ready for publication as early as 1797. As its first title suggests, it must have been at that stage fairly close to a burlesque schema similar to that of *Northanger Abbey* —a novel in which the heroine's romantic confidence in first impressions (a common article of faith in such heroines) was corrected by experience. *Pride and Prejudice,* as it eventually appeared in 1813, had been extensively and recently revised by the author who had already published *Sense and Sensibility,* and had begun to think about *Mansfield Park.* In its final form, therefore, it comes closer to the later work than either of the other early novels and the schema is very drastically modified. Elizabeth Bennet's role, as the heroine who puts too high a value on first impressions, can still be seen in her infatuation with Mr Wickham, and in her initial dislike of Mr Darcy, but it becomes unimportant as the novel develops. Half way through the second volume Elizabeth receives the letter from Mr Darcy in which a true account of past events is made plain to her. Once she has read it and reflected upon its contents, which she does with speed and a remarkable display of judicious critical acumen, taking due note of the interest of the writer and the quality of his language, as well as of events and conduct which she had previously misunderstood, she becomes the best informed, as well as the most intelligent character in the entire novel. Quicker and cleverer than the hero, she soon sees that he has solid virtues of head and heart which largely outweigh his tendency to solemnity and self-importance—qualities which his education and upbringing, as well as his wealth, have imposed upon a naturally affectionate heart and a critical mind. From this point onwards Elizabeth Bennet takes on the character of the later Austen heroine; she becomes the central intelligence through whose eyes and understanding events and character are mediated to the reader. Through the use of the 'indirect free style' of narration, Elizabeth's powers of rational reflection, as well as her personal point of view, are made plain.

None of the Austen heroines is more attractive than Elizabeth Bennet, none more clearly possessed of intelligence and warm affections, but as she develops she effectively destroys the role she is supposed to play. The result is that she begins to look too much like a heroine without a part, a real-life character, not a creature in print, and this will not do, for her extreme, and improbable, good luck in marriage is acceptable only if it is properly distanced from life by the formal requirements of plot and part. That is why Jane Austen spoke of *Pride and Prejudice* as 'too light and bright and sparkling', and why she developed new ways of dealing with the heroine's role, so that the plot should no longer turn on a major reversal of her beliefs or judgment. The later heroines may make mistakes, sometimes serious ones like Emma's, and their author continues to mock their absurdities,but they are conceived, from the start, as the central and most enlightened minds of the novels in which they appear. They no longer (except incidentally) miscast themselves, their difficulties arise from a miscasting imposed upon them by the society in which they live, where intelligent young women of the middle class have no role appropriate to their abilities.

In the three late novels, the main thrust of irony is against the errors of law, manners and customs, in failing to recognise women as the accountable beings they are, or ought to be; and against those forms of contemporary

literature which render them 'objects of pity, bordering on contempt', by sentimentalising their weaknesses and making attractive what ought to be exposed as in need of correction. Austen's adherence to the central convictions of Enlightenment feminism becomes more marked and more forceful, and the scope of her comedy is enlarged, not by taking in a wider social spectrum, but by widening and deepening the range of allusive irony. The catalyst was the popular German dramatist, August von Kotzebue.

Kotzebue and Theatrical Allusion in Mansfield Park and Emma

> I am sure that though none of my plays will be staged in fifty years yet the poets of posterity will use my plots and more often my situations . . . Turn the play into a story and if it still grips it will live.
>
> (August von Kotzebue)[9]

Had Jane Austen not made Kotzebue's *Das Kind Der Liebe* (*Lovers' Vows*) the play-within-the-novel in *Mansfield Park* it is unlikely that his name would be familiar to many English readers. His importance to her later work is, however, not confined to this one novel, but plays a part in the plot of *Emma* and is still, though more weakly, felt in *Persuasion.* In the first two, Austen used his plots and situations and turned the plays into stories which still grip and still live, but perhaps not quite in the way Kotzebue hoped. Kotzebue becomes the grit which irritates Austen into the production of pearls, but her obvious scorn for his plays has not been fully understood as in line with her views as a feminist moralist to whom Kotzebue was the latest and most influential of those disciples of Rousseau, castigated by Wollstonecraft.

Kotzebue's plays enjoyed an enormous success in England from 1798 to about 1810. L. F. Thompson says that, at this time, his 'name was a household word from John O'Groats to Land's End', and his plays, 'especially *The Stranger, Pizzaro, The Birthday* and *The Natural Son [Lovers' Vows],* were represented not only in London season after season but on the boards of every market town that could boast such an ornament'.[10]

Kotzebue's great popularity, however, did not make him admired among the intelligentsia. He became a figure of controversy and was condemned by a good many writers, including Wordsworth, de Quincey, Coleridge and Scott. The chief complaint against him was that he pandered to the public love of sensational plots, created characters who did not resemble human beings as we know them to be, and, through excesses of sentimentality, aroused disgust rather than compassion. Since Kotzebue was also attacked in some right-wing periodicals on account of his revolutionary political sympathies, the view that all hostility to him was on this account has gained ground, especially in studies of Jane Austen which discover in her novels the point of view of an anti-Jacobin. But this is simplistic and hides differences which ought to be considered.

A review of *Lovers' Vows,* which appeared in Cobbett's *Porcupine and Anti-Gallican Monitor* in 1801, has been much quoted in support of the belief that Austen's contempt for this play is a mark of her political conservatism. In it, the reviewer says:

> It is the universal aim of German authors of the present day to exhibit the brightest examples of virtue among the lower classes of society; while the higher orders, by their folly and profligacy, are held up to contempt and detestation. This is fully exemplified in *Lovers' Vows.* The Cottager and his Wife are benevolent and charitable; Frederick, the hero of the piece, a common soldier, the offspring of cupidity, presents an amiable pattern of filial love; while Count Cassel, a travelled nobleman, is a caricature of every odious and contemptible vice.[11]

This view of *Lovers' Vows* is further discussed below in connection with *Mansfield Park,* but it ought also to be considered together with what Wordsworth had to say in the following year. In the Preface to *Lyrical*

Ballads, in which he sets out his purposes in representing such examples of virtue as appear in men like Michael, Simon Lee the Huntsman, and the Leech-Gatherer, he says that such portraits as these are especially needed at a time when

> a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of savage torpor.

Among the causes named is the 'craving for extraordinary incident' which is encouraged not only by the press, but the corruption of contemporary literature:

> The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.

There can be little doubt that Kotzebue was high on Wordsworth's list of those German dramatists who thus corrupted the ability of the public to think or feel adequately.

It might, of course, be said that Wordsworth, even in 1802, had strong conservative impulses and that therefore to quote him, in arguing that an objection to Kotzebue was not necessarily the mark of a reactionary, carries little weight. But even if there are signs in the Preface of the conflict between Wordsworth's 'levelling muse' and his conservatism, it must surely be difficult to deny that part of his purpose in *Lyrical Ballads* comes close to what the *Porcupine* reviewer complains of in Kotzebue. If it must be allowed that the great poet of 'humble and rustic life', in the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads,* objected to Kotzebue as corrupt, we ought not to convict Jane Austen of a reactionary political motive in making him the target of her scorn, unless we can be sure that she had no other interest more obviously germane to her subject-matter and consistent with the whole development of her work.

Jane Austen must have thought little of Kotzebue and less perhaps of the public taste which clamoured for his works, on account of the extreme silliness of his plays, but she had also a feminist motive in satirising him. Here it is important to insist that, whatever later readers and critics may think of Kotzebue's sentimentalising of innocent adulteresses, or pathetic victims of 'noble' seducers, as revolutionary and liberationist, this view is not in accord with that of Enlightenment feminism. We can see why if we consider L. F. Thompson's remarks, bearing in mind what Wollstonecraft had to say about Rousseauist attitudes to women:

> Kotzebue's plays were excellently suited for a female audience. He is never guilty of an expression to which one can take exception. . . . One of Shakespeare's plays held the stage only a night or two because the cast was too exclusively male. Kotzebue gave almost undue prominence to the other sex and catered especially for their taste with his humanitarianism, his happy endings, his introduction of children and his appeal rather to the heart than to the head.[12]

This explanation of why 'Kotzebue found favour with the ladies' is surely a sufficient explanation of why he did not find favour with the Lady who first appeared in print with *Sense and Sensibility,* and who may have wondered, as she watched Bath audiences lapping him up (they can't have included many revolutionaries), whether men or women were really much guided by Reason or Nature, at least in their buying of theatre tickets.

Jane Austen's ability to use the most depressing evidence of folly to advantage came to the rescue. We know that she saw the first performance in Bath of Thomas Dibdin's *The Birthday* (a version of Kotzebue's *Die Versöhnung*) in 1799. It may have been the first time she had seen a Kotzebue play in the theatre at all. It must

have stirred her a good deal, for fifteen years later it provided the schema against which *Emma* was constructed. We may assume that she did not share the view of the *Bath Herald and Register* (surely not a journal controlled from Paris by Jacobins) reviewer, who said:

> The pleasing spectacle of *Bluebeard* . . . was again brought forward Saturday evening last . . . preceded by Kotzebue's admirable drama of *The Birthday.* If the German author has justly drawn down censure for the immorality of his productions for the stage—this may be accepted as his *amende honorable*—it is certainly throughout unexception-ably calculated to promote the best interests of virtue and the purest principles of benevolence and, though written much in the style of Sterne, it possesses humour without a single broad Shandyism.[13]

The Birthday is about two brothers who have quarrelled over 'a garden', and been at daggers drawn about it for fifteen years. They are eventually reconciled by the heroine, Emma, the daughter of one of them, who believes (falsely as it turns out) that she can never marry because of her duty to devote herself to her irascible and stupid father. How Jane Austen used this schema in *Emma* is discussed below; all that I wish to establish here is that she became acquainted with Kotzebue's work almost as soon as his success in England came about, and that her opinion of it was not in accord with that of the reviewer of a respectable Bath newspaper whose circulation was maintained by its bourgeois (or better) readership, in a city never much associated with revolutionary sympathies. Her use of ironic allusion to Kotzebue in two of the new novels begun after 1812 shows how strongly she reacted to him, and also suggests, as is confirmed by other evidence, that, although the writing of *Mansfield Park* did not begin until 1813, the working on ideas that eventually came to fruition in the later work began much earlier under the stimulus of influences away from Steventon.

In developing her later comedy as a criticism of contemporary literature and theatre as well as life, Jane Austen made use of Shakespeare, the touchstone of truth and nature in art not only for Dr Johnson, but for the major poets of her own generation. Johnson says, in the 1765 Preface to his edition of Shakespeare:

> Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that should form his expectations of human affairs from the play, or from the tale, would be equally deceived. *Shakespeare* has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion. Even where the agency is supernatural the dialogue is level with life.

Jane Austen's references to Shakespeare in *Mansfield Park* (chapter III of the third volume) show that she is here invoking him in such a light to contrast with Kotzebue. Coleridge also contrasts the two. In Shakespeare there is a 'signal adherence to the great law of nature, that all opposites tend to attract and temper each other'. This adherence prevents him from exaggeration of vice and virtue and from the sentimentalising of morals, in the interest of particular classes or groups:

> Keeping at all times in the high road of life, Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice: he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher, the Kotzebues of the day . . . Let the morality of Shakespeare be contrasted with that of the writers of his own, or the succeeding, age, or of the present day, who boast their superiority in this respect. No one can dispute that the result of such a comparison is altogether in favour of Shakespeare . . . he inverts not the order of nature and propriety,—does not make every magistrate a drunkard or glutton, nor every poor man meek, humane, and temperate; he has no benevolent butchers, nor any sentimental rat-catchers.

(*Lectures,* 1818)

Jane Austen's view, as shown in her later novels, is partly in accord with this, for she too sees Shakespeare as upholding what 'religion and reason alike' teach us about Nature and morals, and Kotzebue as distorting it by the sentimental treatment of a particular class of characters. But the class which concerns her is not that of the poor contrasted with the rich, but of women contrasted with men. What she thought about benevolent butchers and sentimental rat-catchers, the figures who, in Coleridge's rhetoric, become the representatives of 'the poor', we can only guess for she avoids dealing with them, but we can see, from her treatment of schemas derived from Kotzebue, that she thought his treatment of women, whether village girls or aristocrats, objectionable, because he does not depict them as full human beings accountable for their own actions, but as relative creatures whose highest moral function is to excite compassion in men.

Austen's criticism of Kotzebue is, above all, that he does not draw women as 'mixed characters', whereas Shakespeare, 'who has no heroes' and no heroines either, if by these we mean 'pictures of perfection', does. Kotzebue's innocent female victims may not be guilty of broad Shandyisms, but their language ought to excite disgust, for it was not fit for Englishwomen of sense. Beside it, the languages of a Portia or a Rosalind (allowing for a little coarseness, common in a less polished age) was from a pure and undefiled well, fit for Englishwomen who valued their liberty under the law of reason and nature.

Some of the most perceptive nineteenth-century critics of Austen—Whately, G. H. Lewes, Richard Simpson—found themselves comparing her with Shakespeare as a humourist and as a faithful portrayer of human nature. And it was her greatest achievement that she brought the central argument and subject matter of English feminists from Astell to Wollstonecraft under the humane influence of Shakespearian comedy, seeing in the poet of Nature an enlarged understanding of men and women which might guide her own age towards something better than Kotzebue. Of course, she also rejoiced, like Shakespeare, in human folly, and relished her own role of female-philosopher-turned-Puck—never more so, perhaps, than when she associated Mansfield Park with the truths of the woods near Athens. For *Mansfield Park,* in which the domestic government of an English estate is exposed as based on false principles, makes the education of Sir Thomas Bertram, Bart, MP, rather than of Miss Fanny Price, one of its central ironic themes. The benevolent, but mistaken, Patriarch lives to profit by such 'a contrast . . . as time is for ever producing between the plans and decisions of *mortals,* for their own instruction, and their neighbours' entertainment' (p. 472; my italics). The sparkle of confident, feminist intelligence was never more boldly displayed than in Austen's invocation of Puck's 'Lord what fools these mortals be', in her presentation of the august and formidable Sir Thomas, whose Northamptonshire seat cannot have been many miles distant from that of Sir Charles Grandison.

Notes

Page references to the novels of Jane Austen are to R. W. Chapman's *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Oxford, 1926, and to his *Minor Works,* Oxford, 1954. Page references to the letters are to *Jane Austen's Letters,* ed. R. W. Chapman, Oxford, 1952. Page references to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are to the Penguin edition, ed. Miriam Kramnick, 1975.

1. Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis,* Princeton, 1953, p. 489.

2. Lloyd W. Brown, 'The Comic Conclusions of Jane Austen's Novels', *PMLA.,* no. 84, 1969, *passim.*

3. '*Emma* and the Legend of Jane Austen', Introduction to the Riverside edn of *Emma,* reprinted in *Emma: A Casebook,* ed. David Lodge, London, 1968, p. 154.

4. 'Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen', *Scrutiny,* VIII, 1940.

5. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication,* p. 139.

6. 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', *Critical Essays* [*Critical Essays on Jane Austen,* ed. B. C. Southam, London, 1968], p. 117.

7. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion,* London, 1960, p. 29.

8. ibid., p. 155.

9. Introduction to *Neue Schauspiele,* quoted by L. F. Thompson, *Kotzebue, A Survey of His Progress in England and France,* Paris, 1928, p. 47.

10. ibid., p. 55.

11. Quoted by William Reitzel, '*Mansfield Park* and *Lovers' Vows*', *R.E.S.* [*Review of English Studies*], vol. 9, no. 36, October 1933, p. 453.

12. Thompson, op. cit., p. 103.

13. *Bath Herald and Register,* 29 June 1799, quoted by Jean Freeman, *Jane Austen in Bath,* 1969, p. 15.

Title Commentary: Emma

LIONEL TRILLING (ESSAY DATE 1965)

> SOURCE: Trilling, Lionel. "Emma and the Legend of Jane Austen." In *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning,* pp. 28-49. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965.
>
> *In the following essay, Trilling argues that* Emma *is the greatest of Austen's novels.*

I

It is possible to say of Jane Austen, as perhaps we can say of no other writer, that the opinions which are held of her work are almost as interesting, and almost as important to think about, as the work itself. This statement, even with the qualifying "almost," ought to be, on its face, an illegitimate one. We all know that the reader should come to the writer with no preconceptions, taking no account of any previous opinion. But this, of course, he cannot do. Every established writer exists in the aura of his legend—the accumulated opinion that we cannot help being aware of, the image of his personality that has been derived, correctly or incorrectly, from what he has written. In the case of Jane Austen, the legend is of an unusually compelling kind. Her very name is a charged one. The homely quaintness of the Christian name, the cool elegance of the surname, seem inevitably to force upon us the awareness of her sex, her celibacy, and her social class. "Charlotte Brontë" rumbles like thunder and drowns out any such special considerations. But "Jane Austen" can by now scarcely fail to imply femininity, and, at that, femininity of a particular kind and in a particular social setting. It dismays many new readers that certain of her admirers call her Jane, others Miss Austen. Either appellation suggests an unusual, and questionable, relation with this writer, a relation that does not consort with the literary emotions we respect. The new reader perceives from the first that he is not to be permitted to proceed in simple literary innocence. Jane Austen is to be for him not only a writer but an issue. There are those who love her; there are those—no doubt they are fewer but they are no less passionate—who detest her; and the new reader understands that he is being solicited to a fierce partisanship, that he is required to make no mere literary judgment but a decision about his own character and personality, and about his

relation to society and all of life.

And indeed the nature of the partisanship is most intensely personal and social. The matter at issue is: What kind of people like Jane Austen? What kind of people dislike her? Sooner or later the characterization is made or implied by one side or the other, and with extreme invidiousness. It was inevitable that there should arise a third body of opinion, which holds that it is not Jane Austen herself who is to be held responsible for the faults that are attributed to her by her detractors, but rather the people who admire her for the wrong reasons and in the wrong language and thus create a false image of her. As far back as 1905 Henry James was repelled by what a more recent critic, Professor Marvin Mudrick, calls "gentle-Janeism" and he spoke of it with great acerbity. James admired Jane Austen; his artistic affinity with her is clear, and he may be thought to have shared her social preferences and preoccupations. Yet James could say of her reputation that it had risen higher than her intrinsic interest warranted: the responsibility for this, he said, lay with "the body of publishers, editors, illustrators, producers of magazines, which have found their 'dear,' our dear, everybody's dear Jane so infinitely to their material purpose."[1] In our own day, Dr. Leavis's admiration for Jane Austen is matched in intensity by his impatience with her admirers. Mr. D. W. Harding in a well-known essay[2] has told us how the accepted form of admiration of Jane Austen kept him for a long time from reading her novels, and how he was able to be at ease with them only when he discovered that they were charged with scorn of the very people who set the common tone of admiration. And Professor Mudrick, in the preface to his book on Jane Austen,[3] speaks of the bulk of the criticism of her work as being "a mere mass of cozy family adulation, self-glorif[ication] … and nostalgic latterday enshrinements of the gentle-hearted chronicler of Regency order." It is the intention of Professor Mudrick's book to rescue Jane Austen from coziness and nostalgia by representing her as a writer who may be admired for her literary achievement, but who is not to be loved, and of whom it is to be said that certain deficiencies of temperament account for certain deficiencies of her literary practice.

The impatience with the common admiring view of Jane Austen is not hard to understand and sympathize with, the less so because (as Mr. Harding and Professor Mudrick say) admiration seems to stimulate self-congratulation in those who give it, and to carry a reproof of the deficient sensitivity, reasonableness, and even courtesy, of those who withhold their praise. One may refuse to like almost any author and incur no other blame from his admirers than that of being wanting in taste in that one respect. But not to like Jane Austen is to put oneself under suspicion of a general personal inadequacy and even—let us face it—of a want of breeding.

This is absurd and distasteful. And yet we cannot deal with this unusual—this extravagantly personal—response to a writer simply in the way of condemnation. No doubt every myth of a literary person obscures something of the truth. But it may also express some part of the truth as well. If Jane Austen is carried outside the proper confines of literature, if she has been loved in a fashion that some temperaments must find objectionable and that a strict criticism must call illicit, the reason is perhaps to be found not only in the human weakness of her admirers, in their impulse to self-flattery, or in whatever other fault produces their deplorable tone. Perhaps a reason is also to be found in the work itself, in some unusual promise that it seems to make, in some hope that it holds out.

II

Of Jane Austen's six great novels *Emma* is surely the one that is most fully representative of its author. *Pride and Prejudice* is of course more popular. It is the one novel in the canon that "everybody" reads, the one that is most often reprinted. *Pride and Prejudice* deserves its popularity, but it is not a mere snobbery, an affected aversion from the general suffrage, that makes thoughtful readers of Jane Austen judge *Emma* to be the greater book—not the more delightful but the greater. It cannot boast the brilliant, unimpeded energy of *Pride and Prejudice,* but that is because the energy which it does indeed have is committed to dealing with a more resistant matter. In this it is characteristic of all three novels of Jane Austen's mature period, of which it is the

second. *Persuasion,* the third and last, has a charm that is traditionally, and accurately, called "autumnal," and it is beyond question a beautiful book. But *Persuasion,* which was published posthumously and which may not have been revised to meet the author's full intention, does not have the richness and substantiality of *Emma.* As for *Mansfield Park,* the first work of the mature period, it quite matches *Emma* in point of substantiality, but it makes a special and disturbing case. Greatly admired in its own day—far more than *Emma*—*Mansfield Park* is now disliked by many readers who like everything else that Jane Austen wrote. They are repelled by its heroine and by all that she seems to imply of the author's moral and religious preferences at this moment of her life, for Fanny Price consciously devotes herself to virtue and piety, which she achieves by a willing submissiveness that goes against the modern grain. What is more, the author seems to be speaking out against wit and spiritedness (while not abating her ability to represent these qualities), and virtually in praise of dullness and acquiescence, and thus to be condemning her own peculiar talents. *Mansfield Park* is an extraordinary novel, and only Jane Austen could have achieved its profound and curious interest, but its moral tone is antipathetic to contemporary taste, and no essay I have ever written has met with so much resistance as the one in which I tried to say that it was not really a perverse and wicked book. But *Emma,* as richly complex as *Mansfield Park,* arouses no such antagonism, and the opinion that holds it to be the greatest of all Jane Austen's novels is, I believe, correct.

Professor Mudrick says that everyone has misunderstood *Emma,* and he may well be right, for *Emma* is a very difficult novel. We in our time are used to difficult books and like them. But *Emma* is more difficult than any of the hard books we admire. The difficulty of Proust arises from the sheer amount and complexity of his thought, the difficulty of Joyce from the brilliantly contrived devices of representation, the difficulty of Kafka from a combination of doctrine and mode of communication. With all, the difficulty is largely literal; it lessens in the degree that we attend closely to what the books say; after each sympathetic reading we are the less puzzled. But the difficulty of *Emma* is never overcome. We never know where to have it. If we finish it at night and think we know what it is up to, we wake the next morning to believe it is up to something quite else; it has become a different book. Reginald Farrer speaks at length of the difficulty of *Emma* and then goes on to compare its effect with that of *Pride and Prejudice.* "While twelve readings of *Pride and Prejudice* give you twelve periods of pleasure repeated, as many readings of *Emma* give you that pleasure, not repeated only, but squared and squared again with each perusal, till at every fresh reading you feel anew that you never understood anything like the widening sum of its delights."[4] This is so, and for the reason that none of the twelve readings permits us to flatter ourselves that we have fully understood what the novel is doing. The effect is extraordinary, perhaps unique. The book is like a person—not to be comprehended fully and finally by any other person. It is perhaps to the point that it is the only one of Jane Austen's novels that has for its title a person's name.

For most people who recognize the difficulty of the book, the trouble begins with Emma herself. Jane Austen was surely aware of what a complexity she was creating in Emma, and no doubt that is why she spoke of her as "a heroine whom no one will like except myself." Yet this puts it in a minimal way—the question of whether we will like or not like Emma does not encompass the actuality of the challenge her character offers. John Henry Newman stated the matter more accurately, and very charmingly, in a letter of 1837. He says that Emma is the most interesting of Jane Austen's heroines, and that he likes her. But what is striking in his remark is this sentence: "I feel kind to her whenever I think of her." This does indeed suggest the real question about Emma, whether or not we will find it in our hearts to be kind to her.

Inevitably we are attracted to her, we are drawn by her energy and style, and by the intelligence they generate. Here are some samples of her characteristic tone:

> "Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public!"

> Emma was sorry; to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like through three long months!—to be always doing more than she wished and less than she ought!
>
> "I do not know whether it ought to be so, but certainly silly things do cease to be silly if they are done by sensible people in an impudent way. Wickedness is always wickedness, but folly is not always folly."
>
> "Oh! I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other.…"
>
> [On an occasion when Mr. Knightley comes to a dinner party in his carriage, as Emma thinks he should, and not on foot:] "… There is always a look of consciousness or bustle when people come in a way which they know to be beneath them. You think you carry it off very well, I dare say, but with you it is a sort of bravado, an air of affected unconcern; I always observe it whenever I meet you under these circumstances. *Now* you have nothing to try for. You are not afraid of being supposed ashamed. You are not striving to look taller than any body else. *Now* I shall really be happy to walk into the same room with you."

We cannot be slow to see what is the basis of this energy and style and intelligence. It is self-love. There is a great power of charm in self-love, although, to be sure, the charm is an ambiguous one. We resent it and resist it, yet we are drawn by it, if only it goes with a little grace or creative power. Nothing is easier to pardon than the mistakes and excesses of self-love: if we are quick to condemn them, we take pleasure in forgiving them. And with good reason, for they are the extravagance of the first of virtues, the most basic and biological of the virtues, that of self-preservation.

But we distinguish between our response to the self-love of men and the self-love of women. No woman could have won the forgiveness that has been so willingly given (after due condemnation) to the self-regard of, say, Yeats and Shaw. We understand self-love to be part of the moral life of all men; in men of genius we expect it to appear in unusual intensity and we take it to be an essential element of their power. The extraordinary thing about Emma is that she has a moral life as a man has a moral life. And she doesn't have it as a special instance, as an example of a new kind of woman, which is the way George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke has her moral life, but quite as a matter of course, as a given quality of her nature.

And perhaps that is what Jane Austen meant when she said that no one would like her heroine—and what Newman meant when he said that he felt kind to Emma whenever he thought of her. She needs kindness if she is to be accepted in all her exceptional actuality. Women in fiction only rarely have the peculiar reality of the moral life that self-love bestows. Most commonly they exist in a moonlike way, shining by the reflected moral light of men. They are "convincing" or "real" and sometimes "delightful," but they seldom exist as men exist—as genuine moral destinies. We do not take note of this; we are so used to the reflected quality that we do not observe it. It is only on the rare occasions when a female character like Emma confronts us that the difference makes us aware of the usual practice. Nor can we say that novels are deficient in realism when they present women as they do: it is the presumption of our society that women's moral life is not as men's. No change in the modern theory of the sexes, no advance in status that women have made, has yet contradicted this. The self-love that we do countenance in women is of a limited and passive kind, and we are troubled if it is as assertive as the self-love of men is permitted, and expected, to be. Not men alone, but women as well, insist on this limitation, imposing the requirement the more effectually because they are not conscious of it.

But there is Emma, given over to self-love, wholly aware of it and quite cherishing it. Mr. Knightley rebukes her for heedless conduct and says, "I leave you to your own reflections." And Emma wonderfully replies: "Can you trust me with such flatterers? Does my vain spirit ever tell me I am wrong?" She is 'Emma, never loth to be first," loving pre-eminence and praise, loving power and frank to say so.

Inevitably we are drawn to Emma. But inevitably we hold her to be deeply at fault. Her self-love leads her to be a self-deceiver. She can be unkind. She is a dreadful snob.

Her snobbery is of the first importance in her character, and it is of a special sort. The worst instance of it is very carefully chosen to put her thoroughly in the wrong. We are on her side when she mocks Mrs. Elton's vulgarity, even though we feel that so young a woman (Emma is twenty) ought not set so much store by manners and tone—Mrs. Elton, with her everlasting barouchelandau and her *"caro sposo"* and her talk of her spiritual "resources," is herself a snob in the old sense of the word, which meant a vulgar person aspiring to an inappropriate social standing. But when Emma presumes to look down on the young farmer, Robert Martin, and undertakes to keep little Harriet Smith from marrying him, she makes a truly serious mistake, a mistake of nothing less than national import.

Here it is to be observed that *Emma* is a novel that is touched—lightly but indubitably—by national feeling. Perhaps this is the result of the Prince Regent's having expressed his admiration for *Mansfield Park* and his willingness to have the author dedicate her next book to him: it is a circumstance which allows us to suppose that Jane Austen thought of herself, at this point in her career, as having, by reason of the success of her art, a relation to the national ethic. At any rate, there appears in *Emma* a tendency to conceive of a specifically English ideal of life. Knightley speaks of Frank Churchill as falling short of the demands of this ideal: "No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable,' 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." Again, in a curiously impressive moment in the book, we are given a detailed description of the countryside as seen by the party at Donwell Abbey, and this comment follows: "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture [agriculture, of course, is meant], English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive." This is a larger consideration than the occasion would appear to require; there seems no reason to expect this vision of "England's green and pleasant land." Or none until we note that the description of the view closes thus: "… and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it." Abbey-Mill Farm is the property of young Robert Martin, for whom Emma has expressed a principled social contempt, and the little burst of strong feeling has the effect, among others, of pointing up the extremity of Emma's mistake.

It is often said, sometimes by way of reproach, that Jane Austen took no account in her novels of the great political events of her lifetime, nor of the great social changes that were going on in England. "… In Jane Austen's novels," says Arnold Hauser in his *Social History of Art,* "social reality was the soil in which characters were rooted but in no sense a problem which the novelist made any attempt to solve or interpret." The statement, true in some degree, goes too far. There is in *some* sense an interpretation of social problems in Jane Austen's contrivance of the situation of Emma and Robert Martin. The yeoman class had always held a strong position in English class feeling, and, at this time especially, only stupid or ignorant people felt privileged to look down upon it. Mr. Knightley, whose social position is one of the certainties of the book, as is his freedom from any trace of snobbery, speaks of young Martin, who is his friend, as a "gentleman farmer," and it is clear that he is on his way to being a gentleman pure and simple. And nothing was of greater importance to the English system at the time of the French Revolution that the relatively easy recruitment to the class of gentlemen. It made England unique among European nations. Here is Tocqueville's view of the matter as set forth in the course of his explanation of why England was not susceptible to revolution as France was:

> It was not merely parliamentary government, freedom of speech, and the jury system that made England so different from the rest of contemporary Europe. There was something still more distinctive and more far-reaching in its effects. England was the only country in which the caste system had been totally abolished, not merely modified. Nobility and commoners joined forces in business enterprises, entered the same professions, and—what is still more

> significant—intermarried. The daughter of the greatest lord in the land could marry a "new" man without the least compunction.…
>
> Though this curious revolution (for such in fact it was) is hidden in the mists of time, we can detect traces of it in the English language. For several centuries the word "gentleman" has had in England a quite different application from what it had when it originated.… A study of the connection between the history of language and history proper would certainly be revealing. Thus if we follow the mutation in time and place of the English word "gentleman" (a derivative of our *gentilhomme*), we find its connotation being steadily widened in England as the classes draw nearer to each other and intermingle. In each successive century we find it being applied to men a little lower in the social scale. Next, with the English, it crosses to America. And now in America, it is applicable to all male citizens, indiscriminately. Thus its history is the history of democracy itself.[5]

Emma's snobbery, then, is nothing less than a contravention of the best—and safest—tendency of English social life. And to make matters worse, it is a principled snobbery. "A young farmer … is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel that I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it." This is carefully contrived by the author to seem as dreadful as possible; it quite staggers us, and some readers will even feel that the author goes too far in permitting Emma to make this speech.

Snobbery is the grossest fault that arises from Emma's self-love, but it is not the only fault. We must also take account of her capacity for unkindness. This can be impulsive and brutal, as in the witticism directed to Miss Bates at the picnic, which makes one of the most memorable scenes in the whole range of English fiction; or extended and systematic, as in her conspiracy with Frank Churchill to quiz Jane Fairfax. Then we know her to be a gossip, at least when she is tempted by Frank Churchill. She finds pleasure in dominating and has no compunctions about taking over the rule of Harriet Smith's life. She has been accused, on the ground of her own estimate of herself, of a want of tenderness, and she has even been said to be without sexual responsiveness.

Why, then, should anyone be kind to Emma? There are several reasons, of which one is that we come into an unusual intimacy with her. We see her in all the elaborateness of her mistakes, in all the details of her wrong conduct. The narrative technique of the novel brings us very close to her and makes us aware of each misstep she will make. The relation that develops between ourselves and her becomes a strange one—it is the relation that exists between our ideal self and our ordinary fallible self. We become Emma's helpless conscience, her unavailing guide. Her fault is the classic one of *hubris,* excessive pride, and it yields the classic result of blindness, of an inability to interpret experience to the end of perceiving reality, and we are aware of each false step, each wrong conclusion, that she will make. Our hand goes out to hold her back and set her straight, and we are distressed that it cannot reach her.

There is an intimacy anterior to this. We come close to Emma because, in a strange way, she permits us to—even invites us to—by being close to herself. When we have said that her fault is *hubris* or self-love, we must make an immediate modification, for her self-love, though it involves her in self-deception, does not lead her to the ultimate self-deception—she believes she is clever, she insists she is right, but she never says she is good. A consciousness is always at work in her, a sense of what she ought to be and do. It is not an infallible sense, anything but that, yet she does not need us, or the author, or Mr. Knightley, to tell her, for example, that she is jealous of Jane Fairfax and acts badly to her; indeed, "she never saw [Jane Fairfax] without feeling that she had injured her." She is never offended—she never takes the high self-defensive line—when once her bad conduct is made apparent to her. Her sense of her superiority leads her to the

"insufferable vanity" of believing "herself in the secret of every-body's feelings" and to the "unpardonable arrogance" of "proposing to arrange everybody's destiny," yet it is an innocent vanity and an innocent arrogance which, when frustrated and exposed, do not make her bitter but only ashamed. That is why, bad as her behavior may be, we are willing to be implicated in it. It has been thought that in the portrait of Emma there is "an air of confession," that Jane Austen was taking account of "something offensive" that she and others had observed in her own earlier manner and conduct, and whether or not this is so, it suggests the quality of intimacy which the author contrives that we shall feel with the heroine.

Then, when we try to explain our feeling of kindness to Emma, we ought to remember that many of her wrong judgments and actions are directed to a very engaging end, a very right purpose. She believes in her own distinction and vividness and she wants all around her to be distinguished and vivid. It is indeed unpardonable arrogance, as she comes to see, that she should undertake to arrange Harriet Smith's destiny, that she plans to "form" Harriet, making her, as it were, the mere material or stuff of a creative act. Yet the destiny is not meanly conceived, the act is meant to be truly creative—she wants Harriet to be a distinguished and not a commonplace person, she wants nothing to be commonplace, she requires of life that it be well shaped and impressive, and alive. It is out of her insistence that the members of the picnic shall cease being dull and begin to be witty that there comes her famous insult to Miss Bates. Her requirement that life be vivid is too often expressed in terms of social deportment—she sometimes talks like a governess or a dowager—but it is, in its essence, a poet's demand.

She herself says that she lacks tenderness, although she makes the self-accusation in her odd belief that Harriet possesses this quality; Harriet is soft and "feminine," but she is not tender. Professor Mudrick associates the deficiency with Emma's being not susceptible to men. This is perhaps so; but if it is, there may be found in her apparent sexual coolness something that is impressive and right. She makes great play about the feelings and about the fineness of the feelings that one ought to have; she sets great store by literature (although she does not read the books she prescribes for herself) and makes it a condemnation of Robert Martin that he does not read novels. Yet although, like Don Quixote and Emma Bovary, her mind is shaped and deceived by fiction, she is remarkable for the actuality and truth of her sexual feelings. Inevitably she expects that Frank Churchill will fall in love with her and she with him, but others are more deceived in the outcome of this expectation than she is—it takes but little time for her to see that she does not really respond to Churchill, that her feeling for him is no more than the lively notice that an attractive and vivacious girl takes of an attractive and vivacious young man. Sentimental sexuality is not part of her nature, however much she feels it ought to be part of Harriet Smith's nature. When the right time comes, she chooses her husband wisely and seriously and eagerly.

There is, then, sufficient reason to be kind to Emma, and perhaps for nothing so much as the hope she expresses when she begins to understand her mistakes, that she will become "more acquainted with herself." And, indeed, all through the novel she has sought better acquaintance with herself, not wisely, not adequately, but assiduously. How modern a quest it is, and how thoroughy it confirms Dr. Leavis's judgment that Jane Austen is the first truly modern novelist of England. "In art," a critic has said, "the decision to be revolutionary usually counts for very little. The most radical changes have come from personalities who were conservative and even conventional …"[6] Jane Austen, conservative and even conventional as she was, perceived the nature of the deep psychological change which accompanied the establishment of democratic society—she was aware of the increase of the psychological burden of the individual, she understood the new necessity of conscious self-definition and self-criticism, the need to make private judgments of reality.[7] And there is no reality about which the modern person is more uncertain and more anxious than the reality of himself.

III

But the character of Emma is not the only reason for the difficulty of the novel. We must also take into account the particular genre to which the novel in some degree belongs—the pastoral idyll. It is an archaic genre which has the effect of emphasizing by contrast the brilliant modernity of Emma, and its nature may be understood through the characters of Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates.

These two people proved a stumbling-block to one of Jane Austen's most distinguished and devoted admirers, Sir Walter Scott. In his review of *Emma* in *The Quarterly Review,* Scott said that "characters of folly and simplicity, such as old Woodhouse and Miss Bates" are "apt to become tiresome in fiction as in real society." But Scott is wrong. Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates are remarkably interesting, even though they have been created on a system of character portrayal that is no longer supposed to have validity—they exist by reason of a single trait which they display whenever they appear. Miss Bates is possessed of continuous speech and of a perfectly free association of ideas which is quite beyond her control; once launched into utterance, it is impossible for her to stop. Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father, has no other purpose in life than to preserve his health and equanimity, and no other subject of conversation than the means of doing so. The commonest circumstances of life present themselves to him as dangerous—to walk or to drive is to incur unwarrantable risk, to eat an egg not coddled in the prescribed way is to invite misery; nothing must ever change in his familial situation; he is appalled by the propensity of young people to marry, and to marry *strangers* at that.

Of the two "characters of folly and simplicity," Mr. Woodhouse is the more remarkable because he so entirely, so extravagantly, embodies a principle—of perfect stasis, of entire inertia. Almost in the degree that Jane Austen was interested in the ideal of personal energy, she was amused and attracted by persons capable of extreme inertness. She does not judge them harshly, as we incline to do—we who scarcely recall how important a part in Christian feeling the dream of *rest* once had. Mr. Woodhouse is a more extreme representation of inertness than Lady Bertram of *Mansfield Park.* To say that he represents a denial of life would not be correct. Indeed, by his fear and his movelessness, he affirms life and announces his naked unadorned wish to avoid death and harm. To life, to mere life, he sacrifices almost everything.

But if Mr. Woodhouse has a more speculative interest than Miss Bates, there is not much to choose between their achieved actuality as fictional characters. They are, as I have said, created on a system of character portrayal that we regard as primitive, but the reality of existence which fictional characters may claim does not depend only upon what they do, but also upon what others do to or about them, upon the way they are regarded and responded to. And in the community of Highbury, Miss Bates and Mr. Wood-house are sacred. They are fools, to be sure, as everyone knows. But they are fools of a special and transcendent kind. They are innocents—of such is the kingdom of heaven. They are children, who have learned nothing of the guile of the world. And their mode of existence is the key to the nature of the world of Highbury, which is the world of the pastoral idyll. London is but sixteen miles away—Frank Churchill can ride there and back for a haircut—but the proximity of the life of London serves but to emphasize the spiritual geography of Highbury. The weather plays a great part in *Emma*; in no other novel of Jane Austen's is the succession of the seasons, and cold and heat, of such consequence, as if to make the point which the pastoral idyll characteristically makes, that the only hardships that man ought to have to endure are meteorological. In the Forest of Arden we suffer only "the penalty of Adam, / The seasons' difference," and Amiens' song echoes the Duke's words:

> Here shall he see
> No enemy
> But winter and rough weather.

Some explicit thought of the pastoral idyll is in Jane Austen's mind, and with all the ambivalence that marks the attitude of *As You Like It* toward the dream of man's life in nature and simplicity. Mrs. Elton wants to make the strawberry party at Donwell Abbey into a *fête champêtre:* "It is to be a morning scheme, you know, Knightley; quite a simple thing. I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here,—probably this basket with pink ribbon. Nothing can be more simple, you see. And Jane will have

such another. There is to be no form or parade—a sort of gipsy party.—We are to walk about your gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees;—and whatever else you may like to provide, it is to be all out of doors—a table spread in the shade, you know. Every thing as natural and simple as possible. Is not that your idea?" To which Knightley replies: "Not quite. My idea of the simple and natural will be to have the table spread in the dining-room. The nature and the simplicity of gentlemen and ladies, with their servants and furniture, I think is best observed by meals within doors. When you are tired of eating strawberries in the garden, there will be cold meat in the house."

That the pastoral idyll should be mocked as a sentimentality by its association with Mrs. Elton, whose vulgarity in large part consists in flaunting the cheapened version of high and delicate ideals, and that Knightley should answer her as he does—this is quite in accordance with our expectation of Jane Austen's judgment. Yet it is only a few pages later that the members of the party walk out to see the view and we get that curious passage about the sweetness of the view, "sweet to the eye and to the mind." And we cannot help feeling that "English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive" make an England seen—if but for the moment—as an idyll.

The idyll is not a genre which nowadays we are likely to understand. Or at least not in fiction, the art which we believe must always address itself to actuality. The imagination of felicity is difficult for us to exercise. We feel that it is a betrayal of our awareness of our world of pain, that it is politically inappropriate. And yet one considerable critic of literature thought otherwise. Schiller is not exactly of our time, yet he is remarkably close to us in many ways and he inhabited a world scarcely less painful than ours, and he thought that the genre of the idyll had an important bearing upon social and political ideas. As Schiller defines it, the idyll is the literary genre that "presents the idea and description of an innocent and happy humanity."[8] This implies remoteness from the "artificial refinements of fashionable society"; and to achieve this remoteness poets have commonly set their idylls in actually pastoral surroundings and in the infancy of humanity. But the limitation is merely accidental—these circumstances "do not form the object of the idyll, but are only to be regarded as the most natural means to attain this end. The end is essentially to portray man in a state of innocence, which means a state of harmony and peace with himself and the external world." And Schiller goes on to assert the political importance of the genre: "A state such as this is not merely met with before the dawn of civilization; it is also the state to which civilization aspires, as to its last end, if only it obeys a determined tendency in its progress. The idea of a similar state, and the belief in the possible reality of this state, is the only thing that can reconcile man with all the evils to which he is exposed in the path of civilization.…"

It is the poet's function—Schiller makes it virtually the poet's political duty—to represent the idea of innocence in a "sensuous" way, that is, to make it seem real. This he does by gathering up the elements of actual life that do partake of innocence, and that the predominant pain of life leads us to forget, and forming them into a coherent representation of the ideal.[9]

But the idyll as traditionally conceived has an aesthetic deficiency of which Schiller is quite aware. Works in this genre, he says, appeal to the heart but not to the mind. "… We can only seek them and love them in moments in which we need calm, and not when our faculties aspire after movement and exercise. A morbid mind will find its *cure* in them, a sound soul will not find its *food* in them. They cannot vivify, they can only soften." For the idyll excludes the idea of activity, which alone can satisfy the mind—or at least the idyll as it has been traditionally conceived makes this exclusion, but Schiller goes on to imagine a transmutation of the genre in which the characteristic calm of the idyll shall be "the calm that follows accomplishment, not the calm of indolence—the calm that comes from the equilibrium reestablished between the faculties and not from the suspending of their exercise.…"

It is strange that Schiller, as he projects this new and as yet unrealized idea, does not recur to what he has previously said about comedy. To the soul of the writer of tragedy he assigns the adjective "sublime," which for him implies reaching greatness by intense effort and strength of will; to the soul of the writer of comedy he

assigns the adjective "beautiful," which implies the achievement of freedom by an activity which is easy and natural. "The noble task of comedy," he says, "is to produce and keep up in us this freedom of mind." Comedy and the idyll, then, would seem to have a natural affinity with each other. Schiller does not observe this, but Shakespeare knew it—the curious power and charm of *As You Like It* consists of bringing the idyll and comedy together, of making the idyll the subject of comedy, even of satire, yet without negating it. The mind teases the heart, but does not mock it. The unconditioned freedom that the idyll hypothecates is shown to be impossible, yet in the demonstration a measure of freedom is gained.

So in *Emma* Jane Austen contrives an idyllic world, or the closest approximation of an idyllic world that the genre of the novel will permit, and brings into contrast with it the actualities of the social world, of the modern self. In the precincts of Highbury there are no bad people, and no adverse judgments to be made. Only a modern critic, Professor Mudrick, would think to call Mr. Woodhouse an idiot and an old woman: in the novel he is called "the kind-hearted, polite old gentleman." Only Emma, with her modern consciousness, comes out with it that Miss Bates is a bore, and only Emma can give herself to the thought that Mr. Weston is *too* simple and open-hearted, that he would be a "higher character" if he were not quite so friendly with everyone. It is from outside Highbury that the peculiarly modern traits of insincerity and vulgarity come, in the person of Frank Churchill and Mrs. Elton. With the exception of Emma herself, every person in Highbury lives in harmony and peace—even Mr. Elton would have been all right if Emma had let him alone!—and not merely because they are simple and undeveloped: Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston are no less innocent than Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates. If they please us and do not bore us by a perfection of manner and feeling which is at once lofty and homely, it is because we accept the assumptions of the idyllic world which they inhabit—we have been led to believe that man may actually live "in harmony and peace with himself and the external world."

The quiet of Highbury, the unperturbed spirits of Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates, the instructive perfection of Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston, constitute much of the charm of *Emma.* Yet the idyllic stillness of the scene and the loving celebration of what, for better or worse, is fully formed and changeless, is of course not what is decisive in the success of the novel. On the contrary, indeed: it is the idea of activity and development that is decisive. No one has put better and more eloquently what part this idea plays in Jane Austen's work than an anonymous critic writing in *The North British Review* in 1870:[10]

> Even as a unit, man is only known to [Jane Austen] in the process of his formation by social influences. She broods over his history, not over his individual soul and its secret workings, nor over the analysis of its faculties and organs. She sees him, not as a solitary being completed in himself, but only as completed in society. Again, she contemplates virtues, not as fixed quantities, or as definable qualities, but as continual struggles and conquests, as progressive states of mind, advancing by repulsing their contraries, or losing ground by being overcome. Hence again the individual mind can only be represented by her as a battle-field where contending hosts are marshalled, and where victory inclines now to one side and now to another. A character therefore unfolded itself to her, not in statuesque repose, not as a model without motion, but as a dramatic sketch, a living history, a composite force, which could only exhibit what it was by exhibiting what it did. Her favourite poet Cowper taught her,
>
> "By ceaseless action all that is subsists."

The mind as a battlefield: it does not consort with some of the views of Jane Austen that are commonly held. Yet this is indeed how she understood the mind. And her representation of battle is the truer because she could imagine the possibility of victory—she did not shrink from the idea of victory—and because she could represent harmony and peace.

The anonymous critic of *The North British Review* goes on to say a strange and startling thing—he says that the mind of Jane Austen was "saturated" with a "Platonic idea." In speaking of her ideal of "intelligent love"—the phrase is perfect—he says that it is based on the "Platonic idea that the giving and receiving of knowledge, the active formation of another's character, or the more passive growth under another's guidance, is the truest and strongest foundation of love."[11] It is an ideal that not all of us will think possible of realization and that some of us will not want to give even a theoretical assent to. Yet most of us will consent to think of it as one of the most attractive of the idyllic elements of the novel. It proposes to us the hope of victory in the battle that the mind must wage, and it speaks of the expectation of allies in the fight, of the possibility of community—not in actuality, not now, but perhaps again in the future, for do we not believe, or almost believe, that there was community in the past?

The impulse to believe that the world of Jane Austen really did exist leads to notable error. "Jane Austen's England" is the thoughtless phrase which is often made to stand for the England of the years in which our author lived, although any serious history will make it sufficiently clear that the England of her novels was not the real England, except as it gave her the license to imagine the England which we call hers. This England, especially as it is represented in *Emma,* is an idyll. The error of identifying it with the actual England ought always to be remarked. Yet the same sense of actuality that corrects the error should not fail to recognize the remarkable force of the ideal that leads many to make the error. To represent the possibility of controlling the personal life, of becoming acquainted with ourselves, of creating a community of "intelligent love"—this is indeed to make an extraordinary promise and hold out a rare hope. We ought not be shocked and repelled if some among us think there really was a time when such promises and hopes were realized. Nor ought we be entirely surprised if, when they speak of the person who makes such promises and holds out such hopes, they represent her as not merely a novelist, if they find it natural to deal with her as a figure of legend and myth.

Notes

1. *The Question of Our Speech; The Lesson of Balzac: Two Lectures,* 1905.
2. "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," *Scrutiny* VIII, March 1940.
3. *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery,* 1952.
4. "Jane Austen," *Quarterly Review* 228, July 1917.
5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution,* Anchor edition, pp. 82-83. Tocqueville should not be understood as saying that there was no class system in England but only that there was no caste system, caste differing from class in its far greater rigidity. In his sense of the great advantage that England enjoyed, as compared with France, in having no caste system, Tocqueville inclines to represent the class feelings of the English as being considerably more lenient than in fact they were. Still, the difference between caste and class and the social and political importance of the "gentleman" are as great as Tocqueville says.
6. Harold Rosenberg, "Revolution and the Idea of Beauty," *Encounter,* December 1953.
7. See Abram Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society,* 1945, page 410. In commenting on the relatively simple society which is described in James West's *Plainville, U.S.A.,* Dr. Kardiner touches on a matter which is dear, and all too dear, to Emma's heart—speaking of social mobility in a democratic, but not classless, society, he says that the most important criterion of class is "manners," that "knowing how to behave" is the surest means of rising in the class hierarchy. Nothing is more indicative of Jane Austen's accurate awareness of the mobility of her society than her concern not so much with manners themselves as with her characters' concern with manners.
8. "On Simple and Sentimental Poetry" in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical,* 1875.
9. Schiller, in speaking of the effectiveness that the idyll should have, does not refer to the pastoral-idyllic element of Christianity which represents Christ as an actual shepherd.
10. Volume LXXII, April, pp. 129-152. I am grateful to Professor Joseph Duffy for having told me of this admirable study.

11. Emma's attempt to form the character of Harriet is thus a perversion of the relation of Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley to herself—it is a perversion, says the *North British* critic, adducing Dante's *"amoroso uso de sapienza,"* because it is without love.

Title Commentary: Pride and Prejudice

SUSAN FRAIMAN (ESSAY DATE 1989)

SOURCE: Fraiman, Susan. "The Humiliation of Elizabeth Bennett." In *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy,* edited by Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, pp. 168-87. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989.

In the following essay, Fraiman views Mr. Darcy of Pride and Prejudice *as a father figure for Elizabeth Bennett and therefore reads the novel as transferring patriarchal power from one generation to the next as Elizabeth passes from her father's care to Darcy's.*

I belong to a generation of American feminist critics taught to read by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) both focused our regard on women writers of the nineteenth century and formed in us invaluable habits of attention. It alerted us to eccentric characters, figures off to the side, to the lunatic fringe. We learned to see certain transients—required by the plot to move on before things can work out—as feminist doubles for the author as well as heroine. Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice,* unexemplary as they are expendable, register nonetheless the screams and tantrums of Charlotte Brontë's and Jane Austen's own rage. These marginal women voice anger and defiance that split open ostensibly decorous texts.

I want, in keeping with this tradition, to stress the accents of defiance in *Pride and Prejudice,* but I locate these less at the edges than at the very center of the book; my argument concerns the much-admired Elizabeth Bennet and the two major men in her life, Mr. Bennet and Mr. Darcy. I read *Pride and Prejudice* as the ceding of Mr. Bennet's paternity to Mr. Darcy, with a consequent loss of clout for Elizabeth. Austen's novel documents the collapse of an initially enabling father into a father figure who, in keeping with his excessive social authority, tends to be rather disabling. As Elizabeth passes from Bennet to Darcy, her authorial powers wane: she goes from shaping judgments to being shaped by them. I want to look at Elizabeth's gradual devaluation, her humiliation, in terms of this double father.[1] Austen, I believe, stands back from her decline, ironizing both the onset of marriage and the father-daughter relation. She shows us a form of violence against women that is not hidden away in the attic, displaced onto some secondary figure, but downstairs in the drawing room involving the heroine herself.

Elizabeth's first father is a reclusive man and seemingly ineffectual; beside the rigid figure of *Northanger Abbey*'s General Tilney, Mr. Bennet may well appear flimsy. But the general (his love of new gadgets notwithstanding) is an old-fashioned father whose authoritarian style was all but outmoded by the end of the eighteenth century.[2] Mr. Bennet is not really a bad father—just a modern one, in the manner of Locke's influential text on education. Smoothbrowed advocate of instruction over discipline and reason over force, he typifies the Lockean father. As Jay Fliegelman points out, however, Locke's concern "is not with circumscribing paternal authority, but with rendering it more effective by making it noncoercive."[3] Mr. Bennet, apparently benign to the point of irresponsibility, may seem to wield nothing sharper than his sarcasm. But what he actually wields is the covert power of the Lockean patriarch, all the more effective for its subtlety.

This aloof, unseen power of Mr. Bennet's suggests to me, for several reasons, the peculiar power of an author. His disposition is emphatically literary. Taking refuge from the world in his library, Mr. Bennet prefers the

inner to the outer life, books to people. He asks two things only: the free use of his understanding and his room—precisely those things Virginia Woolf associates with the privilege of the male writer, the privation of the female. Most important, among women whose solace is news, he keeps the upper hand by withholding information. Mr. Bennet is a creator of suspense. In the opening scene, for example, he refuses to visit the new bachelor in town, deliberately frustrating Mrs. Bennet's expectation and desire. Actually, "he had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid, she had no knowledge of it."[4] Mr. Bennet relishes the power to contain her pleasure and finally, with his dénouement, to relieve and enrapture her.

But the suspense is not over. Elizabeth's father is, even then, as stingy with physical description as some fathers are with pocket money. He controls his family by being not tight-fisted but tight-lipped, and in this he resembles Austen herself. George Lewes first noted the remarkable paucity of concrete details in Austen, her reluctance to tell us what people, their clothes, their houses or gardens look like.[5] If female readers flocked to Richardson for Pamela's meticulous descriptions of what she packed in her trunk, they must surely have been frustrated by Austen's reticence here.[6] So Mr. Bennet only follows Austen when, secretive about Bingley's person and estate, he keeps the ladies in the dark. Their curiosity is finally gratified by another, less plain-styled father, Sir William Lucas, whose report they receive "second-hand" from Lady Lucas. Much as women talk in this novel, the flow of important words (of "intelligence") is regulated largely by men. In this verbal economy, women get the trickle-down of news.

FROM THE AUTHOR

AUSTEN EXPLAINS HER REASONS FOR KEEPING TO THE NARROW SUBJECT OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE

You are very very kind in your hints as to the sort of composition which might recommend me at present, and I am fully sensible that an historical romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg, might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life in country villages as I deal in. But 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 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.

Austen, Jane. Letter to James Stanier Clarke of April 1, 1816. In *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others,* 2nd ed. Edited by R. W. Chapman, pp. 452-58. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.

When Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, Mr. Bennet again contrives to keep his audience hanging. Pretending to support his wife, he hides until the last moment his real intention of contradicting her. After a stern prologue he continues: "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*" (112). Not only this particular manipulation but indeed the entire scene goes to show the efficacy of paternal words. Throughout his proposal, to Elizabeth's distress and our amusement, Mr. Collins completely ignores her many impassioned refusals. He discounts what she says as "merely words of course" (108); even his dim, self-mired mind perceives that a lady's word carries no definitive weight. Mr. Collins accuses Elizabeth of wishing to increase his love "by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females" (108). Yet creating suspense is exactly what Elizabeth, rhetorically unreliable, cannot do. She has no choice but "to apply to her father, whose negative might be uttered in such a manner as must be decisive" (109). Mr. Bennet's power resides, as I say, in his authorial prerogative: his right to have the last word.

Though Mr. Bennet uses this right to disparage and disappoint his wife, regarding his daughter he uses it rather to praise, protect, apparently to enable her. Like many heroines in women's fiction (think of Emma Woodhouse or Maggie Tulliver) Elizabeth has a special relationship to her father. She is immediately distinguished as a family member and as a character by his preference for her and hers for him. The entail notwithstanding, she is in many respects his heir. To her he bequeaths his ironic distance from the world, the habit of studying and appraising those around him, the role of social critic. In this role, father and daughter together scan Mr. Collins's letter, dismissing man and letter with a few, skeptical words. Mr. Bennet enables Elizabeth by sharing with her his authorial mandate, which is Austen's own: to frame a moral discourse and judge characters accordingly. Through her father, Elizabeth gains provisional access to certain authorial powers.

But Mr. Bennet also shares with her, illogically enough, his disdain for women; he respects Elizabeth only because she is unlike other girls. This puts his exceptional daughter in an awkward position—bonding with her father means breaking with her mother, even reneging on femaleness altogether. Elizabeth is less a daughter than a surrogate son. Like a son, by giving up the mother and giving in to the father, she reaps the spoils of maleness. We can understand her, alternatively, in terms of Freud's scheme for girls. Freud contends that girls first turn to the father because they want a penis like his. They envy, as Karen Horney explained, the social power this organ signifies under patriarchy.[7] To complete their oedipal task, however, girls must shift from wanting a penis for themselves to wanting a man who has one; ceasing to identify with the powerful father, they must accept instead their own "castration."[8] In these terms the cocky Elizabeth we first encounter is charmingly arrested in the early phase of male-identification. We can see her, then, in one of two ways: as an honorary boy who has completed his oedipal task, or as a backward, wayward girl who refuses to complete hers.

The point is, first, that whatever discursive acuity Elizabeth has derives from an alliance and identification with her father. As the Mr. Collins scene demonstrates, the force of her words is highly contingent. Elizabeth's authority is vicarious, second-hand; like a woman writing under a male pseudonym, her credibility depends on the father's signature. In addition, however enabling, Mr. Bennet is essentially ambivalent toward Elizabeth. "They have none of them much to recommend them," he says of his daughters in chapter I. "They are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters" (5). Insisting that all of his daughters are silly and ignorant, that none of them have much to recommend them, Mr. Bennet blithely classes Elizabeth with "other girls," even as he appears to distinguish her from them. So we find, already in the opening scene, a tension between Elizabeth's "masculine" alacrity and the slow-witted "femininity" threatening to claim her. Mr. Bennet's double vision of her suggests right away the basic ambiguity of Austen's father-daughter relationship, coded not only diachronically in the Mr. Bennet-Mr. Darcy sequence, but also synchronically in Mr. Bennet's duplicity regarding Elizabeth.

For in Austen the male-bonding between father and daughter is set up to collapse. Eventually the economic reality asserts itself, the axiom of the famous first line held up to a mirror and read backward: a single woman not in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a husband. Sooner or later what Adrienne Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality" (conspiracy of economic need and the ideology of romance) forces Elizabeth out of the library, into the ballroom, and finally up to the altar.[9] The father's business in this ritual is to give the daughter away. If Mr. Bennet is enabling up to a point, the marriage ceremony requires him to objectify his daughter and hand her over. He not only withdraws his protection and empowerment, but also gives away (reveals) her true "castrated" gender, her incapacity for action in a phallocentric society. This ceremony—posing father as giver, daughter as gift—underlies and ultimately belies the father-daughter relationship in *Pride and Prejudice*.

So Elizabeth's gradual falling out with her father, which means forfeiting her authorial status, is built into the institution of marriage. Austen makes it quite clear that Mr. Bennet neglects Lydia, failing to protect her from ruinous male designs. Yet, is not the father's letting go of the daughter precisely what the wedding ritual

requires?[10] Mr. Bennet's profligacy with Lydia is simply a starker form of his cheerful readiness to give away any and all of his daughters. "I will send a few lines by you," he tells his wife, "to assure [Bingley] of my hearty consent to his marrying which ever he chuses of the girls" (4). Exposing a pattern intrinsic to the nuptial plot, Mr. Bennet's abandonment of Lydia provides a crude paradigm for Elizabeth's milder estrangement from her father and for the literal distance between father and heroine in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park.*[11] Bennet, by retiring as Elizabeth's champion, is not ineffectual as a father, but correct.

In his discussion of marriage and the incest taboo, Lévi-Strauss proposes that the exchange of women among kin groups serves, like the exchange of money or words, to negotiate relationships among men. Women are, in effect, a kind of currency whose circulation binds and organizes male society.[12] It seems to me that *Pride and Prejudice* offers a similar anthropology. Here, too, marriage betrays the tie between father and daughter in favor of ties among men. I have the idea that Elizabeth's economic imperative is not the only motive for her marriage, that the fathers have an agenda of their own, involving considerations of class.

Mr. Bennet's class interest in a Bennet-Darcy match is fairly obvious and similar to Elizabeth's own. He may laugh at Mrs. Bennet's schemes, but the fact remains that a liaison to aristocracy will benefit him significantly. And in spite of his philosophic detachment, Mr. Bennet is not without a streak of pragmatism—after all, he has always intended to visit Mr. Bingley. Nor is he unimpressed by wealth and rank. He is frankly delighted that Darcy has used his money and influence to straighten out the Lydia-Wickham affair. "So much the better," he exults. "It will save me a world of trouble and economy" (377). Sounding even, for a moment, strangely like Mr. Collins, he consents to Elizabeth's marriage with little of his habitual irony. "I have given him my consent," he tells her. "He is the kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse any thing, which he condescended to ask" (376).

Though Mr. Darcy's class interests may seem to rule against a connection to the Bennets, they too are subtly at work here. In her remarks on eighteenth-century marriage, Mary Poovey notes that Cinderella matches frequently allayed not only middle-class status anxiety, but also the financial anxiety increasingly rife among the well-born.[13] Cinderella's family may be obscure, but her share in merchant profits is attractive to a prince who is poor. Austen does not fully represent, until *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot, the material as well as moral impoverishment of the landed class in her day. Yet as early as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) she gives us Willoughby who, unsure of his aristocratic heritage, leaves Marianne for a certain Miss Grey with fifty thousand pounds. Of course in *Pride and Prejudice* cash flows the other way: Darcy has it and Elizabeth needs it. But a decline in aristocratic welfare is nevertheless suggested by the sickly Miss De Bourgh. It may well be the enfeeblement of his own class that encourages Darcy to look below him for a wife with greater stamina. As a figure for the ambitious bourgeoisie, Elizabeth pumps richer, more robust blood into the collapsing veins of the nobility, even as she boosts the social standing of her relatives in trade. Most important, however—to the patriarchs of both classes—she eases tensions between them. By neutralizing class antagonism, she promotes the political stability on which industrial prosperity depends.[14]

I turn, now, to the handing of Elizabeth from Bennet to Darcy, which is prefigured by a scene on the Lucas dance floor. Here Sir William Lucas stands in for Mr. Bennet, jockeying for power with Mr. Darcy, who has the upper hand. Sir William begins to despair, when suddenly he is "struck with the notion of doing a very gallant thing" (26). Laying claim to Elizabeth, he offers her up to Darcy as "a very desirable partner." Sir William understands that gift-giving can be an "idiom of competition." As anthropologist Gayle Rubin explains, there is power in creating indebtedness.[15] We imagine the three of them: Elizabeth between the two men, her hand held aloft by Lucas, Lucas eager to deposit it, Darcy "not unwilling to receive it" (26). The fathers' device here is synecdoche. Elizabeth is reduced to a *hand,* extended in friendship or hostility, the means of fraternal intercourse. Suddenly, however, Elizabeth pulls back. With startling resolution she withdraws herself from the debt nexus. Indeed, throughout much of the novel Elizabeth resists the conventional grammar of exchange. She would not only extract herself as object but, contesting the fathers' right to control the action, insert herself as subject. Saboteur, Elizabeth threatens to wreck the marriage

syntax. Needless to say, this makes for one of the stormier courtships in nineteenth-century fiction.

It was, as I have noted, Lévi-Strauss who first saw marriage as a triangulated moment, a woman exchanged between two (groups of) men. Gayle Rubin went on to identify this kind of traffic, its organization of a sex-gender system, as the basis for female subordination. But the immediate model for my placing such an exchange at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice* is provided by Eve Sedgwick; her recent book, *Between Men,* examines the way men bond across the bodies of women in a range of English texts.[16] Her mapping of "male homosocial desire" posits, however, an essentially passive female term. It imagines a triangle that is stable and uncontested; even women who begin active and ambitious, once drawn into the space between two men, fall automatically still. What I have tried to suggest above is that Elizabeth does not readily accept a merely pivotal role. The book stretches out because she puts up a fight before acceding (and never entirely) to the fathers' homosocial plot. The site of her resistance, as well as her compromise, is language.

This brings us to Mr. Darcy—a father by virtue of his age, class, and a paternalism extending to friends and dependents alike. A man given to long letters and polysyllables, a man with an excellent library and even hand, Darcy may also be seen as an aspiring authorial figure. If Bennet sets out to create suspense, Darcy hankers to resolve it. Their relation is one of literary rivals, with Elizabeth the prize. The complication is Elizabeth's own formidable way with words. As surrogate son, father's heir, Elizabeth is herself a contender for the authorial position. Instead of rewarding Darcy for his accession, she competes with him for it. In these terms, Elizabeth's and Darcy's matching of wits is more than flirtation—it is a struggle for control of the text. There are two heated and definitive moments in this struggle: Elizabeth's refusal of Darcy's first proposal and the day after, when he delivers his letter.

Chapter II of the second volume finds Elizabeth alone at the Collins's house in Kent. Concerned sister and conscientious reader, she is studying Jane's letters. Suddenly Darcy bursts in and blurts out a proposal, more an admission of weakness than a confession of love. The chapter closes by resuming Elizabeth's internal dialogue, "the tumult of her mind" (193) after Darcy's departure. But have we, throughout this chapter, been anywhere *but* in Elizabeth's mind? By all rights this should be Darcy's scene, his say. In fact, we get relatively few of his actual words. His amatory discourse is quickly taken over by a narrator who represents the scene, renders Darcy's language, from Elizabeth's point of view: "His sense of her inferiority … [was] dwelt on with a warmth which … was very unlikely to recommend his suit" (189). The text of Darcy's proposal is completely glossed, and glossed over, by her interpretation of it. Of Elizabeth's refusal, by contrast, Austen gives us every unmediated word, a direct quotation four times as long as that permitted Darcy. This sets the pattern for what follows. Every time Darcy opens his mouth, he is superseded by a speech of greater length and vehemence. She answers his question—Why is he so rudely rejected?—with a tougher question of her own: "I might as well enquire … why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I *was* uncivil?" (190). Conceding nothing, she accuses him at some length of everything: of breaking Jane's heart and unmaking Wickham's fortune, of earning and continually confirming her own dislike. She betters his scorn for her family by scorning him. "I have every reason in the world to think ill of you" (191), she asserts. Her language, her feelings, her judgments overwhelm his and put them to shame. They drive him to platitude, apology, and hasty retreat. This rhetorical round leaves Elizabeth clear victor.

The following day, however, she is obsessed by Darcy: "It was impossible to think of any thing else" (195). She receives his letter. As the man has crowded out all other thoughts, so now his letter crowds out all other words, monopolizing the narrative for the next seven pages. Longer than the entire preceding chapter, it completely dispels Elizabeth's inspired performance of the day before. If Darcy was not "master enough" of himself then, he regains his mastery now. He takes back his story and, in a play for literary hegemony (to be author and critic both), tells us how to read him. The letter is a defense of his judgment, its impartiality and authority. About Jane he insists: "My investigations and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or

fears.—I did not believe her to be indifferent because I wished it;—I believed it on impartial conviction" (197). As for Wickham, the letter documents Darcy's early suspicions and the events that proved him right. It further demonstrates the power of Darcy's moral discourse over others. Bingley has "a stronger dependence on [Darcy's] judgment than on his own" (199). Georgiana, fearing her brother's disapproval, decides not to elope after all.[17]

Only after Darcy's unabridged epistle do we get Elizabeth's response to it. She reads "with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes" (204). Darcy's letter saps her power to comprehend, disables her attention. It addresses her as reader only to *indispose* her as reader. At first Elizabeth protests: "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!" (204). She rushes through the letter and puts it away forever. But the text, unrelenting, demands to be taken out, read and reread. Against the broad chest of Darcy's logic, Elizabeth beats the ineffectual fists of her own. Putting down the paper, she "weighed every circumstance with what she meant to be impartiality … but with little success" (205). Her interruptions, procrastinations, do nothing to stop the inexorable drive of Darcy's narrative to its foregone conclusion. In what Roland Barthes might call its "processive haste," it sweeps away Elizabeth's objections and has its way with her.[18]

In its second sentence, the letter disclaims "any intention of paining" (196). It apologizes for wounding, yet proceeds all too knowingly to wound. There is indeed a disturbing insistence on its hurtfulness, a certain pleasurable recurrence to the violence of its effect. "Here again I shall give you pain" (200), the writer unhesitatingly announces. But now Darcy's determination to inflict seems matched by Elizabeth's to be afflicted. They coincide in their enthusiasm for her humiliation: "'How despicably have I acted!' she cried.—'I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!'" (208). Vindicating Darcy's judgment and debasing Elizabeth's, disqualifying her interpretation of things in favor of his, the letter leaves her "depressed beyond any thing she had ever known before" (209).

This is the point, the dead center, on which the whole book turns. Darcy's botched proposal marks the nadir of his career, after which, launched by his letter, he rises up from infamy in an arc that approaches apotheosis. In the ensuing chapters he turns deus ex machina, exerting an implausible power to set everything straight—a power Mr. Bennet conspicuously lacks. It is Darcy who arranges for three lucky couples to be, each, the happiest couple in the world. Like the authorial persona of *Northanger Abbey,* Darcy herds us all to "perfect felicity." The nature of his unseen influence is precisely authorial. Darcy's letter proves his textual prowess. At this point he succeeds Mr. Bennet as controlling literary figure and displaces Elizabeth as her father's scion. From now on the pen, as *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot might say, is in his hands.

Soon after receiving Darcy's letter, Elizabeth meets up with Kitty and Lydia. Officer-crazy as ever, Lydia gushes on about Brighton and her plans to join the regiment there for its summer encampment. This first reference to Brighton unfolds into an unexpectedly earnest seduction plot that might seem more at home in a novel by Richardson or Burney. It is latent, however, in Lydia's very character, throwback to those too sentimental heroines so mercilessly parodied by Austen's juvenilia. That such a plot should surface now, seize center page and, brash as its heroine, hold the spotlight for more than seven chapters, is by no means accidental. The Lydia-Wickham imbroglio creates, for one thing, a situation before which Mr. Bennet will prove inadequate, Mr. Darcy heroic. Elizabeth first doubts her father regarding his decision to let Lydia go to Brighton, and she blames her father bitterly for the subsequent scandal. For Mr. Darcy, by contrast, the calamity is a chance to prove his nobility both of heart and of purse, his desire to rectify and his power to do so. The Lydia plot therefore accomplishes Elizabeth's separation from her father and her reattachment to another. It works a changing of the paternal guard.

By showcasing Darcy, the upstart plot that seems to delay and even briefly to replace Elizabeth's and Darcy's courtship serves actually to advance it. Yet there is another reason that Lydia's story, a classic case of seduction, moves into the foreground at this moment. It fills the curious gap between Elizabeth's first, private softening and her final, public surrender. I would argue that, at this juncture, Elizabeth's narrative is displaced onto that of her sister. Lydia's seduction registers an emotional drama—of coercion, capitulation, and lamentation—missing from but underlying Elizabeth's story proper. Of course Elizabeth is a foil for Lydia, one sister's wisdom held up to the other's folly. Yet there remains a sense in which their positions are scandalously similar. At one point, in response to Lydia's rudeness, Elizabeth admits, "However incapable of such coarseness of *expression* herself, the coarseness of the *sentiment* was little other than her own breast had formerly harbored" (220). And perhaps this is more generally the case: that Elizabeth and Lydia differ more in *style* than in substance. In other words, far from being an alternative plot, Lydia's is, albeit in cruder terms, a parallel one. Like the interpolated tales in that protonovel *Don Quixote,* Lydia's tale works less to distract from the central narrative than to distill its meaning. It does not defer Elizabeth's progress toward marriage so much as code the seduction and surrender on which her marriage relies.

We leave Elizabeth at the end of volume 2, chapter 13, completely, under Darcy's influence. "She could think only of her letter" (209). As the next chapter explains, "Mr. Darcy's letter, she was in a fair way of soon knowing by heart" (212). The unusual syntax here is succinct indication of the new order—Mr. Darcy and his text come pointedly before Elizabeth, would-be subject. The narrator continues, "When she remembered the style of his address, she was still full of indignation; but when she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him, her anger was turned against herself" (212). Elizabeth's reversal here, the introversion of her anger, is again revealing. Her initial judgment of Darcy is now recanted as unjust, its accusation redirected against herself.

When we first meet Elizabeth, daughter of a social critic resembling Austen herself, she is proud of her ability to know things deeply and to judge them knowingly. Yet by the end of the novel she claims only to be high-spirited. Sorry to have refused Darcy, she longs to be schooled by his better judgment: "By her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance" (312). It should not surprise us to find, in an Austen novel, that judgment, information, and knowledge rate higher than ease and liveliness. While these are all Austen's professional virtues, the former are fundamental to her moral lexicon.[19] (Thus her impatience with Jane's dumb neutrality.) What may surprise and sadden us, however, is that a heroine who began so competent to judge should end up so critically disabled, so reliant for judgment on somebody else. Not that Elizabeth lapses into sheer Lydiacy. Just that by the closing chapters her eye is less bold, her tongue less sharp, the angularity—distinguishing her from the rest of her more comfortably curvaceous sex—less acute.

According to one critical truism, *Pride and Prejudice* achieves a kind of bilateral disarmament: Elizabeth gives up her prejudice, while Darcy relinquishes his pride.[20] I am arguing, however, that Darcy woos away not Elizabeth's "prejudice," but her judgment entire. While Darcy defends the impartiality of his opinion, Elizabeth confesses the partiality and thus worthlessness of hers. His representation of the world is taken to be objective, raised to the level of universality; hers is taken to be subjective—*prejudiced*—and dismissed. True, Elizabeth was wrong about Wick-ham. But was she really that wrong about Darcy? He may warm up a bit, and his integrity is rightly affirmed, yet the fact remains that he is hardly less arrogant than Elizabeth at first supposed. Her comment to Fitzwilliam can stand: "I do not know any body who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr. Darcy" (183).

And is Darcy's own record of accuracy much better? His judgment of Jane is just as mistaken, and as partial, as Elizabeth's of Wickham. Yet his credibility remains intact. Finally admitting to having misinterpreted Jane, Darcy explains that he was corrected not by Elizabeth, but by his own subsequent observations (371). On the basis of his new appraisal he readvises the ever-pliant Bingley. His error, far from disqualifying him to judge,

only qualifies him to judge again. Elizabeth's error, on the other hand, is irreparably discrediting. What happens in *Pride and Prejudice* is not that an essentially prejudiced character finally sees the error of her ways. Rather, a character initially presented as reliable, who gains our and Austen's respect precisely for her clear-sightedness, is ultimately represented as prejudiced. The real drama lies not in the heroine's "awakening" to her true identity, but in the text's reidentification of her.

If Elizabeth does not overcome her "prejudice," neither does Darcy abandon his pride. Early in the book Elizabeth declares, "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*" (20). Yet by the last volume her feelings have changed considerably: "They owed the restoration of Lydia, her character, every thing to him. Oh! how heartily did she grieve over every ungracious sensation she had ever encouraged, every saucy speech she had ever directed towards him. For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him" (326-27). Elizabeth and Darcy begin skeptical of each other, proud of themselves, and they reach a connubial consensus that is altogether different: at last both are skeptical of her, both proud of him.

But wait. Does not Darcy make a pretty speech to his bride confessing, "By you, I was properly humbled" (369)? Here it is useful to see how the text itself defines "pride," and how this definition relates to Mr. Darcy. The bookish Mary—another figure for Austen, if a self-mocking one—distinguishes "pride" from "vanity": "Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us" (20). As for Darcy, Charlotte Lucas suggests that his pride is excusable: "One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favor, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a *right* to be proud" (20). A younger Lucas puts it more bluntly: "If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy … I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day" (20). The practical Lucases have a point. Darcy's richness gives him if not a "right," then a careless readiness to be proud. A man in his social position need not consider any opinion but his own. Darcy is proud because he does not have to be vain—others' opinions do not affect him. His pride, we might say, comes with the territory. It is less a psychological attribute than a social one, and as such it is only heightened by Darcy's enhanced status—as husband, hero, and authorial figure—in *Pride and Prejudice*'s last act.

Of course we continue to admire Elizabeth. She may care for Darcy's regard, but she is not so utterly enslaved by it as Miss Bingley. She may hesitate to laugh at Darcy, but she does show Georgiana that a wife may take (some) liberties. We admire her because she is not Charlotte, because she is not Lydia. I am insisting, however, that Elizabeth is a better friend to Charlotte, a closer sister to Lydia—that her story runs more parallel to theirs—than previous readings have indicated. The three women live in the same town, share the same gossip, attend the same balls—why, as some critics have claimed, should Elizabeth alone be above the social decree?[21] There are, in Elizabeth's marriage, elements both of crass practicality and of coercion. Elizabeth is appalled by Charlotte's pragmatism, and yet, choosing Darcy over Wickham, she is herself beguiled by the entrepreneurial marriage plot.[22] If she is embarrassed by her personal connection to Lydia, she is also implicated by the formal intersection of their plots: in the course of the novel she loses not her virginity but her authority.

Elizabeth marries a decent man and a large estate, but at a certain cost. Though she may stretch the marriage contract, it binds her nonetheless to a paternalistic noble whose extensive power is explicitly ambiguous: "How much of pleasure *or pain* it was in his power to bestow!—How much of good *or evil* must be done by him!" (250-51, emphasis added). If Mr. Bennet embodies the post-Enlightenment, modified patriarch, Mr. Darcy harks back to an earlier type—before fathers were curbed by Lockean principles, before aristocrats began to feel the crunch. Darcy disempowers Elizabeth if only because of the positions they each occupy in the social schema: because he is a Darcy and she is a Bennet, because he is a man and she is his wife. If Mr. Bennet permits Elizabeth to fill the role of "son," she marries another father figure only to revert, in terms of privilege, to "daughter."

In *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen shows us an intelligent girl largely in the grasp of a complex mechanism whose interests are not hers. She does this, I think, less in resignation than in protest; here, as in *Northanger Abbey,* Austen is concerned to ironize girls and novels that hasten to the altar for conclusive happiness.[23] I should stress, however, that my purpose in outlining a trajectory of humiliation has been not to displace but to complexify the reading that takes for granted connubial bliss. We can experience the ending as euphoric (most readers do) and still recognize those aspects of the novel working strenuously against this. I want, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, to appreciate the doubleness that characterizes the work of nineteenth-century women writers, the tension between conventionality and subversion. This tension is, on the one hand, produced by an author who knows what she is doing, whose art is a deliberate shaping, whose ironic tendencies were manifest at fifteen. To ignore any such intentionality is to slight Austen's mastery. But the ideological slipperiness of *Pride and Prejudice* is, on the other hand, finally a matter of the text's own logic, its own legibility. Beyond any fully conscious intention on Austen's part, a pattern of duplicity is at work in the narrative itself, with a consistency amounting to design.

As I have argued, part of this novel's design is to reveal a system of homosocial relations underlying the institution of heterosexuality. Anticipating Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin, and Eve Sedgwick, it recognizes in marriage a displacement of the father-daughter bond by a bond between fathers. Elizabeth's humiliation has everything to do with transactions between various fathers that take place behind her back, over her head, and apart from, if not against, her will. I want to close by offering some further support for this view.

By the end of the book, Mr. Bennet's paternal role has been assumed by his brother-in-law, Mr. Gardiner. Mr. Gardiner, though "gentleman *like,*" is not technically a gentleman. Living by trade "and within view of his own warehouses" (139), he represents, more than Mr. Bennet, the rising middle class. No wonder Elizabeth fears that Darcy will rebuff him, unkind as Darcy has been toward her bourgeois relations. She is quite unprepared for Darcy's civility to Gardiner, and for the apparent power of fishing to overcome class differences. Perhaps their shared fondness for Elizabeth, their lengthy haggle over Lydia, as well as their equal passion for trout, serve to reinforce the social/economic advantages of a Darcy-Gardiner alliance. They become, in any case, suggestively close. The very last paragraph of the novel informs us that: "With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them" (388).

At first this seems a peculiarly insignificant note on which to end. On second glance it appears to confirm the notion I have had: that just as the Gardiners have been the means of uniting Darcy and Elizabeth, so Elizabeth has been the means of uniting Mr. Darcy and Mr. Gardiner. *Pride and Prejudice* attains a satisfying unity not only between a man and a woman, but also between two men. Austen's novel accomplishes an intercourse not merely personal, but social—as much a marriage of two classes as a marriage of true minds.

Notes

1. My title and my argument are a turn on Mark Schorer's "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse" (1959), in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 98-111. Here he remarks: "The diminution of Emma in the social scene, her reduction to her proper place … is very beautiful" (102).
2. See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 239-58.
3. Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 13. See Beth Kowaleski-Wallace's discussion of the Lockean father in "Milton's Daughters: The Education of Eighteenth-Century Women Writers," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 275-95.

4. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 6. Future references are to this edition.
5. Lewes's observation is cited by Judith O'Neill in her introduction to *Critics on Jane Austen: Readings in Literary Criticism,* ed. Judith O'Neill (London: George Allen, 1970), 8.
6. See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 153.
7. Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity Complex in Women as Viewed by Men and by Women" (1926), in *Psychoanalysis and Women,* ed. Jean Baker Miller (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 19.
8. For a useful recapitulation of Freud on fathers and daughters, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 94, 114-16.
9. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality,* eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review, 1983), 177-205.
10. See, for example, Lynda E. Boose, "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare," *PMLA* 97, no. 3 (1982): 325-47. According to Boose, King Lear's faux pas is his unwillingness to release Cordelia—he "casts her away not to let her go but to prevent her from going" (333)—thereby obstructing the ritual process of her marriage to France.
11. In these terms, Emma's conclusion may have certain advantages for its heroine. It is true that Emma defers to Knightley's worldview much as Elizabeth does to Darcy's. But remaining under her father's roof may preserve some of the authority she has had, in his household and the community, as Mr. Woodhouse's daughter.
12. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 61.
13. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.
14. See Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 15.
15. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 172.
16. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
17. Georgiana's position as "daughter" in relation to Darcy contributes to our sense of him as "paternal," as does his fatherly advice to Bingley.
18. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 12.
19. See Austen's famous defense of the novel as a "work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed … the most thorough knowledge of human nature … the liveliest effusions of wit and humour" (*Northanger Abbey,* 1818, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd edition [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933], 38).
20. John Halperin's recent biography, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) is notably complacent toward this formulation: "It is unnecessary to rehearse again the process by which Darcy's pride is humbled and Elizabeth's prejudice exposed—' *your* defect is a propensity to hate every body,' she tells him early in the novel; 'And I yours … is wilfully to misunderstand them,' he replies" (70).
21. I have in mind D. W. Harding and Marvin Mudrick, old guard of Austen criticism's "subversive school" (as opposed to Alistair Duckworth, Marilyn Butler, et al., who see Austen as a social conservative): D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," *Scrutiny* 8 (1940): 346-62; Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); Alistair M. Duck-worth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). While I am taking Harding's and Mudrick's side, I

disagree with their view that Austen challenges her society by allowing Elizabeth somehow to transcend it, that Elizabeth represents the "free individual." *Pride and Prejudice* is not, in my opinion, about the heroine's independence of the social context; it is about her inextricability from it.

22. See Karen Newman, "Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending," *ELH* 50, no. 4 (1983): 693-710. Newman points out that critics as early as Sir Walter Scott have noticed Elizabeth's fascination with Pemberly: "Austen is at pains from early in the novel to show us Elizabeth's response to Darcy's wealth" (698). It is interesting that Hollywood, of venal habits and puritanical tastes, should recognize and be uneasy with Elizabeth's suspicious position as Austen wrote it. In the 1940 film version of *Pride and Prejudice,* Lady Catherine threatens to cut Darcy out of her will if he goes ahead and marries a Bennet. Elizabeth proves her romantic integrity by vowing to marry him anyway. Needless to say, Austen conspicuously chose *not* to test Elizabeth in such a manner.
23. In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), Gilbert and Gubar refer us to Lloyd W. Brown (*Bits of Ivory: Narrative Techniques in Jane Austen's Fiction* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1973]) for "the most sustained discussion of Austen's ironic undercutting of her own endings" (667). Karen Newman also sees the happy ending in Austen as parodic: despite its comic effect, there remain "unresolved contradictions between romantic and materialistic notions of marriage" (695). The idea of a fairy-tale union is falsified by Austen's clairvoyance about why women need to marry. My reading accords a good deal with Newman's, though I am less confident than she that Austen's heroines manage nevertheless to "live powerfully within the limits imposed by ideology" (705).

Title Commentary: Mansfield Park

MOIRA FERGUSON (ESSAY DATE 1991)

SOURCE: Ferguson, Moira. "*Mansfield Park*: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender." *Oxford Literary Review* 13, nos. 1-2 (1991): 118-39.

In the following essay, Ferguson explores the connection between the restrictions on Mansfield Park *'s Fanny Price and the slave trade also discussed in the novel.*

Mansfield Park (1814) is a eurocentric, post-abolition narrative that intertwines with a critique of gender relations and posits a world of humanitarian interactions between slave-owners and slaves. As such, following the successful passage of the Abolition Bill in 1807, *Mansfield Park* initiates a new chapter in colonialist fiction. Nonetheless, although the novel works against the idea of the traditionally closed and brutal world of plantocratic relations, it entertains the option of emancipation—as opposed to abolition—only through the sound of muffled rebel voices. In order to stage a future society peaceably perpetuating British rule, Jane Austen transforms Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park—who is also a plantation-owner in Antigua—from a characteristically imperious 'West Indian' planter—stock figure of ridicule in contemporary drama, poetry and novels—into a benevolent, reforming land-owner.[1]

Given the state of agitation in the Caribbean in the early 1800s, the unreality of this scenario forces textual contradictions and eruptions. No African-Caribbean people speak, no mention is ever made of slave plots or insurrections, and even slaves' white counterparts—Anglo-Saxon women in rebellion in one form or another—are assimilated or banished.[2] Thus gender relations at home parallel and echo traditional relationships of power between the colonialists and colonized peoples: European women visibly signify the most egregiously and invisibly repressed of the text—African-Caribbeans themselves. They mark silent African-Caribbean rebels as well as their own disenfranchisement, class and gender victimization.

Let me contextualize these remarks by noting that *Mansfield Park* was begun by Jane Austen in early 1811 and published in 1814, with its novelistic chronology extending from 1808 through 1809. As a result of the energetic abolition movement and parliamentary compromise with the West India lobby in 1792, slaveowners' efforts to resist legal abolition, let alone emancipation, were notorious.[3]

A transatlantic land-owner, Sir Thomas Bertram is fictionally characterized as one of those members of parliament who defended plantocratic interests.[4] He belonged to the 'outer ring' of absentee planters and merchants who never, or rarely, visited the colonies, although their connections remained solid.[5] In Raymond Williams' words:

> Important parts of the country-house system, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were built on the profits of … trade [with the colonies]. Spices, sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco, gold and silver: these fed, as mercantile profits, into an English social order, over and above the profits on English stock and crops.…The country-houses which were the apex of a local system of exploitation then had many connections to these distant lands.…[Moreover], the new rural economy of the tropical plantations—sugar, coffee, cotton—was built by [the] trade in flesh, and once again the profits fed back into the country-house system: not only the profits on the commodities but … the profits on slaves.[6]

After a brief, quiescent period following the passage of the Bill, however, fierce contestations over slavery began anew at home and abroad. As the British press reported news of increasing atrocities in 1809, 1810, and 1811, it became obvious that the abolitionists' utopian vision of a Caribbean plantocracy committed to ameliorating the conditions of their only remaining slaves was palpably false.[7] This rise in atrocities, in addition to vigorous illicit trading, spurred parliamentary proposals that all Caribbean slaves be registered.[8] Old colonial legislatures that included Antigua opposed slave registries on constitutional grounds because such a procedure violated their right of internal taxation; not until 1820 did colonialists assent.

In fact, the time during which *Mansfield Park* was written marked a turning point in the fortunes of the gentry, to which social class Sir Thomas, as a baronet, arguably belonged.[9] In England the Luddite riots fomented unrest, the prime minister was assassinated, war was declared against the United States, and the gentry endured a general economic crisis. Mrs Norris, Sir Thomas' sister-in-law, informs us that Sir Thomas' financial stability depends on maintaining his Caribbean property:[10] his 'means will be rather straitened if the Anti-guan estate is to make such poor returns.[11] Sir Thomas needs his Caribbean profits to stay financially afloat in England; colonialism underwrites his social and cultural position.

Thus, ongoing news of Caribbean economic crises exacerbates Sir Thomas' already straitened circumstances. Sugar prices had plummeted as a result of a major depression after 1807. The ensuing urgency to diversify the imperiled sugar monoculture made the physical presence of customarily absentee landlords expedient, and so Sir Thomas was obliged 'to go to Antigua himself, for the better arrangement of his affairs.[12] The task at hand was to maintain his estates at a profit and in the process, since trading was now illegal, to ensure the survival of his slaves as steady, well-nourished workers. Sadistic overseers, with whom Sir Thomas may have been content in the past, provided returns were satisfactory, would no longer do. His appearance when he returns to England suggests not only an exhausting engagement with his overseers and a severe reaction to noisome conditions, but through metonym it also emphasizes his affiliation with the Creole class. He 'had the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate' (178).

The society to which Sir Thomas traveled was dominated by aggressive oppositional relations between colonialists and colonized people, although absentee landlordism was unusual on Antigua compared to its frequency on neighboring islands. As a near-noble landowner, Sir Thomas would socialize with the commander-in-chief of the Leeward Islands, the Right Honorable Ralph, Lord Lavington, who, in 'real life', chose to set a constant pointed public example of desirable relations between colonizers and colonized:

> His Christmas balls and routs were upon the highest scale of magnificence; but he was a great stickler for etiquette, and a firm upholder of difference of rank and *colour* [Flanders' underlining].…He would not upon any occasion, receive a letter or parcel from the fingers of a black or coloured man, and in order to guard against such *horrible* defilement, he had a golden instrument wrought something like a pair of sugar tongs, with which he was accustomed to hold the presented article.[13]

Back home, abolitionists contested the condoned maltreatment of slaves encapsulated in Lord Lavington's insidious public behaviour; they decried the atrocities that his cultural practice validated: violations of the Abolition Act, as well as individual cases of heinous maltreatment and murders of slaves by planters in 1810 and 1811.[14] Since the powerful proslavery lobby indefatigably suppressed these events as far as their power allowed, only those with access to ongoing revelations in the press and through rumor could stay abreast of daily developments. The centuries-long ideological battle over the humanity of Africans constantly and variously manifested itself.

Plantocratic Paradigms in Mansfield Park

Power relations within the community of Mansfield Park reenact and refashion plantocratic paradigms; those who work for Sir Thomas and his entourage both at home and abroad are locked into hierarchical and abusive patterns of behaviour, though under widely different circumstances. The cruel officiousness of protagonist Fanny Price's aunt, Mrs Norris, who is effectively Sir Thomas' overseer and lives in the suggestively named white house 'across the park' from the Great House underlines his plantocratic style of administration.

Mrs Norris' surname recalls John Norris, one of the most vile proslaveryites of the day. Austen was well aware of Norris' notoriety, having read Thomas Clarkson's celebrated *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* in which Norris is categorically condemned. Clarkson's text was published in 1808 and read by Jane Austen while she was working out the plot of *Mansfield Park.*[15] Not only had Clarkson's history astounded her but she admitted to her sister Cassandra that she had once been 'in love' with the famous abolitionist whose devotion, industry, and total lack of regard for his own life in the cause was legend.[16] Clark-son chronicles how Norris represented himself to Clarkson in Liverpool as an opponent of the slave trade, then arrived in London as a pro-slavery delegate representing Liverpool.[17] After contacting Norris for an explanation, Clarkson notes Norris' unctuously self-serving response:

> After having paid high compliments to the general force of my arguments, and the general justice and humanity of my sentiments on this great question, which had made a deep impression upon his mind, he had found occasion to differ from me, since we had last parted, on particular points, and that he had therefore less reluctantly yielded to the call of becoming a delegate,—though notwithstanding he would gladly have declined the office if he could have done it with propriety.[18]

Underscoring the intertextual designation of Mrs Norris as sadistic overseer, Sir Thomas himself is centerstaged as 'master', especially in his treatment of niece Fanny Price. With very little ceremony and offering Fanny Price's family no say in the matter, Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris engineer the transference of this ten-year-old poor relation from her home in Portsmouth to Mansfield Park. A marginalized, near-despised family, the Prices lose one of their own to accommodate Mrs Norris' need to appear charitable; Sir Thomas eventually concurs in her decision although he reserves his judgment to return Fanny Price if she threatens domestic stability. Portsmouth, by this account, is the uncivilized other; its members overflow with energies that menace the security of Mansfield Park. Epitomizing the clash of epistemologies in the text, Portsmouth signifies a way of living that negates the tightly controlled social order and challenges the sovereign law embodied in Sir Thomas by ignoring it altogether. On the other hand, in a different way, since Portsmouth as a naval town serves to uphold Sir Thomas' position by enforcing British control of the West Indies, what

might be more important is that in the domestic arena of England, the link between the two must be separated. The expropriated Fanny Price hails from the milieu of transgressors who always signify the target of their activities: kidnapped and captive slaves.

Young Fanny Price's removal from her family is described in terms often reserved for epiphanic moments in the narrative of slavery:

> The remembrance … of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again, would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation.
>
> (370)

This mercantilist attitude toward human relationships, represented as disinterested benevolence toward Fanny Price, invokes traditionally conservative rationales for the 'trade-in-flesh'. Family feeling or unity never becomes an issue, since proslaveryites do not recognize African and slave families as social formations. On the contrary, the West Indian lobby argued that bringing slaves to the Caribbean was a good deed, a way of civilizing those whose environment provided them with nothing but barbarism—precisely the same basis for the justification of bringing Fanny Price to Mansfield Park.

So, when Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, she is closely watched for evidence of her uncouth otherness. She must accept Sir Thomas' authority unconditionally or she will be removed. Sir Thomas scrutinizes her 'disposition', anticipating 'gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner' (10-11). Eventually he decides she has a 'tractable disposition, and seemed likely to give them little trouble' (18). She will acclimatize well. Nonetheless, his children 'cannot be equals [with Fanny Price]. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different' (11).

Fanny herself begins to adapt to the value system at Mansfield, learning 'to know their ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them'. Fanny thinks 'too lowly of her own claims' and 'too lowly of her own situation' to challenge values that keep her low.[19] Underscoring class difference and alluding to the colonial-sexual nexus, profligate elder son Tom, the heir apparent to Sir Thomas' colonial enterprise, assures Fanny Price that she can be a 'creepmouse' all she wants as long as she obeys his commands.

Just as markedly, when Fanny Price years later is deciding what to wear at the ball, the point of contention is whose chain (or necklace) she will wear. The lurking question is to whom will she subject herself or belong. To what extent has Mansfield Park and its values begun to construct her subjectivity? Gladly, she decides on the chain of her future husband, Sir Thomas' younger son, Edmund. Moreover, when Sir Thomas leaves for Antigua, she steps into his moral shoes; she opposes Mrs Norris' opportunism and informally assumes the role of the 'good' overseer, her aunt's alter ego. Mimicking Sir Thomas, willingly cooperating in her own assimilation, she speaks for and through him. Fanny Price helps to foreshadow and map a new colonialist landscape that upholds the moral status quo but draws the line at arbitrary judgment and excessive indulgence. In the chapel scene at Sotherton, for instance, Fanny Price identifies herself as an opponent of change.[20] Edmund, on the other hand, underscores Fanny's complicity in her own assimilation when he confides—to her delight—as she leaves for Portsmouth that she will 'belong to [them] almost as much as ever' (26-7).

Yet Fanny Price is still the daughter of Ports-mouth—Mansfield Park's relegated other, reared to succeed pluckily against the odds. Her master-slave relationship with Sir Thomas operates on the register of two opposing discourses: complicity and rebellion. Her stalwart refusal to marry Henry Crawford and the punishment of summary banishment she incurs identifies Mansfield Park ideologically as an institution that rallies to disempower anyone who jeopardizes Sir Thomas' feudal reign. This is especially true in the case of the déclassé Fanny Price, to whom Mansfield Park has opened its portals. In return she opposes its patriarchal

demands on females as property by claiming one form of autonomy, thereby rendering herself an unregenerate ingrate in ruling class eyes. Sir Thomas even describes her in language reserved for slave insurrectionaries:

> I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse.
>
> (318)

To Sir Thomas, Fanny Price's feelings are as irrelevant as slaves' feelings; she is his object. In Tzvetan Todorov's words, 'those who are not subjects have no desires.[21]

Fanny Price responds to her natal family almost exclusively as an other, after Sir Thomas banishes her to Portsmouth. Such is the enormity of his ideological power. His risk in sending her to resist Portsmouth and embrace Mansfield Park values pays off. Her home is nothing but 'noise, disorder, impropriety', her overworked impecunious mother pronounced 'a dawdler and a slattern' (388, 390). Portsmouth reconstitutes Fanny Price as Sir Thomas' transformed daughter, no longer the exiled object; while at Portsmouth she barricades herself ideologically, as it were, inside Mansfield Park, functioning as its representative. Her mother's features that she has not seen in over a decade endear themselves to her—not because she has missed seeing them—but because they remind Fanny Price of Lady Bertram's, her mother's sister and Sir Thomas' wife: 'they brought her Aunt Bertram's before her' (377). Fanny Price has come to resemble the eurocentrically conceived 'grateful negro' in pre-abolition tales who collaborated with kind owners and discouraged disobedience among rebel slaves.[22] Her embrace of Mansfield Park's values dissolves any binding association with her family and her old life.

After leaving Portsmouth for the second time, Fanny 'was beloved' by her adopted family in Mansfield Park, the passive tense affirming her surrender of agency. When Edmund decides she will make him an appropriate wife, her parents' response is not mentioned. We assume they are neither told nor invited to the wedding. The only Portsmouth members who textually reappear are the conformists: sister Susan, coded as a second Fanny, ready to satisfy Lady Bertram's need for a round-the-clock assistant, and impeccable sailor-brother William, who exercised 'continued good conduct' (462).

Sir Thomas' commercial approach to Fanny Price reformulates the treatment he previously accorded her mother, Frances Price, who 'disoblig[ed]' her family when she married a lieutenant of marines 'without education, fortune, or connections'; as a result, the Mansfield Park inner circle acts almost as if Frances Price senior did not exist; certainly she has no rights as a parent, so her children can be more or less removed at will. The text hints, too, that having ten babies in nine years is tantamount to a reprehensible lack of restraint. Neither Mrs Price's continuing independence in not seeking help nor her maintenance of a large family on a pittance elicit textual approbation. Rather, she is lucky, in the text's terms, to be the recipient of Sir Thomas' charity. With almost all immediate family ties severed, her status, mutatis mutandi, parallels that of her sister Lady Bertram, whose dowry has doomed her to the borders in a different sense. Within a phallocratic economy, their lives elicit contempt and condescension.

Lady Bertram, Mrs Norris, and Frances Price make up the trio of sisters who collectively display the degradation of colonial-gender relations. In the opening sentence of *Mansfield Park,* which highlights Sir Thomas' hegemonic order, the trope of capture and control that infuses the text first appears:

> About thirty years ago Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts

> and consequences of an handsome house and large income.

The text thus describes her alleged initial conquest of Sir Thomas in arrestingly ironic tones and in doing so, as in the famous opening assertion in *Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park*'s first sentence also celebrates its opposite: Sir Thomas' acquisition of a desirable social object. Maria Ward instantly drops out of sight, both in nomenclature and in self-led behaviour. Occupying the role of a slatternly plantation mistress—'she never thought of being useful' (179), Lady Bertram's prominent class status through marriage collides with the posture of an undermined female. The lap dog upon which she lavishes attention—'no one is to tease my poor pug'—emblematizes her pathetically protected status.[23] When Sir Thomas has to break news to her, he approaches her as he would a child. During his absence, she rather tellingly works on 'yards of fringe'—appropriate for a marginalized wife—and when he returns, in recognition of her imposed vacuity, she waits to have 'her whole comprehension' filled by his narrative (196). She epitomizes emptiness, a vacant object-status, a slave or constructed subject who commits spiritual suicide. Only once does a hint of spunky self-respect surface. On Sir Thomas' departure for Antigua when she comments that she does not fear for his safety, a momentary ambiguity nags the text. Is she overly confident he will be safe because she is oblivious to maritime danger due to the Napoleonic wars? Or does she not care? Does her comment speak unconsciously about her recognition of powerlessness? Does it quietly express repressed anger?

Sir Thomas' behaviour on both sides of the Atlantic signals a plantocratic mode of behaviour. Through the trope of his journey to Antigua, his long absence, and his sparing commentary about his experiences when he returns, Austen stresses his planter-like detachment from humanity, or his playing down of the facts, or both. One of the few things he did in Antigua—we learn—is attend a ball in the company of creoles—as white planters were mockingly termed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; culturally and economically, Sir Thomas is inextricably linked to his Antiguan counterparts. And given certain much-touted facts about planters, contemporaries could have amplified Sir Thomas' character in a way that would expressively inflect Lady Bertram's remark about not being concerned about his safety. Planters were infamous for taking slave mistresses and fathering children.

Edward Long, who wrote the immensely popular *History of Jamaica* (1774), describes Creole activities as follows:

> Creole men … are in general sensible, of quick apprehension, brave, good-natured, affable, generous, temperate, and sober; unsuspicious, lovers of freedom, fond of social enjoyments, tender fathers, humane and indulgent masters; firm and sincere friends, where they once repose a confidence; their tables are covered with plenty of good cheer …; their hospitality is unlimited …; they affect gaiety and diversions, which in general are cards, billiards, backgammon, chess, horse-racing, hog-hunting, shooting, fishing, dancing, and music.…With a strong natural propensity to the other sex, they are not always the most chaste and faithful of husbands.[24]

Lowell Joseph Ragatz points out, furthermore, that from the mid-eighteenth century:

> private acts enabling white fathers to make generous provision for their illegitimate half-breed children, despite existing laws prohibiting the transmission of extensive properties to blacks, were passed in all the island legislatures with painfully increasing regularity. The number of free persons of color in Barbados, largely recruited through illicit relations with white men and negresses, rose from 448 to 2,229 between 1768 and 1802, while the number in Dominica soared from 600 in 1773 to more than 2,800 in 1804. This rapid growth of a mixed blood element in the British West Indies after 1750 arose chiefly from the Anglo-Saxon's now merely transitory residence there and the small number of white women remaining in the islands. Concubinage became well-nigh universal in the second half of the eighteenth century

> and the system pervaded all ranks of society. During the administration of Governor Ricketts in Barbados in the 1790s, a comely negress even reigned at government house, enjoying all a wife's privileges save presiding publicly at his table.[25]

According to August Kotzebue's well-known play that the characters in *Mansfield Park* choose to rehearse for their recreation, *Lovers' Vows,* no love/lust exists in England, only 'in all barbarous countries'.[26] Austen uses this play to intertextualize the characters' motives and interactions. A remark from the play's philandering Count Cassel that comments on sexual exploitation in the Caribbean matches contemporary accounts and illumines the character of Sir Thomas.[27]

Jane Austen was well aware of these infamous activities. She knew about the estate of the Nibbs family in Antigua because the Reverend George Austen, Jane Austen's father, was a trustee; she also knew of the Nibbs' 'mulatto' relative.[28] As one critic concretely contends: 'Jane Austen would certainly have been aware of the likelihood of a family such as her fictional Bertrams having numerous mulatto relatives in Antigua'. Sir Thomas' condemnation of Mrs Price marrying low and his anger at Fanny Price's refusal to accommodate him by marrying Henry Crawford mocks planters' infamous, quotidian practices.

A question then crops up: Does Sir Thomas banish his daughter, Maria, and censure Henry Crawford because their sexual indulgences mirror his Antiguan conduct? Is one dimension of his behaviour a form of self-projection, an unconscious denial of his dual and contradictory realities in the Caribbean and Britain?

Another victim of Sir Thomas' mercantilist attitudes, elder daughter Maria refuses to be Lady Bertram's clone. Instead she stands with her exiled Aunt Frances and cousin Fanny in claiming sexual independence. Her actions are even more morally outré since she has already been manipulated into marriage with Rushworth, a man whom her father financially desires. For example in the gate scene at Sotherton, Maria symbolically and literally refuses to be imprisoned. Maria, that is, falls for the ideological trap that is set for her and is punished for trying to release herself.[29] Mary Crawford, who also disregards Sir Thomas' authority and is coded as a predator of sorts, similarly contests for personal autonomy and is configured as more evil because she disregards Sir Thomas' values. Linked by their given names, they are different versions of a gendered bid for identity.[30]

In the text's terms, none of these spirited acts by women in multiple postures of subjection can be vindicated except that of the conflicted Fanny Price. The Crawfords are reduced to the social margins, Henry for visible rakishness, Mary for 'evil' and bold collaboration in her brother's escapades. The possibility smoulders that Sir Thomas cannot contain an English reflection of his Antiguan self. He represents men who control the general slave population and the female slave population in particular through varieties of abuse. When women like Frances and Fanny Price, Maria Bertram, and Mary Crawford articulate a counterdiscourse against their objectification, Sir Thomas stands firm. Insurgent women become deleted subjects, objects of his wrath who must be appropriately punished, usually for keeps. At the conscious and unconscious level, the text continually inscribes challenges to the assumed inferiority of women and the right of a hegemonic patriarch to use women as he pleases.

Most systematically of all, however, *Lovers' Vows* intertextualizes property-owning attitudes that characterize planter-slave relations, including Sir Thomas' flagrant neglect of female welfare.[31] At the same time, the dramatic resolution of these corrupt interrelationships appears to exonerate Sir Thomas and validate patriarchal rule. Clearly coded as Sir Thomas, the Baron is multiply conflicted. In former days, he had abandoned naive and pregnant Agnes, who bore Frederick. Like the 'deserted and neglected negroes' of Antigua who will become a later focus of national concern, Agnes is now starving to death and homeless. Eventually, however, the Baron's callous desertion is mitigated by information that he has hired helpers to search constantly till they find her. In the end the Baron decides to marry Agnes though he fails to consult her about his plan. Like Maria Ward, she is assumed to desire such a splendid match.

In like manner, the Baron's efforts to marry off his daughter Amelia to silly Count Cassel are soon revealed as nonbinding. When he learns that Amelia loves Pastor Anhalt, the Baron readily consents, a scenario that comments on the marital imbroglio of Fanny Price, Henry Crawford, and Edmund Bertram. The case of Frederick, who strikes the Baron in the course of trying to save his mother's life, allusively invokes the nature of Sir Thomas' power: the Baron orders Frederick killed even though 'a child might have overpowered him', for 'to save him would set a bad example'.[32] Only when the Baron discovers that Frederick is his son, does parental feeling induce him to relent. In doing so, the Baron earns permission to be readmitted to the human community. Feudal laws and relations in *Lovers' Vows* sign those of the plantocracy.

Conclusion

Mansfield Park initiated a new chapter in colonialist fiction as old and new abolitionists came to terms with the fact that the Abolition Bill did not fulfil its minimum requirement—amelioration of inhuman conditions. Jane Austen's repugnance toward the slave trade, moreover, is well documented—her brother Francis was a vigorous abolitionist—and by the time she writes *Emma* in 1816 her condemnation is forthright.[33] Hence Sir Thomas' chastening is one way of prescribing this letting-up process among a seemingly unregenerate plantocracy. He reconstitutes himself as a moral rather than a profit-oriented planter, a condition inveterately resisted among the colonial ruling class. Recent experience in the House of Commons as well as the Caribbean have persuaded Sir Thomas, Jane Austen subtly argues, that the old order may be doomed and disappearing. As a Parliamentary member, Sir Thomas would have been witnessing at first hand the efforts of Wilberforce and his supporters to initiate corrective legislation. In admitting his errors and curbing his selfishness, Sir Thomas comes to represent the liberal-conservative ideal of humanitarian plantation ownership at a time when outright manumission is effectively a non-issue.

It hardly seems to be a coincidence that *Mansfield Park* echoes the name of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, who wrote the legal decision for the James Somerset case in 1772, stipulating that no slaves could be forcibly returned from Britain to the Caribbean, which was widely interpreted to mean that slavery in Britain had been legally abolished.[34] Austen's invocation of Lord Mansfield's name suggests the novel's intrinsic engagement with slavery and a view of Sir Thomas' plantations as a place where feudal relations are beginning to dissolve.[35] To underscore that point, the word 'plantation' is frequently used to denote Sir Thomas' property on both sides of the Atlantic.

At another level, the intertextualizing of Lord Mansfield's ruling warns and censures all those who try to further impose their will on the already subjugated, in Sir Thomas' case, Fanny Price and by extension his Antiguan slaves. The choice of Mans field for the title underscores the idea of property in the hands of a patriarch—one man's plantations—and in its compression of several frames of meaning and reference, it connects the Caribbean plantation system and its master-slave relationships to tyrannical gender relations at home and abroad.

Jane Austen's recommendations for a kinder, gentler plantocracy, however, do anything but confront that institution head on. Not to put too fine a point on it, the opposite is virtually true. En route to the new dispensation, Sir Thomas' change of heart is accompanied and contradicted by his challenge to the heterogenous utterances of those who flout his power. Hence paradoxically, his moral reformation reconfirms his control. With unruly elements purged or contained and his unitary discourse intact though refashioned, the same power relations persist in slightly different guise between the ruling class elite and dominated people, between male and female. Thus to read *Mansfield Park* as a text with closures that favour more benevolent socio-political relationships only serves to mask textual undercurrents that threaten to explode its tightly controlled bourgeois framework.

Let me briefly recite some of these closures that purport to foretell future felicity and a more uniform culture groping toward harmony. First, *Lovers' Vows* is intended to demonstrate how well the Baron (Sir Thomas)

suppresses anarchic expression and restores peace after learning his lesson. Second, protagonist Fanny Price, despite announcing her right to autonomy, attains the status of an insider because she mirrors Sir Thomas' values and rather coldly rejects her origins. She embraces an imposed identity as a bona fide member of the Mansfield Park community. Sir Thomas, in turn, offers himself as a father: 'Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted. His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself' (472). Third, the Price family in Portsmouth is exposed as decisively inferior except for those who agreeably adapt. Disobedience and heady self-determination are penalized by lifetime expulsion from the old order: Maria Bertram and Mary Crawford are excluded from the ruling class coterie while younger daughter Julia's repentance and her more accommodating disposition gain her a second chance.

Also to the point is Lady Bertram's languid life, which is criticized yet accepted as a familiar though inconsequential existence while the mettlesome spirit of the Price survivors goes unapplauded. That is, although Lady Bertram may draw sympathetic attention as a witless figure, the necessity for a social appendage in female form to round out plantocratic control is never gainsaid. But perhaps the most morally ambiguous textual judgment concerns Mrs Norris herself whose downfall is treated as her just deserts. Former overseer and exposed renegade, she is banished for good, like her sister Frances, from the family circle. That she encourages Maria Bertram to claim a certain kind of freedom is sweepingly condemned. The text obliterates the fact that she represents Sir Thomas' interests, but in excess of how the text wants him portrayed.[36] She is his avatar, Sir Thomas at his most acquisitive and self-indulgent. He cannot countenance the reflection of himself in Mrs Norris, who represents his displaced tacit approval of heinous cruelties and ensuing reduced profits. When he rejects her, he rejects part of his former self and life; he becomes part of the new order that seeks more wholesome relations at home and abroad. Since his regeneration cannot mean that he continues to treat people unfeelingly, Mrs Norris has to be reconstructed as a villain, tidily demolished, and eliminated as a speaking subject.

These methodical but artificial closures, however, in their blanket effort to smother opposition, only highlight ideological antagonisms that decentre Sir Thomas' power and question its validity. They elicit an insistent counterdiscourse. His posture also underwrites a certain anxiety about outsiders, regardless of former familial or friendly relationships. Human connections count for naught compared to the obsession with control.

Most ironically, textual imbeddings surface in the person of Sir Thomas' major vindicator, the Baron, who turns out in one sense to be his most damning accuser. As Sir Thomas' autocratic counterpart, the medieval Baron has no compunction about killing an innocent man who defies his authority. Similarly, Sir Thomas himself can order severe punishment, if not death, against slaves he arbitrarily deems insubordinate. Such was the authority of planters. And not uncoincidentally, the Baron is execrating Frederick in *Lovers' Vows* while that other Baron, Sir Thomas, administers the Antiguan plantations, by implication in the same way. The Baron denies Frederick's humanity as planters deny the humanity of slaves, relenting only when he discovers Frederick is his son. In a remarkably unconscious self-projection, the Baron commands Frederick in words that would make more sense in reverse: 'Desist—barbarian, savage, stop!!' (526). Moreover, by summarily terminating the theatricals, Sir Thomas reestablishes his authority over a symbolically uncontrollable situation.[37]

Most materially, the sparse counterdiscourse concerning slaves pinpoints a fundamental textual repression. Having affirmed her pleasure in Sir Thomas' stories of his Caribbean visit, Fanny inquires about the slave trade. After absorbing her uncle's answer—significantly unreported—she expresses amazement to Edmund about the ensuing 'dead silence' (198), a phrase that requires careful unpacking. Let me back up for a moment.

In this transitional post-abolitionist period that features a shaky British-Caribbean economy and multiple slave insurrections, no safe space, from a eurocentric perspective, is available for colonized others as speaking subjects, let alone as self-determining agents. Put baldly, slave subjectivity has to be effaced. As the oppressed daughter of an exigent family, Fanny Price becomes the appropriate mediator or representative of slaves'

silenced existence and constant insurrectionary potential. In her role as a marginalized other (though in a vastly different cultural context), Fanny Price can project and displace personal-political anxieties and mimic her servile subject position.

As a brief for plantocratic gradual reform, the text disintegrates at 'dead silence', a phrase that ironically speaks important debarred and smothered voices. As Mansfield Park's unofficial spokesman for Antiguan society, the beleaguered Sir Thomas has cut slaves off from representation. *Lovers' Vows,* besides, has already voiced and even accentuated the major *topoi* of a muzzled colonialist discourse: brutality, fractured families, and the violated bodies and psyches of innocent people. Thus the conceptualizations of 'dead' and 'silence' that parallel the play's metonyms of bondage further indict the gaps in Sir Thomas' discourse. Beyond that, these loaded inscriptions of death and muteness accost the taboo enforced on dissent in the colonies. 'Dead silence' affirms Sir Thomas' seeming pretence that power relations are stable in Antigua. For what other than dissimulation of some sort—most likely an obfuscation or omission—could explain Fanny Price's ready acceptance of his lengthy speech on the slave trade. 'Dead' and 'silence', in other words, forswear the reality of ubiquitous slave insurrections. For example, plots were organized and carried out in Jamaica, Tobago, and especially in Dominica, where the second maroon war was led by Quashie, Apollo, Jacko, and others.[38] Uncontainable conflicts are further unmasked by textual allusions to several issues of the *Quarterly Review,* which carried many troublesome facts about slavery in 1811:[39] for one, the periodical reported that the progressive diminution in slave population levels persisted, despite abolition of the trade, a fact that threw doubt on promises made by planters and colonial legislatures to ameliorate conditions. Old planters in Jamaica and Antigua were in the news, too, as zealous competitors of the 'new' planters. The *Quarterly Review* also confirmed that the bottom had dropped out of the sugar market by 1808, that estates were in disrepair, and growers could not be indemnified.[40] What's more, the seemingly univocal colonial discourse of *Mansfield Park* that upholds a singular view of slavery as 'working', belies domestic agitation inside and outside Parliament for improved conditions.[41]

Antigua, then, tropes an anxiety-creating unknown venue, falsely coded as a run-down locale in need of an individual planter's semi-altruistic, definitively ethnocentric intervention. Profits are down, but workers and administrators suffer too. Antigua also correlates with Portsmouth, both being symbolic sites of indeterminacy near water and places where the allegedly uncivilized cluster. As a port and an island intimately involved with slavery, Portsmouth and Antigua witness slave ships arriving and departing; scenes involving the sale of people and naval engagements are in constant view. Sir Thomas may subsume Antigua within his monocular vision and Fanny Price may fail to see (or evade) Portsmouth's obvious immersion in the slave trade as she gazes at the sights of the town, but their buried knowledge and realities intertextually circulate nonetheless. Like the Orient in Edward Said's formulation, Antigua and Portsmouth are Mansfield Park's wild, colonized others, signs of potential disruption and sexual conflict.[42] They signal that the women of Mansfield Park are ideologically absorbed or unceremoniously expelled—or even obliterated (as the slavewomen of Antigua are) as autonomous beings.

In this space as Mansfield Park's other, Antigua satirizes Sir Thomas' authority. He may conduct his relationships in a recognizably plantocratic mode that solidifies his power, but both vocal and mute suppressions are evident. Sir Thomas' return assumes that he leaves behind a certain order, even harmony, on his plantations. He controls superficially obedient slaves, but that illusion will soon be fractured. By implication, other apparent fixtures might also turn out to be less enduring.

This is not to argue that the possibility of slave emancipation in *Mansfield Park* parallels a potential liberation for Anglo-Saxon women. But it is to posit that challenges to ossified thought and the received cultural representation of women are at least conceivable. Lady Bertram is comatose, but can that state last? The condition of indolent plantocratic wives is certainly coming to an end. Besides, the self-determining duo of Maria-Mary will not tolerate permanent disappearance. Their independent natures will soon reassert themselves, the text having forced them into a closure, demonstrably false. Fanny Price, however, the

obedient daughter who replaces the ungovernable overseer, is pinioned in a conflict of searing and unresolvable tensions. So little room is available for repudiation of her place in Mansfield Park's social situation that it threatens to bind and fix her.[43] Ultimately the rebellious acts of Fanny Price and her ideological companions, Maria, Frances Price, and Frederick are paradigmatic of slave resistance: Fanny Price signifies a bartered slave and the sign of the absent female slave. The deported Maria, in turn, is a variant of the marginalized Portsmouth family.

By contrast, Sir Thomas' authority is scarcely denied by the men of the text who fare somewhat differently. Each of them projects a part of that complex Sir Thomas, even the sybaritic Bishop Grant, symbolically linked to his malignant niece and nephew as Sir Thomas is linked to Mrs Norris. Despite debauchery, elder son Tom will take up his inheritance, as does the foolish Rushworth, whose wealth and aristocratic status enable him to transcend a temporary setback. Henry Crawford continues to seduce women and Edmund settles down into married life.

Mansfield Park, then, I am arguing, is a post-bolition narrative that intertwines with a critique, conscious or unconscious, of gender relations. Although the text superficially presents itself at the end as an agreeable synthesis that has incorporated its contradictions—the hermeneutics of an attempted restoration of power—the text's relationship to emancipationist ideology creates irrepressible contradictions and signals incompletion. As a colonialist script, it features epistemological ethnocentrisms, blanks, ellipses, substitutions, and the homogenizing of silent slaves, occupying a space between old and new modes of discourse and agitation. It projects the end of an uncompromising proslavery lobby by fusing commentary on slaves and Anglo-Saxon women who are concurrently exhibiting forms of autonomy and powerlessness. Thus the reformed planter's voice in itself becomes a nullified force. His contradictory positions cancel themselves out. The indirectness of the commentary, moreover, indicates Jane Austen's temporary reluctance to sound the controversy over slavery into recognizable audibility. Not until *Emma* does she do so unmistakably.

As a quasi-allegory of colonial-gender relations, *Mansfield Park* offers itself as a blueprint for a new society of manners. Relationships in the colonies will match those at home, for domestic manners have been transformed for the better. But as we have seen, Sir Thomas' brand of eurocentric benevolence is dubious at best and the socio-political recommendations are decidedly and perhaps necessarily constrained. Nonetheless, the attempt to show the positive consequences of a kinder, gentler world in action, together with many potent silences and irruptions of nuanced subaltern voices, signifies the desirable, though possibly not attainable, transition to a new colonialist dispensation of gradualist politics at home and abroad. Despite this slow but positive evolution, however, emancipation still cannot be named.

Notes

1. Wylie Sypher, 'The West-Indian as a 'Character' in the Eighteenth Century', in *Studies in Philology* vol. 36 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 504-5, 509.
2. Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains. Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).
3. Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965). See also D. J. Murray, *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government 1801-1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Dale Herbert Porter, *The Defense of the British Slave Trade, 1784-1807,* Dissertation University of Oregon, June 1967, 25-166.
4. Mary Millard points out that Northampton squires were rarely sugar-planters and speculates that 'an earlier Bertram married a lady who brought an estate in Antigua, as her dowry'. Mary Millard, '1807 and All That', *Persuasions,* 50-1. I thank Professor Kenneth Moler for invaluable discussions on the question of Sir Thomas's slave-owning status.

5. Sir Thomas probably belonged to the 'outer ring' of absentee planters and merchants who had never visited the colonies. Between 1807 and 1833 forty-nine planters and twenty merchants belonged to this group. B. W. Higman, 'The West India 'Interest' in Parliament 1807-1833', *Historical Studies* 13 (1967-69) 4, 1-19. See also Lowell Joseph Ragatz, *Absentee Landlordism in the British Caribbean, 1750-1833* (London: Bryan Edwards Press, n.d.), 1-19).
6. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 279-80.
7. Sir George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections: in a Series of Letters Addressed to Mrs. Beecher Stowe, written by Sir George Stephen, at Her Request* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 36-7. Note also that as a result of information about ongoing inhumane treatment, British abolitionists were shortly to publicize the condition of slaves in Antigua even more decisively in forming a committee for the 'Neglected and Deserted Negroes' of that island. See John Rylands Memorial Library 'The Case of the Neglected and Deserted Negroes in the Island of Antigua', pamphlet 21.5, pt. 8.
8. Frank J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England. A Study in English Humanitarianism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 131, 171-2. B. W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). See also James Walvin, 'The rise of British popular sentiment for abolition 1787-1832', *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey,* eds Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), 154 and *passim*; Sir George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections,* 25-27 and *passim.*
9. Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park. An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), 40-2.
10. Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park,* 35-6.
11. R. W. Chapman, *The Novels of Jane Austen. The Text based on Collation of the Early Editions,* vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 30. Further references to *Mansfield Park* will be given in the text. The enormous chain of expenses that emanated from the Great House included a host of people from servants and overseers to waiters, 'brownskin gals' of no official function, and the estate's managing attorney who received 60% of the gross. Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire. A Short History of British Slavery* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), 132-9).
12. Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park,* 37. William B. Willcox touches briefly on the turmoil that would have precipitated Sir Thomas's decision, in *The Age of Aristocracy 1688-1830* (Lexington, MS: D. C. Heath and Company, 1971), 174-179. Willcox also points out that: 'Though Miss Austen's two brothers were in the navy throughout the war, her world is untouched by anything outside itself; it is tranquil and timeless' 168. See also *Mansfield Park,* 65.
13. With respect to Sir Thomas's 'near-noble' status, Fleishman argues that 'only some four hundred families could qualify for the higher class, and despite an economic fluidity which enabled some baronets and even commoners to enter it, this was an aristocracy composed mainly of noblemen' (40). Mrs. Flanders, *Antigua and the Antiguans: A Full Account of the Colony and its Inhabitants From the Time of the Caribs to the Present Day, Interspersed with Anecdotes and Legends. Also, an Impartial View of Slavery and the Free Labour Systems; the Statistics of the Island, and Biographical Notices of the Principal Families,* vol. 2 (London, 1844), 136.
14. Sir George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections,* 8-19; Frank J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England,* 176-81.
15. Chapman, *The Novels of Jane Austen,* 553-6.
16. Frank Gibbon, 'The Antiguan Connection: Some New Light on *Mansfield Park* ', in *The Cambridge Quarterly,* 11 (1982), 303.
17. Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament,* vol. 1 (London: 1808; rpt. Frank Cass, 1968), 378ff; 477ff. In reading Clarkson, Jane Austen would have been abreast of fierce abolitionist and pro-slavery infighting both inside and outside Parliament and of the literature on the subject of the slave trade.
18. Clarkson, *History,* vol. 1, 479.

19. Johanna M. Smith, '"My only sister now": Incest in *Mansfield Park* ', *Studies in the Novel* 19:1 (1987), 1-15.
20. Ruth Bernard Yeazell, 'The Boundaries of Mansfield Park', in *Representations,* 6 (1984), 133-152.
21. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America. The Question of the Other,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 130.
22. In *Popular Tales* (1804) Maria Edgeworth, for example, has a story entitled 'The Grateful Negro', that exemplifies exactly this familiar binary opposition. It is possible, given Jane Austen's admiration for Maria Edge-worth (Chapman, vol. 5, 299), that she had read some of Edgeworth's tales as well as her novels. Given the popularity of *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* (1796) by Elizabeth Helme that also features a 'grateful negro', Austen may well have read that novel or others featuring that motif.
23. *Mansfield Park,* 217. The connection of indolent house-mistresses despised by their authors frequently appears. Two examples are Lady Ellison in Sarah Robinson Scott's novel, *The History of George Ellison* (1766) and Mary Wollstonecraft's polemical attack on such practices in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).
24. Sypher, 'The West Indian', 503, 506.
25. Ragatz, *Absentee Landlordism,* 1-21. Note also how Sir Thomas's 'burnt, fagged, worn look' (178) matches signs of the contemporary West Indian in fiction. 'A yellowish complexion, lassitude of body and mind, fitful spells of passion or energy, generosity bordering on improvidence, sentimentality combined with a streak of naughtiness and cruelty to subdeviates'; see also Sypher, *The West Indian,* 504.
26. *Lovers' Vows. A Play, in five acts. Performed at the Theatre Royal Covent-Garden. From the German of Kotzebue. by Mrs. Inchbald* (London, 1798) in Chapman, *The Novels of Jane Austen,* 475-538.
27. *Lovers' Vows,* 534.
28. Gibbon, 'The Antiguan Connection', 298-305.
29. Gerald L. Gould, 'The Gate Scene at Sotherton in *Mansfield Park* ', in *Literature and Psychology,* 20:1 (1970), 75-8.
30. For the discussions of subjectivity and interpellation in ideology here and elsewhere in the essay, I am indebted to Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics, and Ideology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).
31. I am assuming here and elsewhere in the text the reader's conversancy with *Lovers' Vows,* an assumption I think Jane Austen makes.
32. In *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), Michel Foucault argues that feudal torture of the criminal's body and subsequent death 'made everyone aware … of the unrestrained presence [and power] of the sovereign' 'The ceremony of the public torture and execution displayed for all to see the power relation that gave his force to the law …'. 'We must regard the public execution, as it was still ritualized in the eighteenth century, as a political operation' 49-53.
33. Jane Austen, *Emma* (first published 1816) (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1933), 233.
34. See F. O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), especially 77-124 and 237-43. See also James Walvin, *The Black Presence. A documentary history of the Negro in England, 1555-1860* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 95-114.
35. Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 116-119.
36. I am indebted for the argument about the text's excess and unconsciousness to Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production,* trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 75-97 and *passim.*
37. Yeazell, 'The Boundaries of *Mansfield Park* ', 133.
38. Craton, *Testing the Chains,* 337-8.
39. *Mansfield Park,* 104. I would add data from the *Quarterly Review* to Chapman's list of sources for *Mansfield Park* and refashion his chronology of the novel from 1800-1809 accordingly.
40. See *Quarterly Review,* 164.
41. Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology,* 13.

42. I am thinking here of Edward Said's conceptualization of orientalizing in Chapter One, 'The Scope of Orientalism', in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), and *passim.*
43. Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology,* 156-7.

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Austen, Jane (1775 - 1817): Introduction

JANE AUSTEN (1775 - 1817)

English novelist.

Originally written between 1798 and 1799, but not published until 1818, *Northanger Abbey* is considered Jane Austen's first significant work of fiction, and is her only work to be widely studied as part of the Gothic literary tradition. The novel is in part a burlesque of the Gothic and sentimental fiction that was popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries particularly of Ann Radcliffe's novels, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. In addition to its parodic elements, *Northanger Abbey* also follows the maturation of Catherine Morland, a naive eighteen-year-old, ignorant of the workings of English society and prone to self-deception. Influenced by her reading of novels rife with the overblown qualities of horror fiction, Catherine concocts a skewed version of reality by infusing real people, things, and events with terrible significance. However, Catherine's impressions, though clouded by Gothic sentiment, often hint at an insightful, if unconscious, judgment of character that cuts through the social pretensions of those around her. In this respect Austen's novel carries on an ironic discourse which makes it not only a satire, but also a sophisticated novel of social education.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Austen began writing while she was still living at her childhood home at Steventon Rectory in Hampshire, England. Her life at Steventon, though sheltered from the world at large, gave her an intimate knowledge of a segment of English society—the landed gentry—that was to provide the material for most of her fiction, and by 1787 Austen had already begun to produce stories, dramas, and short novels. In 1795 she commenced

writing *Elinor and Marianne*, an early version of her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). One year later, she started *First Impressions*, the work that eventually evolved into *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). When Austen finished *First Impressions* in 1797, her father submitted it to a London publisher. Although rejected, the story remained a popular favorite among the circle of relations and acquaintances with whom Austen shared her writings. In 1798 and 1799 Austen wrote most of a novel that was later revised, bought by the publisher Richard Crosby, and advertised in 1803 as "In the Press, SUSAN; a novel, in 2 vols." It remained unpublished, however, and was later revised again and published in 1818, after Austen's death, as *Northanger Abbey*, along with the novel *Persuasion*.

MAJOR WORKS

Austen's career is generally divided into an early and a late period, the former encompassing the juvenilia, as well as *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice*, and *Northanger Abbey*, the latter including *Emma* (1816), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Persuasion*. They are separated by a hiatus of eight years. There is a remarkable consistency in the work of the early and late periods, marked by a certain mellowing of tone in the later works. The plots of Austen's novels revolve around the intricacies of courtship and marriage between members of the upper class. Austen's detractors in more egalitarian eras find fault with what they perceive to be a rigid adherence to a repressive class system. Also, in commenting on the narrowness of her literary world and vision, some critics wonder if novels of such small scope can truly reflect the human condition. However, Austen's talents are uniquely suited to her chosen subject. Her realm is comedy, and her sense of the comedic in human nature informs her technique, which is judged as superb for its delineation of character, control of point of view, and ironic tone. Although Austen chose as her subject the people she knew best, she illuminated in their characters the follies and failings of men and women of all times and classes.

While ostensibly a burlesque of the conventional modes of Gothic horror fiction, *Northanger Abbey* is also a novel of education that focuses on the theme of self-deception. Austen portrays Catherine as an inversion of the typical Gothic heroine, making her neither beautiful, talented, nor particularly intelligent, but rather ordinary in most respects. In contrast, several other characters in the novel are presented as pastiches of stock Gothic characters—Isabella and General Tilney, for example, are parodies of the damsel and the domestic tyrant. These individuals seem to fit into Catherine's deluded perspective of the world which, in the tradition of Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote, leaves her unable to distinguish between reality and the romanticized version of life she finds in popular novels. Other characters in the novel serve to balance the work. Henry Tilney is often regarded by critics as Austen's mouthpiece—though he, too, is occasionally an object of irony and ridicule. For example, he fails to realize that Catherine's delusions, though excessive, hint at the true nature of people and events. Thus, Catherine is the first to understand that General Tilney, although not a murderer, is cruel and mercenary. This ironic aspect of the novel alludes to a larger theme in the work, that of the moral significance of social conventions and conduct—a subject that Austen explored in greater detail in later novels.

Catherine's introduction into society begins when Mr. and Mrs. Allen, her neighbors in Fullerton, invite her to vacation with them in the English town of Bath. There she meets the somewhat pedantic clergyman Henry Tilney and the dramatic Isabella Thorpe, who encourages Catherine in her reading of Gothic fiction. Her circle of acquaintances widens with the arrival of James Morland, Catherine's brother and a love interest for Isabella, and John Thorpe, Isabella's rude, conniving brother. The setting shifts from Bath to Northanger Abbey, the ancestral home of the Tilneys, when John deceives General Tilney, Henry's father, into believing that Catherine is an heiress. Austen's satire of Gothic horror novel conventions begins as Henry and Catherine drive up to the Abbey and the former plays on the heroine's romantic expectations of the estate. When Catherine reaches her destination she is disappointed to find a thoroughly modern building, completely lacking in hidden passageways, concealed dungeons, and the like. Later, Austen allows Catherine's imagination to run amok, only to reveal the objects of her fears as ordinary and mundane. At the climax of the novel, General Tilney—whom Catherine suspects of having murdered or shut up his wife somewhere in the

abbey—turns the heroine out after learning that she does not come from a wealthy family. At the close of the novel, the outraged Henry proposes marriage to Catherine, now divested of her delusions by Henry and his sister Eleanor. General Tilney, who proves to be not a murderer, but rather an individual of questionable moral and social character, eventually gives his consent to the marriage after learning that his daughter Eleanor is also engaged—to a wealthy Viscount.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have generally regarded *Northanger Abbey* to be of lesser literary quality than Austen's other mature works. Some scholars have observed occasional lapses in her narrative technique of a sort that do not appear in later novels. By far the greatest debate surrounding *Northanger Abbey*, however, is the question of its aesthetic unity. Critics have traditionally seen the work as part novel of society, part satire of popular Gothic fiction, and therefore not a coherent whole. Detractors, focusing on the work as a parody, have found its plot weak, its characters unimaginative and superficial, and its comedy anticlimactic due to its reliance on an outmoded style of fiction. Others, while conceding the lack of an easily discernible organizing principle, argue that the work is unified on the thematic level as not merely a satire of popular fiction, but also an ironic presentation of a self-deceived imagination that is quixotically wrong about reality but right about human morality. In addition, critics have considered *Northanger Abbey* a transitional work, one that moves away from the burlesque mode of juvenilia and toward the stylistic control of such masterpieces as *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*.

Austen, Jane (1775 - 1817): Representative Works

Sense and Sensibility (novel) 1811
Pride and Prejudice (novel) 1813
Mansfield Park (novel) 1814
Emma (novel) 1816
Northanger Abbey and Persuasion. 4 vols. (novels) 1818
Lady Susan (novel) 1871
The Watsons (unfinished novel) 1871
Love and Friendship and Other Early Works (juvenilia) 1922
[Sanditon] Fragments of a Novel (unfinished novel) 1925
Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others (letters) 1932
Volume the First (juvenilia) 1933
Volume the Third (juvenilia) 1951
Volume the Second (juvenilia) 1963

Austen, Jane (1775 - 1817): Primary Sources

SOURCE: Austen, Jane. "Chapter 14." In *Northanger Abbey*. 1818. Reprint edition, pp. 107-16. New York: Signet, 1996.

In the following excerpt from Northanger Abbey, *first published in 1818, Catherine discusses the pleasure she derives from reading Gothic fiction—Ann Radcliffe's* Mysteries of Udolpho, *in particular—versus what she perceives as the drudgery of reading nonfiction works, such as histories.*

The next morning was fair, and Catherine almost expected another attack from the assembled party. With Mr. Allen to support her, she felt no dread of the event: but she would gladly be spared a contest, where victory itself was painful, and was heartily rejoiced therefore at neither seeing nor hearing anything of them. The

Tilneys called for her at the appointed time; and no new difficulty arising, no sudden recollection, no unexpected summons, no impertinent intrusion to disconcert their measures, my heroine was most unnaturally able to fulfil her engagement, though it was made with the hero himself. They determined on walking around Beechen Cliff, that noble hill whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object from almost every opening in Bath.

"I never look at it," said Catherine, as they walked along the side of the river, "without thinking of the south of France."

"You have been abroad then?" said Henry, a little surprised.

"Oh! No, I only mean what I have read about. It always puts me in mind of the country that Emily and her father travelled through, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. But you never read novels, I dare say?"

"Why not?"

"Because they are not clever enough for you—gentlemen read better books."

"The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when I had once begun it, I could not lay down again; I remember finishing it in two days—my hair standing on end the whole time."

"Yes," added Miss Tilney, "and I remember that you undertook to read it aloud to me, and that when I was called away for only five minutes to answer a note, instead of waiting for me, you took the volume into the Hermitage Walk, and I was obliged to stay till you had finished it."

"Thank you, Eleanor—a most honourable testimony. You see, Miss Morland, the injustice of your suspicions. Here was I, in my eagerness to get on, refusing to wait only five minutes for my sister, breaking the promise I had made of reading it aloud, and keeping her in suspense at a most interesting part, by running away with the volume, which, you are to observe, was her own, particularly her own. I am proud when I reflect on it, and I think it must establish me in your good opinion."

"I am very glad to hear it indeed, and now I shall never be ashamed of liking *Udolpho* myself. But I really thought before, young men despised novels amazingly."

"It is *amazingly;* it may well suggest *amazement* if they do—for they read nearly as many as women. I myself have read hundreds and hundreds. Do not imagine that you can cope with me in a knowledge of Julias and Louisas. If we proceed to particulars, and engage in the never-ceasing inquiry of 'Have you read this?' and 'Have you read that?' I shall soon leave you as far behind me as—what shall I say?—I want an appropriate simile.—as far as your friend Emily herself left poor Valancourt when she went with her aunt into Italy. Consider how many years I have had the start of you. I had entered on my studies at Oxford, while you were a good little girl working your sampler at home!"

"Not very good, I am afraid. But now really, do not you think *Udolpho* the nicest book in the world?"

"The nicest—by which I suppose you mean the neatest. That must depend upon the binding."

"Henry," said Miss Tilney, "you are very impertinent. Miss Morland, he is treating you exactly as he does his sister. He is forever finding fault with me, for some incorrectness of language, and now he is taking the same liberty with you. The word 'nicest,' as you used it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as

you can, or we shall be overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way."

"I am sure," cried Catherine, "I did not mean to say anything wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should not I call it so?"

"Very true," said Henry, "and this is a very nice day, and we are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice young ladies. Oh! It is a very nice word indeed! It does for everything. Originally perhaps it was applied only to express neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement—people were nice in their dress, in their sentiments, or their choice. But now every commendation on every subject is comprised in that one word."

"While, in fact," cried his sister, "it ought only to be applied to you, without any commendation at all. You are more nice than wise. Come, Miss Morland, let us leave him to meditate over our faults in the utmost propriety of diction, while we praise *Udolpho* in whatever terms we like best. It is a most interesting work. You are fond of that kind of reading?"

"To say the truth, I do not much like any other."

"Indeed!"

"That is, I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do not dislike travels. But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in. Can you?"

"Yes, I am fond of history."

"I wish I were too. I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome; and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. The speeches that are put into the heroes' mouths, their thoughts and designs—the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books."

"Historians, you think," said Miss Tilney, "are not happy in their flights of fancy. They display imagination without raising interest. I am fond of history—and am very well contented to take the false with the true. In the principal facts they have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as anything that does not actually pass under one's own observation; and as for the little embellishments you speak of, they are embellishments, and I like them as such. If a speech be well drawn up, I read it with pleasure, by whomsoever it may be made—and probably with much greater, if the production of Mr. Hume or Mr. Robertson, than if the genuine words of Caractacus, Agricola, or Alfred the Great."

"You are fond of history! And so are Mr. Allen and my father; and I have two brothers who do not dislike it. So many instances within my small circle of friends is remarkable! At this rate, I shall not pity the writers of history any longer. If people like to read their books, it is all very well, but to be at so much trouble in filling great volumes, which, as I used to think, nobody would willingly ever look into, to be labouring only for the torment of little boys and girls, always struck me as a hard fate; and though I know it is all very right and necessary, I have often wondered at the person's courage that could sit down on purpose to do it."

"That little boys and girls should be tormented," said Henry, "is what no one at all acquainted with human nature in a civilized state can deny; but in behalf of our most distinguished historians, I must observe that they might well be offended at being supposed to have no higher aim, and that by their method and style, they are perfectly well qualified to torment readers of the most advanced reason and mature time of life. I use the verb 'to torment,' as I observed to be your own method, instead of 'to instruct,' supposing them to be now admitted

as synonymous."

"You think me foolish to call instruction a torment, but if you had been as much used as myself to hear poor little children first learning their letters and then learning to spell, if you had ever seen how stupid they can be for a whole morning together, and how tired my poor mother is at the end of it, as I am in the habit of seeing almost every day of my life at home, you would allow that 'to torment' and 'to instruct' might sometimes be used as synonymous words."

"Very probably. But historians are not accountable for the difficulty of learning to read; and even you yourself, who do not altogether seem particularly friendly to very severe, very intense application, may perhaps be brought to acknowledge that it is very well worth-while to be tormented for two or three years of one's life, for the sake of being able to read all the rest of it. Consider—if reading had not been taught, Mrs. Radcliffe would have written in vain—or perhaps might not have written at all."

Catherine assented—and a very warm panegyric from her on that lady's merits closed the subject. The Tilneys were soon engaged in another on which she had nothing to say. They were viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste. Here Catherine was quite lost. She knew nothing of drawing—nothing of taste: and she listened to them with an attention which brought her little profit, for they talked in phrases which conveyed scarcely any idea to her. The little which she could understand, however, appeared to contradict the very few notions she had entertained on the matter before. It seemed as if a good view were no longer to be taken from the top of an high hill, and that a clear blue sky was no longer a proof of a fine day. She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. A misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.

The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author; and to her treatment of the subject I will only add, in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire anything more in woman than ignorance. But Catherine did not know her own advantages—did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward. In the present instance, she confessed and lamented her want of knowledge, declared that she would give anything in the world to be able to draw; and a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which his instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him, and her attention was so earnest that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of foregrounds, distances, and second distances—side-screens and perspectives—lights and shades; and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath as unworthy to make part of a landscape. Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once, Henry suffered the subject to decline, and by an easy transition from a piece of rocky fragment and the withered oak which he had placed near its summit, to oaks in general, to forests, the enclosure of them, waste lands, crown lands and government, he shortly found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence. The general pause which succeeded his short disquisition on the state of the nation was put an end to by Catherine, who, in rather a solemn tone of voice, uttered these words, "I have heard that something very shocking indeed will soon come out in London."

Miss Tilney, to whom this was chiefly addressed, was startled, and hastily replied, "Indeed! And of what nature?"

"That I do not know, nor who is the author. I have only heard that it is to be more horrible than anything we have met with yet."

"Good heaven! Where could you hear of such a thing?"

"A particular friend of mine had an account of it in a letter from London yesterday. It is to be uncommonly dreadful. I shall expect murder and everything of the kind."

"You speak with astonishing composure! But I hope your friend's accounts have been exaggerated; and if such a design is known beforehand, proper measures will undoubtedly be taken by government to prevent its coming to effect."

"Government," said Henry, endeavouring not to smile, "neither desires nor dares to interfere in such matters. There must be murder; and government cares not how much."

The ladies stared. He laughed, and added, "Come, shall I make you understand each other, or leave you to puzzle out an explanation as you can? No—I will be noble. I will prove myself a man, no less by the generosity of my soul than the clearness of my head. I have no patience with such of my sex as disdain to let themselves sometimes down to the comprehension of yours. Perhaps the abilities of women are neither sound nor acute—neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they may want observation, discernment, judgment, fire, genius, and wit."

"Miss Morland, do not mind what he says; but have the goodness to satisfy me as to this dreadful riot."

"Riot! What riot?"

"My dear Eleanor, the riot is only in your own brain. The confusion there is scandalous. Miss Morland has been talking of nothing more dreadful than a new publication which is shortly to come out, in three duodecimo volumes, two hundred and seventy-six pages in each, with a frontispiece to the first, of two tombstones and a lantern—do you understand? And you, Miss Morland—my stupid sister has mistaken all your clearest expressions. You talked of expected horrors in London—and instead of instantly conceiving, as any rational creature would have done, that such words could relate only to a circulating library, she immediately pictured to herself a mob of three thousand men assembling in St. George's Fields, the Bank attacked, the Tower threatened, the streets of London flowing with blood, a detachment of the Twelfth Light Dragoons (the hopes of the nation) called up from Northampton to quell the insurgents, and the gallant Captain Frederick Tilney, in the moment of charging at the head of his troop, knocked off his horse by a brickbat from an upper window. Forgive her stupidity. The fears of the sister have added to the weakness of the woman; but she is by no means a simpleton in general."

Catherine looked grave. "And now, Henry," said Miss Tilney, "that you have made us understand each other, you may as well make Miss Morland 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 Morland is not used to your odd ways."

"I shall be most happy to make her better acquainted with them."

"No doubt; but that is no explanation of the present."

"What am I to do?"

"You know what you ought to do. Clear your character handsomely before her. Tell her that you think very highly of the understanding of women."

"Miss Morland, I think very highly of the understanding of all the women in the world—especially of those—whoever they may be—with whom I happen to be in company."

"That is not enough. Be more serious."

"Miss Morland, no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much that they never find it necessary to use more than half."

"We shall get nothing more serious from him now, Miss Morland. He is not in a sober mood. But I do assure you that he must be entirely misunderstood, if he can ever appear to say an unjust thing of any woman at all, or an unkind one of me."

It was no effect to Catherine to believe that Henry Tilney could never be wrong. His manner might sometimes surprise, but his meaning must always be just: and what she did not understand, she was almost as ready to admire, as what she did. The whole walk was delightful, and though it ended too soon, its conclusion was delightful too; her friends attended her into the house, and Miss Tilney, before they parted, addressing herself with respectful form, as much to Mrs. Allen as to Catherine, petitioned for the pleasure of her company to dinner on the day after the next. No difficulty was made on Mrs. Allen's side, and the only difficulty on Catherine's was in concealing the excess of her pleasure.

The morning had passed away so charmingly as to banish all her friendship and natural affection, for no thought of Isabella or James had crossed her during their walk. When the Tilneys were gone, she became amiable again, but she was amiable for some time to little effect; Mrs. Allen had no intelligence to give that could relieve her anxiety; she had heard nothing of any of them. Towards the end of the morning, however, Catherine, having occasion for some indispensable yard of ribbon which must be bought without a moment's delay, walked out into the town, and in Bond Street overtook the second Miss Thorpe as she was loitering towards Edgar's Buildings between two of the sweetest girls in the world, who had been her dear friends all the morning. From her, she soon learned that the party to Clifton had taken place. "They set off at eight this morning," said Miss Anne, "and I am sure I do not envy them their drive. I think you and I are very well off to be out of the scrape. It must be the dullest thing in the world, for there is not a soul at Clifton at this time of year. Belle went with your brother, and John drove Maria."

Catherine spoke the pleasure she really felt on hearing this part of the arrangement.

"Oh! yes," rejoined the other, "Maria is gone. She was quite wild to go. She thought it would be something very fine. I cannot say I admire her taste; and for my part, I was determined from the first not to go, if they pressed me ever so much."

Catherine, a little doubtful of this, could not help answering, "I wish you could have gone too. It is a pity you could not go all go."

"Thank you; but it is quite a matter of indifference to me. Indeed, I would not have gone on any account. I was saying so to Emily and Sophia when you overtook us."

Catherine was still unconvinced; but glad that Anne should have the friendship of an Emily and a Sophia to console her, she bade her adieu without much uneasiness, and returned home, pleased that the party had not been prevented by her refusing to join it, and very heartily wishing that it might be too pleasant to allow either James or Isabella to resent her resistance any longer.

Austen, Jane (1775 - 1817): Title Commentary

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SYNDY MCMILLEN CONGER (ESSAY DATE 1987)

> SOURCE: Conger, Syndy McMillen. "Austen's Sense and Radcliffe's Sensibility." *Gothic*, n.s., 2 (1987): 16-24.
>
> *In the following essay, Conger argues that rather than denouncing Ann Radcliffe's Gothic "sensibility" in* Northanger Abbey, *Austen affirms its essence and expands upon its utility as both a heroic virtue and a means of achieving growth.*

The intrinsic value of *Northanger Abbey* is still disputed, but its significance in literary history generally is not: it is viewed as a key moment in the history of the novel. Here Ann Radcliffe's Female Gothic, the last representative of a century of literary emotionalism, is parodied to death by the novel of social realism: here Louis Bredvold's "natural history of sensibility"[1] comes to an end. Recent revisionists[2] see Austen as more indebted to her predecessor but still believe that she resists Radcliffe's endorsement of the heart. Marilyn Butler insists that Austen's heroines "are rebuked for letting interiority guide them" (140, 145), and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar also argue that Catherine Morland, foreshadowing Austen's later heroines, must "relinquish" her "subjectivity" to save herself (121, 129, 144).[3] This vision of Austen sacrificing Radcliffe's subjectivity on the altar of realism or propriety or common sense wants some revision itself, for it rests on cursory assumptions about Radcliffe's achievement. The two authors are not poles apart at all on the question of sensibility; they are, on the contrary, two of the most prominent of many women writers involved in a late-century enterprise best briefly described as "saving sensibility."[4]

By the time Radcliffe completed *The Italian*, she had also reformed the English Gothic novel, divorcing it from sensation and wedding it to sentiment. She focuses her fictions not on the supernatural and irrational forces that drive forward Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* but rather on the sensitive human psyche responding to such forces; and the effect is to establish that special form of eighteenth-century sensitivity, sensibility, as the behavioral norm. In Radcliffe's world sensibility is not confined to a few amiable eccentrics: all her good characters have it; conversely, all her wicked characters are without it, are, instead, slaves to the brute passions. Yet she never recommends sensibility blindly. First she reconstructs it,[5] then tests it for viability in the laboratory of Gothic terrors.

This rehabilitation of sensibility[6] was no small undertaking. A cult term that emerged midcentury but eluded precise definition, at first it referred to a bundle of loosely compatible but positive ideas: "delicate sensitiveness of taste" or "the capacity for refined emotion"; most specifically the "readiness to feel compassion for suffering," to forgive, and to be charitable (OED, cf. Hagstrum 5-9). Especially after the appearance of *The Sorrows of Young Werter* in England in 1779, however, it began to seem suspect, to raise a number of troubling questions. Was its cultivation more apt to lead to emotional refinement or excess, sensitivity to others or egotism, morality or pathological behavior? It declined in status, mocked and

abandoned by leading authors and rendered lugubrious by minor ones. Radcliffe's guarded endorsement of it in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* suggests that she was well aware of this tarnished reputation.

Mr. St. Aubert, the heroine's father, is willing to defend sensibility only as the lesser of two evils: "Whatever may be the evils resulting from a too susceptible heart, nothing can be hoped from an insensible one" (1.20). For St. Aubert, sensibility is a central, even an indispensable human attribute, but not a sufficient virtue unto itself. "Sentiment is a disgrace," says the dying man to his daughter, "instead of an ornament, unless it lead us to good actions" (1.80). Since it too easily invites self-indulgence or "the pride of fine feeling" (1.79), both of these being obstacles to fellow-feeling, its necessary companions are self-control and moderation: "I would not annihilate your feelings, my child, I would only teach you to command them"; "All excess is vicious" (1.20). Actually, his praise of sensibility, when compared to the successes of its avatars in *Udolpho* and *The Italian*, is unnecessarily faint. These characters do occasionally succumb to excessive emotionality; but, more often, the special gifts of sensibility serve them well, helping them to survive in a hostile world.

First, they are acutely perceptive. They use their senses: visual, common, moral. They combine an awareness of their own hearts with a scrutiny of others' faces to gain an intuitive knowledge or "emotional consciousness" (OED) of their situations. When left alone, they tend to scan their minds, sorting out and, if necessary, challenging their feelings or their ideas; they tend to set their inner lives in order. At other times, the same sensitivity and capacity for fine discernment turns outward—they are all skilled physiognomists: they scan eyes, study gestures, and draw accurate inferences about the emotional or moral state of persons around them (Ellena de Rosalba's study of her jailor Spalatro's face, for instance, saves her life). This special consciousness of inside and outside, coupled with their capacity for intense concentration, often grants them the advantage in self-control.[7] They are conversant with their own hearts and this habitual rational attention to emotion sets them free from passion's tyranny. Under stress their minds are nearly always clear, agile and strong. Witness Emily talking to Count Morano just as he has decided to abduct her by force: "Calm, Intreat you, these transports, and listen to reason, if you will not to pity. You have equally misplaced your love, and your hatred" (2.264).

These characters of sensibility are clearly designed to be stronger than the creations of mid-century ironists Mackenzie and Sterne, Harleys and Yoricks who were frequently immobilized by their own or others' emotions. Radcliffe's sensibility is much more than passive capacity for refined emotions, even for compassion. It energizes the whole mind, heightening its ordinary powers of perception, communication, concentration, and self-control. It is a new normative, moderate, rational subjectivity; and it is worth saving because it is a saving grace. The startling fact about recent Radcliffe criticism, seen in this light, is that it sees her fictions as hypocritical and deeply subjective. Radcliffe indulges in "every excess of sensibility which she explicitly warns against" (Kahane 52); her fictions "might virtuously proclaim the merits of self-control," but what they show is a "world governed by subjectivity." They are pure "exploration of her heroines' inner state of being at various levels of consciousness," one such level being "'inner rage and unspecified … guilt'" (Butler 133).

This preoccupation with Radcliffe's supposed covert message at the expense of her overt one focuses attention on a single but essential fact about Gothic fiction, one amply discussed by students of the genre from Eino Railo to Tzvetan Todorov—its subrational appeal. But Gothic fiction appeals to us, such students are quick to add, because it brings some order to the chaotic subrational realm.[8] The Gothic objectifies fears and desires in specific events, characters, and objects and then rationalizes them, making the latent manifest and, at the same time, usually less threatening. This objectifying process leads Todorov to suggest that Gothic fiction is ersatz psychoanalysis; and recent studies of the Female Gothic support his claim. Tania Modleski argues that the Female Gothic enables women readers to "work through profound psychic conflicts," that it legitimizes a temporary paranoia in readers by allowing them to identify with guiltless heroines placed in a hostile environment (83). These fictions give vent to terror and hostility but without finally recommending such attitudes (Fleenor 17).

Political persuasion may determine whether critics view this textual doubleness as therapeutic or repressive, but I doubt if it justifies their refusing to see the doubleness at all, of insisting that Radcliffe, for Austen saw that doubleness, even if she responded to it with characteristic tact. She worried about Radcliffe's affective appeal but without condemning it; and she did not let it undermine her admiration for the ethic of sensibility that Radcliffe's texts manifestly defend. In fact, *Northanger Abbey* moves towards a subtle endorsement of that ethic, while Catherine acts out a confrontation with the problem of the Gothic's special subjective appeal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR "GOTHIC EXTRAVAGANCE" IN *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

The meaning of Catherine's adventures, including her Gothic aberrations at Northanger, is indissolubly a part of the formal structure of the novel. Without the dual form in which pairs of opposites are dramatically illustrated, especially the contrast between reason and imagination, the growth of wisdom and experience in Catherine Morland would be not only incomplete but also formally chaotic and therefore aesthetically meaningless. In the penultimate chapter, where the contrast between romance and common life is repeated from Chapter ii (Vol. I), Jane Austen achieves a resolution of the antithes is between Gothic romance and the reality of everyday life in the achievement of her own novel: Gothic extravagance does have a place in literature if it serves an aesthetic rather than an empirical function. She seems to banish romantic material from the novel in the comic finality of Catherine's humiliation, but ironically allows it a legitimate existence by the formal success with which she has employed the Gothic episode.

SOURCE: Glock, Waldo S. "Catherine Morland's Gothic Delusions: A Defense of *Northanger Abbey." Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, no. 32 (1978): 33-46.

Catherine's misreadings and misadventures have been much discussed, but a few points need to be made about them for present purposes. Catherine is a naive reader, consuming *Udolpho* without ever activating her analytical faculty: she reads for plot and for thrills (1.25). Moreover, she allows Mrs. Radcliffe to activate her dream-making process; and that leads her to confuse fiction and reality as had her cervantick predecessor and, also as he had, to imitate the heroines of her idol. In this case, by practicing physiognomy, by reading a man's character in his face: General Tilney's "silent thoughtfulness," "downcast eyes," and "contracted brow" add up in her roused imagination to the "air and attitude of a Montoni!" (2.150).

Catherine's muddle reflects clear recognition on Austen's part of the danger of Gothic fiction—its activation of passive-agressive fantasies and volatile emotions; but her response to that danger is neither to condemn the reader nor the author, but simply to insist on the separateness of fiction and reality (Glock 44-45) and, even more important, on the inapplicability of emotions depicted and elicited in fiction to life. As Catherine sadly notes to herself after Henry's astonished lecture—"Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (2.159)—we had best confine our "craving to be frightened" (2.160) to the aesthetic realm.

Northanger Abbey does not limit its evaluation of Radcliffe's subjective appeal, however, to these few negative moments. On the contrary, it contains many suggestions that *Udolpho* presents Catherine with psychological benefits as well as dangers. It may not enhance her power of selfcontrol, but it nevertheless does increase her abilities to see and to converse. While she views Bath from the hills with the Tilneys, Catherine is able to compare the new scene to Radcliffe's "the south of France" and to chat, as a result, more easily with Henry; and if it guides her aesthetic appreciation of landscape in Bath, it intensifies her moral awareness at the Abbey. On the one hand, this results in a mistaken inference about the General, but, on the other, it also provides a helpful bridge in Catherine's education between the moral idyll of her childhood and the crasser actual world outside her home.

Catherine notices herself that she feels somehow protected by *Udolpho*—a neglected insight of hers that anticipates Modleski's thesis by 200 years: "While I have Udolpho to read," she assures Isabella Thorpe, "I feel as if nobody could make me miserable" (1.25). The reviewers of Austen's day might have insisted that

such an attitude endangered Catherine's virtue; Austen's text, however, demonstrates that Catherine is right, that *Udolpho* shields her from graver actual dangers, a delightful reversal of the reviewers' favorite cliche. At the Allens', Catherine's "raised, restless, and frightened imagination" busies itself with *Udolpho* while her adult chaperone worries about dressmakers (1.34). In town Catherine ponders the mystery of the black veil whenever Isabella chatters to her mindlessly about clothes or men or her brother John rattles about carriages and women's faces (1.22-23). Upon arrival at the Tilney abbey, Catherine views the spotless well-lit, modernized interior with the eye of a disappointed Gothic addict, oblivious to the General's struggle to impress her with his riches (1.128). *Udolpho* may burden Catherine temporarily with a few embarrassing fantasies, but it is often the best of the offered leisure pursuits and a positive preventive to vanity, frivolity, or materialism—a position on novel reading, incidentally, also taken by Mr. Rambler and another of his admirers, Mary Wollstonecraft.[9]

Implicit in Catherine's story is at least one other tribute to *Udolpho*: a subtle endorsement of Radcliffe's ethic of sensibility. Those who persist in seeing Catherine as progressing away from such an ethic may be dazzled by the parody into believing that its presence somehow magically banishes everything Radcliffe stood for from Austen's fictive world. If *Northanger Abbey* moves its heroine away from one kind of subjectivity, however, it is only to move her towards another. It is not so much a progress as a process of refinement, one in which the heroine is gradually divested (Moler 36) of certain excessive traits and certain false friends until she stands before us, at the end, as an approximation of Radcliffe's ideal (granted, that in Austen's fiction there are only approximations of ideals) of rational sensibility (Duckworth 8).

Catherine begins her story as a tomboy, a reluctant scholar, and a naif, still "ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (1.5). She is also burdened, however, by excessive sensibility; she is indiscriminately goodnatured and the difficulties she has at Bath stem as much from her "too susceptible heart" as they do from her inexperience. She thinks well of nearly everyone, and refuses to pass judgment on her brother James's new friends, the Thorpes. It seems harsh to infer from this, however, as Stuart Tave has done, that Catherine is an "amiable idiot" (60); for even in the brisk round of mindless activity she is caught up in at Bath, she shows signs of awakening sensitivity, discernment, and self-control. She doubts Henry's playful assertions, she worries about the impropriety of riding in carriages and missing appointments, and she finally sees that she must, for the sake of her own and her friends' feelings, sometimes say no to the whims of others. Her sensibility, even if it renders her gullible, at the same time makes her teachable and flexible, two valuable assets in the complex moral world of Austen's novels.

Isabella presents a particular danger to Catherine in her still malleable condition, that of tempting her to become a heroine of false sensibility. Isabella's mode of discourse, which Catherine begins to echo during her Bath period, is exaggerated and insincere, the vocabulary of sentiment without the substance to back it up that St. Aubert deplores. The Tilneys are a better influence on Catherine. Eleanor Tilney is presented as Isabella's foil, the genuine version of what Isabella professes to be: all decorum, sensitivity, and fellow-feeling. She is very much like her analogue Emily St. Aubert, but with one important exception: she does not wear her heart on her face. Her sensibility is concealed by a quiet reserve (1.38).

In contrast, Henry enters the novel in the role of a talkative antic commentator. He mocks the Bath society's attention to surfaces so much that Catherine concludes, shortly after meeting him, that he indulges "himself a little too much with the foibles of others" (1.15). Gilbert and Gubar agree, pegging him as "his father's son," opinionated, condescending, even insensitive and misogynistic to a degree (140); but the fact remains that he is by far the more sympathetic of Catherine's two suitors. John Thorpe's remarks begina and end with himself and his own concerns; he remains blind to his weaknesses and essentially unaware of the needs of others. In contrast, Henry, even if his discerning mind is sometimes "more nice than wise" (1.84), knows himself and attends to others. He is his sister's counterpart: a complete man of sensibility disguised in motley. He has moral sense, common sense, a keen capacity for empathy, acuteness of apprehension, refined taste, and a capacity for forgiveness too, even of a young woman who sees his father as a murderer! Henry generally

keeps this sensibility under cover of his wit; but when he is pressed by his father to abandon Catherine and to consider a financially more advantageous marriage, his sentimental values emerge. He rejects the advice of his father and hastens to Catherine's house to bring about a visibly sentimental unraveling: "He felt hemself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland" (2.202).[10]

At Northanger Abbey, then, Catherine is taught to distinguish sentimental fiction from reality, but, as might be surmised by the company she keeps, she is not stripped of her sensibility. Her abbey experiences rather refine her character than revolutionize it. Much that is affected and adolescent falls away at the abbey—the extravagance of diction, imagination, and curiosity. What remains is essentially Radcliffe's ideal: the well-regulated, yet sensitive and charitable, mind. After the General has peremptorily ordered Catherine to leave, even though she is stunned and deeply shamed, she checks her own grief to minister to Eleanor's. When Eleanor begs her, with a "look of sorrow," to write her despite her father's interdict, Catherine's pride melts "in a moment" and she instantly says "Oh, Eleanor, I will write to you indeed" (2.185). Eleanor is equally generous in these last moments, pressing her pocket money on Catherine for the unexpected journey. Not just their tears and words on this occasion, but their acute consciousness of the moral and emotional dimensions of the crisis, their giving and forgiving natures, and their self-control for each others' sakes, mark them as heroines of sensibility in Radcliffe's sense.

Radcliffe's special subjectivity does not seem to me to be sacrificed in this scene or elsewhere in *Northanger Abbey*. What has been sacrificed, if anything, is the assumption that sensibility is necessarily on the face or in the self-consciousness of the characters. Sensibility here and elsewhere in Austen's works has become so quiet that it is often overlooked. It has no unmistakable surface characteristics.[11] It can underlie Henry's teasing conversation as well as the sweet, serious discourse of his sister; Mrs. Allen's absent-minded permissiveness but also Mrs. Morland's gentle scrutiny and periodic lectures. In this context, it should be fairly obvious why Austen seems skeptical of the Gothic frame that Radcliffe had given to sensibility. Austen needed to divest it of the Gothic atmosphere of exaggeration to save it for her own more subtle fictional reality, one where faces more often serve as masks than as windows to the heart.

One can only be sure that someone else has sensibility in an Austen novel after a lapse of time and events: only if a professed concern for others has been translated, as St. Aubert recommends, into actions, tested by adversity, and remains unshaken, is it true sensibility. Three characters in *Northanger Abbey* clearly fail this test of time, even though they imagine themselves in firm possession of aesthetic and moral sense: both the Thorpes' and the General's attentiveness to Cathe-rine melt away with their misconceptions of the Morland fortune. In contrast, there is no special awareness in Eleanor, Henry, Mrs. Morland, or Catherine that their actions can be identified with a code called sensibility, yet they obviously can. It is as if, to survive, sensibility has gone underground. Radcliffe had declared it to be normative; Austen rather clearly but unobtrusively assumes it to be, mentioning it less often than Radcliffe but nevertheless granting it a central position in *Northanger Abbey* that it never after relinquishes. People with it in her novels—Catherine, Marianne Dashwood, Colonel Brandon, Anne Elliott, and Fanny Price—need never be given up for lost; and those without it (just as St. Aubert had assured Emily)—the Thorpes, the Misses Steele or Bertram—are seldom to be saved. For Austen not only is sensibility, as it is for Radcliffe, a measure of moral excellence and the key to true propriety; it has also become the leaven for growth, the secret ingredient of her Bildungsroman. Clearly, *Northanger Abbey* does not mark the death of Radcliffe's sensibility but rather its fruitful transfiguration.

Notes

1. Stuart M. Tave argues persuasively for this keen distinction between Radcliffe and Austen. Others who do so include Frank W. Bradbrook, Waldo S. Glock, Kenneth Moler, and Mary Lascelles.

2. They base their arguments on Harold Bloom's assumptions about authors and their predecessors and the "anxiety of influence." Judith Wilt offers a similar reading but her focus is not so conspicuously feminist. My

own revisionist reading is closest to Jean Hagstrum's, who sees Austen's novels as contemplative reconsiderations of the values of sensibility. I draw on Hans-Robert Jauss's reception theory; particularly, on his convictions that texts are best considered in contexts, in relationship to analagous works in their time (synchronic study) and in the past (diachronic study), and that these relationships are nearly always complex ones.

3. Cf. the similar readings of David Levine, of Judith Wilt, who sees Austen's heroines trying to "cut … destructive emotion down to size" (135), and of Coral Ann Howells, who emphasizes Austen's greater atten tion to "balance" in matters of feeling.

4. Katharine Rogers has suggested that eighteenth-century English women writers felt, to some degree, liberated by the literary mode of sensibility, even though they were often ambivalent about it. It authorized the expression of emotions which the culture-at-large (and their conduct books) did not. Sensibility may have appealed to women on a number of other levels as well: linguistic, social, ethical. Women at the time were encouraged to be silent, or if allowed to speak, were untrained to speak the language of pure logic. Sensibility valued the non-verbal forms of communication fostered by silence—sympathy, facial expression, gesture—and it spoke characteristically in a language that was alogical, that blended together thought and emotion. They faced poverty, even disgrace, if they were ever judged harshly by parents or husbands. The literature of sensibility emphasized suitors, husbands, and fathers who forgave. The fascination of women writers and readers of fiction with sensibility in the eighteenth century received attention early in our century from J. M. S. Tompkins. More recently, their interest in foreign literature of sensibility has been under investigation by Grieder and Conger.

5. Gary Kelly (51) sees the importance of sensibility for Radcliffe but believes that reason constitutes for her an opposing set of values. Howells does, too, discussing feeling in various Gothic novelists, including Rad cliffe, in a much more general sense.

6. Useful critics on sensibility besides Louis Bredvold are Ronald S. Crane, Jean Hagstrum, John K. Sheriff, and Ian Watt. For special attention to women, see also Carol Gilligan, Katharine Rogers, and Patricia M. Spacks.

7. Nina da Vinci Nichols (205) has recently made an important distinction between Radcliffe's and Matthew G. Lewis's Gothic fiction. Radcliffe's characters are concerned about identity and "power over the self"; Lewis's Ambrosio is motivated by a desire for "power over others."

8. Theodore Ziolkowski reiterates the necessity of reason in the making of Gothic literature in *Disenchanted Images*.

9. See Samuel Johnson's Rambler No. 4 and Mary Wollstoncraft's *Vindication* (18.2). See also the works by Robert Scholes on Johnson and Austen and by Lloyd W. Brown and Margaret Kirkham on Austen and Feminism.

10. The conclusion of *Northanger Abbey* is a visibly sentimental unraveling. Radcliffe could hardly have done better. The heroine sits over her needlework, "sunk again, without knowing it herself, into languor and listlessness." The hero suddenly arrives and is introduced by a "conscious daughter" to her mother; and he is doing his best to apologize for the lack of propriety in his sudden appearance "with the embarrassment of real sensibility." The mother, too, manages a good-natured response: "He did not address himself to an uncandid judge or a resentful heart. Far from comprehending him or his sister in their father's misconduct, Mrs. Morland … received him with the simple professions of unaffected benevolence … (2.196).

11. Spacks sheds valuable light on Austen's interest in concealment.

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CLAIRE LAMONT (ESSAY DATE 1995)

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In the following essay, Lamont discusses the significance and symbolic use of Gothic architecture in Northanger Abbey.

When Catherine Morland is invited to visit the Tilneys at Northanger Abbey these are her reflections:

> She was to be their chosen visitor, she was to be for weeks under the same roof with the person whose society she mostly prized—and, in addition to all the rest, this roof was to be the roof of an abbey!—Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney—and castles and abbies made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill. To see and explore either the ramparts and keep of the one, or the cloisters of the other, had been for many weeks a darling wish, though to be more than the visitor of an hour, had seemed too nearly impossible for desire. And yet, this was to happen. With all the chances against her of house, hall, place, park, court, and cottage, Northanger turned up an abbey, and she was to be its inhabitant. Its long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel, were to be within her daily reach, and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun.[1]

This paper is about Jane Austen's Gothic architecture. I have started with a quotation which expresses Catherine Morland's view of Gothic architecture, that it is a matter of "castles and abbies". The Gothic novels of the late-eighteenth century make frequent use of these two types of medieval building, the castle and the monastery, both of which had a domestic function but were not primarily defined by that function. As these two settings figure repeatedly in Gothic novels they come to take on features of two opposing signifying systems. The castle is associated with aggression, extroversion and the male; it dominates its landscape. The monastery is associated with repression, introversion and the female, and lies half-hidden in a valley. It is typical of early Gothic novels to be set in remote parts of continental Europe, and in an earlier century. However vestigial the historical sense of the novelists they set their novels in some sort of medieval world. In *Northanger Abbey*, however, the setting is in the south-west of England in Jane Austen's present, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Medieval castles and monasteries were visible in her world but both would have lost their *raison d'être*, military or spiritual. They would be visible as ruined, restored or imitated.

In *Northanger Abbey* the heroine makes her first visit from home to Bath, apparently one of the least Gothic of settings. Having been originally a Roman settlement, it was rebuilt in the eighteenth century with neo-classical architecture as the medicinal properties of its waters were exploited. From Bath Catherine Morland makes two Gothic excursions. The first is the abortive trip to Blaize Castle; the second is the visit to Northanger Abbey. Catherine imagines Blaize Castle to be "an edifice like Udolpho" (102), and before agreeing to go on the trip asks "may we go all over it? may we go up every staircase, and into every suite of rooms?" (102) She anticipates "the happiness of a progress through a long suite of lofty rooms" or "along narrow, winding vaults" (104). The party never reaches Blaize Castle, and it is never actually pointed out in the novel that it was it was not, as John Thorpe had asserted, an old castle, "the oldest in the kingdom" (101), but an eighteenth-century Gothic imitation.[2]

There is no doubt about the age of Northanger Abbey. Catherine learns its history from Eleanor Tilney:

> Many were the inquiries she was eager to make of Miss Tilney; but so active were her thoughts, that when these inquiries were answered, she was hardly more assured than before, of Northanger Abbey having been a richly-endowed convent at the time of the Reformation, of its having fallen into the hands of an ancestor of the Tilneys on its dissolution, of a large portion of the ancient building still making a part of the present dwelling although the rest was decayed, or of its standing low in a valley, sheltered from the north and east by rising woods of oak.

Critics of the Gothic motif of the monastery usually stress imprisonment rather than the spiritual role of such a building. A monastic building in the Gothic novel is a place where someone is kept either against their will or at least in denial of the full range of their passions. Catherine Morland shares this view; she expects to find evidence of "an injured and ill-fated nun" (150). Eleanor Tilney's account of the history of Northanger Abbey, however, does not appear to invite that interpretation. Northanger had been "a well-endowed convent at the Reformation" which had "fallen into the hands of an ancestor of the Tilneys on its dissolution" ("fallen" implies either coming down, or chance). The word "convent" was in the late eighteenth century just acquiring its specific modern meaning of a religious house[3] We may read the convent as a safe and spiritual retreat for women, which has now become the personal property of one man. What was endowed as a convent has become a private house where women are oppressed by one man, and a man significantly called *General* Tilney. His name indicates that he would be more at home in a castle. Catherine Morland, who is not interested in history, and particularly not the "quarrels of popes and kings" (123), does not meditate on this paradox. For her a castle or an abbey would do. She does not detect that although castles may have lost their original purpose with the cessation of fighting, it is a question whether the same can be said of a convent. One thing that the English Reformation has achieved is to give the powerful male, whose attributes are reflected in the castle, ownership also of the convent.

General Tilney exercises his ownership of Northanger Abbey in a way that no other man does in Jane Austen's novels. In her other novels a woman is mistress of the house and is in charge of the domestic arrangements. This is still the case when the mistress is not a wife but an unmarried daughter. Even Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* does not deny his daughter her rights as mistress of the house. General Tilney issues invitations on behalf of his daughter and orders meals, overriding his daughter in each case (148, 171, 186). Catherine expects the domestic arrangements at Northanger to be in Eleanor's hands: after Henry Tilney's frightening account of a Gothic bedroom she takes comfort from the belief that "Miss Tilney, she was sure, would never put her into such a chamber as he had described!" (167) (She does not say that the Abbey would not have such a chamber.)

Jane Austen's norm of village Anglicanism does not imply that society is any the better for the dissolution of a convent. Catherine Morland's progress in the novel is from her parsonage home at Fullerton to the vicarage she will share with Henry Tilney at Woodston. Between these two havens of integrity she visits Bath and Northanger. Both of these, built as places of healing, have lost their proper function and are now given over to fashion and materialism.

Catherine's Gothic reveries are filled with "castles and abbies": "To see and explore either the ramparts and keep of the one, or the cloisters of the other, had been for many weeks a darling wish …" (150). For Catherine a Gothic castle should contain, besides its defining architectural features of ramparts and keep, towers and long galleries, suites of lofty rooms, many staircases, and narrow, winding vaults (101-102, 104). An abbey should have cloisters, long, damp passages, narrow cells and a ruined chapel (150). That much she has gathered from her reading of Gothic novels, before her conversation with Henry Tilney in the curricle on the way to Northanger. He confirms her view that a Gothic house has staircases, gloomy passages and lofty rooms, not to mention "a secret subterraneous communication between your apartment and the chapel of St Anthony, scarcely two miles off" (164, 166).

How are these expectations fulfilled at Northanger Abbey? Jane Austen does not usually spend much time describing a house from the outside. She is more interested in a house as a living space, and with its interior dynamics. However, the approach to a Gothic building is an important descriptive moment in the Gothic novel, and Catherine's first sight of Northanger Abbey cannot be passed over:

> every bend in the road was expected with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendour on its high Gothic windows. But so low did the building stand, that she

> found herself passing through the great gates of the lodge into the very grounds of Northanger, without having discerned even an antique chimney.
>
> (167)

In the Gothic that draws on architecture the façade is frequently presented as the face in front of the labyrinthine brain behind (Poe's House of Usher is perhaps the most famous example). Northanger Abbey will not be read from the outside, and the heroine enters with no guidance.[4]

Once inside, Catherine is first shown into "the common drawing-room". The architectural feature mentioned in that room is the Gothic window:

> The windows, to which she looked with peculiar dependence, from having heard the General talk of his preserving them in their Gothic form with reverential care, were yet less what her fancy had portrayed. To be sure the pointed arch was preserved—the form of them was Gothic—they might be even casements—but every pane was so large, so clear, so light! To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing.
>
> (168)

Catherine is obviously in a house which has undergone modern restoration. The General has preserved the pointed arches of the windows, but has made a compromise with history in not restoring painted glass, small divisions in the panes, dirt, and cobwebs. He has picked on a characteristic feature, the pointed arch, for preservation and discreetly modernized the rest. The Gothic here appears to be optional; it is not structurally necessary. Catherine may criticize this compromise, but then she has no clear sense of the implications of what she is asking for. She wants not only the original windows, but also the dirt derived, presumably, from many years of subsequent neglect. As her mother was to remark of her, "Catherine would make a sad heedless young house-keeper to be sure …" (245).

Of all Jane Austen's novels, *Northanger Abbey* gives the most detailed description of a domestic interior. It is the only one of her novels to make serious use of architecture in its plot. The Gothic house with its complicated interior, its subterranean vaults, or, especially in later novels, its attics, lends itself to interpretation which sees these architectural features as representing aspects of life which have been frustrated or repressed. For all Henry Tilney's terrifying description of the subterranean passage that leads from the heroine's bedroom to the ruined chapel of St Anthony (166) Northanger Abbey is not described as having any subterranean passages, not even a decent cellar. Nor is it described as having an attic. The architecture, and any psychological reading of it, is not based on a vertical view of the house with "normal life" on one or two floors and the suppressed abnormal in basement or attic below or above. The important architectural feature of Northanger Abbey is not its vertical dimensions, but its horizontal ones. Catherine expected an abbey to have cloisters; Northanger Abbey does; it is based on a quadrangle.

On her first evening Catherine sees that the house is built on a quadrangle (168). The next day she is given a tour. The house surrounds a court (181), and it has two floors. On the ground floor are the public rooms and offices, and on the upper floor the bedrooms. The rooms on the ground floor are tall, which is why the "broad staircase of shining oak" required "many flights and many landing-places" to reach the upper floor (168). Catherine is first taken round the building on the ground floor. She is taken through a suite of rooms: the "common drawing-room", which led into "a useless anti-chamber" which led in turn into "the real-drawing-room" which led into the library (186). Catherine had expected a Gothic building to offer "suites of rooms", that is rooms leading off each other, rather than each going off a hall or corridor. Northanger Abbey offers such a suite, though not quite up to Catherine's wishes (186). As she is taken round the

quadrangle she is told that three sides retain the original Gothic architecture, and that of these one was more Gothic than the other two in that it retained elements of its convent origin in the remains of a cloister and cells (187). The fourth side of the building was modern. After being shown round the ground floor, Catherine is taken upstairs. There, the organization of the rooms was different. The rooms did not open off one another in a suite, but there was on the inner side of the quadrangle a corridor or gallery, whose windows looked across the quadrangle, and off this gallery were the bedrooms whose windows therefore looked outwards (168). Eleanor Tilney shows Catherine round the upper floor, but she is twice interrupted by an imperious request from her father before they can get right round. On both occasions they are stopped at a folding door, on the far side of which is the room which Eleanor's mother had occupied (189, 194). The consequence is that Catherine has been taken round the house on the ground floor; but only round part of it on the upper floor.

Catherine had glimpsed beyond the folding door on the upper floor "a narrower passage, more numerous openings, and symptoms of a winding stair-case" (189). She deduced that this was the side of the house where the remains of the original abbey were most preserved (191). She had seen that it had a staircase, and her Gothic imagination had speculated that Mrs Tilney could have been taken down it "in a state of well-prepared insensibility" (191). On the third attempt to see Mrs Tilney's room Catherine goes alone.[5] She walks round the gallery, through the folding door, and enters Mrs Tilney's room (196). She is disappointed. It is a pleasant modern room, with sash windows, through which the western sun was shining. Gothic rooms, as had been established earlier, have casement windows (168). It was usually the east wing in a Gothic novel that was the most ruinous.[6] Catherine had wanted to visit a Gothic house; she has done so, and has been muddled by its architecture. She realizes her mistake in interpreting the upper floor of Northanger Abbey in terms of her Gothic expectations rather than in the light of her knowledge of the ground floor. She knew that the fourth side of the quadrangle was modern; but she had not supposed Mrs Tilney's room to be at one end of that side (196).

I have suggested that an important feature of the Gothic interior is the suite of rooms, one room leading off another. In the Gothic building the room does not have have certain bounds. This is true on the ground floor of Northanger Abbey, where one room leads off another in wealthy show. It is of more threatening significance in the Gothic bedroom. As Henry Tilney points out, a Gothic heroine hoping to have safety at last in a bedroom finds that the room has no lock, or that some hidden door opens off it (165-66). The Gothic bedroom is not a place of security because its bounds are not secure; there might be a hidden opening within it leading to a succession of vaulted chambers containing who knows what horrors, most of which are not at first noticed.[7] This is the parodic version of the splendid suite of rooms. The two versions of the suite of rooms may be thought of as representing public show and private neurosis. At Northanger Abbey Catherine was relieved to find that her room was decorated with wallpaper (169). The Gothic bedroom would be hung with tapestry, and there would be no knowing, until some storm of wind revealed an irregularity in the wall behind, what sort of hidden entrance it might conceal. It is an indication of the all-revealing nature of modern architecture, and the speedy collapse of her Gothic fantasies, that Catherine was so sure that the doors that she observed in Mrs Tilney's modern room led only to dressing-closets that she did not even bother to check that that was so: "she had no inclination to open either" (196).

It is a feature of recent criticism of *Northanger Abbey* to acknowledge but not stress Catherine's Gothic disappointments. Feminist critics in particular have drawn attention to the fact that while Catherine may have been mistaken in thinking that Mrs Tilney had been either murdered or imprisoned, no one believes that she had been a happy woman. The patriarchal power of General Tilney over the women in his household is the modern equivalent of the authoritarian power of the Gothic hero.[8] The fact that Catherine's three disappointments (over the chest, the ebony cabinet and Mrs Tilney's room) all involve her expectations of Gothic evidence being followed by an extremely domestic reality (the folded counterpane, the laundry list, and the well-kept bedroom) can be read as a reproof to Catherine for her failure to realize the progress of society which has allowed a comfortable home to supersede the discomforts of the Gothic. Or, following Katherine Ferguson Ellis, her discoveries can be read as representing the tyranny of the home-as-haven ideal

on the woman who inhabits it.[9] In such readings *Northanger Abbey* is a Gothic novel in spite of itself.

Northanger Abbey is a Gothic novel which uses architecture as a way of exploring unacknowledged areas of human psychology. If one such area is patriarchal power, another is the nature of the attraction which Catherine feels for Henry Tilney. Repeatedly, Catherine's interest in Gothic architecture is matched by her interest in Henry Tilney: "Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney" (149). On the way to Blaize Castle she had "meditated, by turns, on broken promises and broken arches, phaetons and false hangings, Tilneys and trapdoors" (103). On the road to Northanger she had "an abbey before, and a curricle behind" (162). In deciding to explore Mrs Tilney's room on her own she chooses a day when Henry Tilney is away. But he returns before he is expected. Catherine has just let herself out of the bedroom and closed the door:

> At that instant a door underneath was hastily opened; some one seemed with swift steps to ascend the stairs, by the head of which she had yet to pass before she could gain the gallery. She had no power to move. With a feeling of terror not very definable, she fixed her eyes on the staircase, and in a few moments it gave Henry to her view.
>
> "Mr Tilney!" she exclaimed in a voice of more than common astonishment. He looked astonished too. "Good God!" she continued, not attending to his address, "how came you here?—how came you up that staircase?"
>
> "How came I up that staircase!" he replied, greatly surprised. "Because it is my nearest way from the stable-yard to my own chamber; and why should I not come up it?"
>
> (196-97)

Catherine had not experienced Gothic terror in the bedroom; she was feeling it now. Catherine knew that Gothic buildings had staircases, and she knew of the existence of this one. She is surprised because the only function she had had for that staircase was for Mrs Tilney to be brought down it "in a state of well-prepared insensibility". The staircase had not delivered an unconscious woman, however, but a lover come back before he was expected.

Northanger Abbey is the only novel by Jane Austen in which the heroine goes to stay in the hero's home, and there is sexual tension in her use of its architecture. Catherine's love of Henry Tilney and her love of the Gothic had always been confused. In her search for Mrs Tilney's room she manages to put herself in the direct route between the stables and Henry's bedroom. As Henry points out where she stands is in his space rather than in hers:

> "This passage is at least as extraordinary a road from the breakfast-parlour to your apartment, as that staircase can be from the stables to mine."
>
> (197)

There seems to be sexual adventure in Catherine's Gothic enquiries. Her conscious mind is exploring a Gothic bedroom; but in so doing she is suppressing knowledge she had about the house. Henry Tilney rushing up the staircase while she is frozen at the top of it is a powerful image. Her astonished question, "how came you here?" is a statement of her failure to understand the architecture which had so engrossed her imagination.

Notes

1. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), ed. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis, Penguin, 1972, 149-50.

2. Andor Gomme, Michael Jenner and Bryan Little, *Bristol: An Architectural History*, London, 1979, 174-75.

3. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, 1989, convent, sb., 6.

4. In contrast, Emma remarks of the other abbey in Jane Austen's novels, Donwell Abbey, home of Mr Knightley, "It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was" (*Emma* [1816], ed. Ronald Blythe, Penguin, 1966, 353).

5. Catherine's solitary exploration of Northanger may draw on Blanche's exploration of Chateau-le-Blanc in Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), ed. Bonamy Dobrée, Oxford, 1966, 479-80.

6. For instance in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 377. This detail was picked up by Walter Scott in a humorous account of the types of novel popular in his day, "… must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho, of which the eastern wing had long been uninhabited …" (*Waverley* [1814], ed. Claire Lamont, Oxford, 1981, 3).

7. This is true of Emily's bedroom at Udolpho (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 235) and Adeline's in Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), ed. Chloe Chard, Oxford, 1986, 144.

8. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, New Haven and London, 1979, 135.

9. Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, 1989, x-xii.

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Jerinic, Maria. "In Defense of the Gothic: Rereading *Northanger Abbey*." In *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, edited by Devoney Looser, pp. 137-49. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

Rejects the classification of Northanger Abbey *as a parody of the Gothic novel and argues that it is "an imitation, and not a complete rejection, of Ann Radcliffe's* The Mysteries of Udolpho."

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OTHER SOURCES FROM GALE:

Additional coverage of Austen's life and career is contained in the following sources published by Thomson Gale: *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 19; *Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults*, Vol. 3; *British Writers*, Vol. 4; *British Writers: The Classics*, Vol. 1; *British Writers Retrospective Supplement*, Vol. 2; *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography, 1789–1832; Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 116; *DISCovering Authors; DISCovering Authors: British; DISCovering Authors: Canadian; DISCovering Authors: Modules, Most-studied Authors* and *Novelists; DISCovering Authors 3.0; Exploring Novels; Feminism in Literature: A Gale Critical Companion; Literary Movements for Students*, Vol. 1; *Literature and Its Times*, Vol. 2; *Literature and Its Times Supplement*, Vol. 1; *Literature Resource Center; Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, Vols. 1, 13, 19, 33, 51, 81, 95, 119, 150; *Novels for Students*, Vols. 1, 14, 18, 20; *Twayne's English Authors; World Literature and Its Times*, Vol. 3; *World Literature Criticism*; and *Writers for Young Adults Supplement*, Vol. 1.

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: Introduction

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen Julia Epstein

One of England's most celebrated authors, Austen ranks among the most widely studied and read authors in the English language, as well as in translations in thirty-five other languages. Though Austen is sometimes criticized by modern scholars as lacking innovation, her novels offered an often humorous and subtle critique of English society. Austen has been lauded for her intricate plots and dynamic characters, and noted for the sense of morality with which she infuses the aristocratic settings of her work.

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: Chronology

The following chronology offers an overview of Austen's life and career. The topics presented here are discussed in greater detail in the critical essay that follows.

1775: Jane Austen is born on 16 December at Steventon, Hampshire, near Basingstoke, to the Reverend George Austen, Rector of Steventon (1731-1805) and Cassandra Leigh Austen (1739-1827), who had married in 1764. The Austens lived in Deane, Hampshire, where their first three children were born, then moved to Steventon and had five more children. Jane is the seventh of eight children: James (1765-1819), George (1766-1838), Edward (1768-1852), Henry (1771-1850), Cassandra Elizabeth (1773-1845), Francis [Frank] (1774-1865), and Charles John (1779-1852). The Austens were Tories in the country village of Steventon, and associated with the local gentry. George Austen earned a respectable but not large income of £600 a year from the Deane and Steventon livings, which he supplemented by taking in boarding pupils from neighboring families from 1773 until 1796. Before 1773, the family experienced financial problems that were eased by a

loan from Mrs. Austen's wealthy brother, James Leigh Perrot (1735-1817).

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play, *The Rivals,* one of the most enduring late eighteenth-century comic dramas, and one that Jane Austen came to know well, is performed in London. The actress Sarah Siddons (1755-1831) makes her theatrical debut at the Drury Lane Theatre.

1777: Philadelphia Austen Hancock (George Austen's sister) and her daughter Eliza travel on the European continent, then settle in Paris in 1779.

1778: The Franco-American Alliance is formed. Britain declares war on France.

Frances Burney's *Evelina* is published, as well as Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children.* Two key Enlightenment thinkers and writers in Europe—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Swiss philosopher and political theorist, and François Arouet (Voltaire), French philosopher and polymath—die.

1779: James Austen (age fourteen), the eldest Austen child, enters St. John's College, Oxford, on a "Founder's Kin" scholarship, as his father had done before him.

1780: The Gordon Riots occur in London in June. This action begins as an anti-Catholic demonstration and develops into ten days of rioting; 700 people die; 450 arrests are made, which result in twenty-five executions.

1781: Austen cousin Eliza Hancock marries Jean-François Capot de Feuillide (1750-1794) in France. Her husband is a captain in the Queen's Regiment of Dragoons and calls himself the Comte de Feuillide.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* are published. Friedrich Schiller's play *The Robbers* is performed.

1782: The Austens perform the first of their home theatricals, encouraged by James Austen. Amateur theatricals at Steventon became a tradition and were performed in the dining room or the nearby barn. Eliza de Feuillide influenced these activities.

1783: Jane and Cassandra Austen are sent to school with their cousin Jane Cooper (age twelve), to be taught by Ann Cawley (Mrs. Cooper's aunt) at a boarding school at Oxford in the spring. In the summer the school moves to Southampton. The girls are brought home after an infectious disease (probably typhus) breaks out. After the girls return home, Jane Cooper's mother contracts the illness and dies in October.

Edward Austen, the third son, is adopted by Thomas Knight II (1735-1794) and his wife Catherine, née Knatchbull, (1753-1812) of Godsmersham, Kent, about eight miles southwest of Canterbury.

The Reverend George Lefroy (1745-1806) and his wife Anne, née Brydges, (1749-1804) take up residence at Ashe, next to Steventon, when Lefroy becomes rector, and the Lefroys become close friends of the Austens. "Madam Lefroy" becomes a trusted advisor to Jane Austen.

William Pitt (1759-1806) becomes Prime Minister.

Britain recognizes American independence when the Peace of Versailles ends the war.

1784: Eliza de Feuillide accompanies her husband to France.

William Pitt is reelected Prime Minister and passes the India Act, establishing political control over British territories in India.

Samuel Johnson, English essayist, dictionary-maker, poet, and playwright, and Denis Diderot, a leader of the French Enlightenment *philosophes,* die.

1785-87: Jane and Cassandra Austen and Jane Cooper attend the Abbey House School in Reading, Berkshire, where they board.

1786: Austen probably begins to write her juvenilia sometime in 1786 or 1787.

Edward Austen goes on the Grand Tour to Switzerland and Italy, then spends a year in Dresden financed by his adoptive parents, the Knights. He returns in 1788.

Frank Austen (almost twelve) enters the Royal Naval Academy, Portsmouth. His experience figures prominently in the portrayal of Fanny Price's naval brother in *Mansfield Park.*

James Austen (age twenty-one) leaves to spend a year in France and may also have traveled to Spain and Holland.

Jane and Cassandra Austen leave the Abbey School in Reading and return home to Steventon in December.

Eliza de Feuillide returns from France to London where her son, Hastings, is born. He is named for Warren Hastings.

1787: James Austen returns from Europe and is ordained deacon at Oxford.

A major public campaign to abolish the slave trade begins in Britain. The Somerset case in 1772 had effectively outlawed slavery in England when Lord Mansfield (1705-1793), lord chief justice, ruled that slaves could not be sold abroad by their masters.

1787-90: These dates are speculative, but the following juvenile writings from *Volume the First* probably date from this period: “Frederic and Elfrida,” “Jack and Alice,” “Edgar and Emma,” “Henry and Eliza,” “Mr. Harley,” “Sir William Mountague,” “Mr. Clifford,” “The Beautifull Cassandra,” “Amelia Webster,” “The Visit,” and “The Mystery.”

1788: Henry Austen (age seventeen) enters St. John's College, Oxford, as his father and his older brother James had done.

Eliza de Feuillide and Philadelphia Hancock return to France.

Edward Austen returns from Europe and takes up permanent residence with the Knight family at Godsmersham.

In December, Frank Austen finishes his studies in Portsmouth and sails for the East Indies on board HMS *Perseverance.*

King George III has his first attack of “madness,” creating a Regency crisis.

In May, there is a motion in Parliament to abolish the slave trade.

1789: James Austen begins to publish a weekly magazine at Oxford, *The Loiterer.* His brother Henry participates in this venture, and the two of them are the primary writers.

James Austen is ordained as a priest at Oxford.

George Austen lets Deane parsonage to the recently widowed Martha Craven Lloyd (1728-1805) and her daughters, Martha (1765-1843) and Mary (1771-1843), who soon become close friends with Jane and Cassandra Austen.

King George III recovers and the Regency crisis ends. The Bastille falls in Paris on 14 July and the Declaration of the Rights of Man is signed, beginning the French Revolution.

1790: Jane Austen writes *Love and Freindship* [*sic*], the key piece in *Volume the Second* of her juvenile writings.

James and Henry Austen cease publication of the magazine *The Loiterer* when James leaves Oxford to become curate at Overton near Steventon.

Philadelphia Hancock and Eliza de Feuillide return to England from revolutionary France.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* are published. Burke's *Reflections* inaugurates a war of ideas.

1791: Charles Austen (age twelve and the youngest Austen son) enters the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth, which his brother Frank attended.

Jane Austen writes *The History of England.*

James Austen becomes vicar of Sherborne, St. John, Hampshire, just north of Basingstoke.

Edward Austen marries Elizabeth Bridges (1773-1808) of Goodnestone Park, about seven miles east of Canterbury, and they live at Rowling House nearby.

Frank Austen remains in the East Indies, but changes ships and becomes midshipman on HMS *Minerva.*

1791-92: The dates are speculative, but Jane Austen probably composes “A Collection of Letters” and the play *Sir Charles Grandison* (based on Samuel Richardson's 1751 novel of the same title) in these years.

1792: Jane Austen writes “Lesley Castle,” “The Three Sisters,” “Evelyn,” and “Catharine,” all from *Volume the Second.*

Philadelphia Hancock dies of breast cancer on February 26.

James Austen marries Anne Mathew (1759-1795), granddaughter of the Duke of Ancaster.

Jane Austen attends her first balls (she is sixteen).

Cassandra Austen becomes engaged to marry the Reverend Thomas Fowle (1765-1797), of the Fowle family of Kintbury. Tom's father Thomas Fowle and George Austen had been friends since their undergraduate days at Oxford, and a third Lloyd daughter, Elizabeth, is married to Tom's brother, the Reverend Fulwar Craven Fowle.

Britain experiences the beginnings of increasingly repressive legislation against “Jacobins,” including a proclamation against seditious writings.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* appears.

1793: Most of Jane Austen's juvenile writings, *Volume the First, Volume the Second,* and *Volume the Third,* have been composed and are fair-copied.[1]

The collected "Scraps" are possibly composed or revised—including "The Female Philosopher," "The First Act of a Comedy," "A Letter from a Young Lady," "A Tour through Wales," and "A Tale," all in *Volume the Second.*

Edward Austen's first child and Jane Austen's oldest niece, Fanny, is born at Rowling.

Henry Austen becomes a lieutenant in the Oxfordshire Militia.

James Austen's first child, Anna, is born at Deane.

Jane Austen writes the final pieces collected as the *Juvenilia* and dedicates them to her second niece Anna as "Detached Pieces": "A Fragment," "A Beautiful Description of the Different Effects of Sensibility on Different Minds," and "The Generous Curate." She also writes "Ode to Pity." These pieces, which appear in *Volume the First,* complete the writings collected as the juvenilia.

After six years, Frank Austen returns from the East Indies.

King Louis XVI of France is tried and guillotined in Paris on 21 January. France declares war on Holland and Great Britain in January and on Spain in February. The Terror ensues in France, the Committee of Public Safety under Robespierre comes to power, Jean-Paul Marat is murdered, and in October Queen Marie Antoinette is executed.

Sedition trials in England and Scotland lead to harsh sentences and exile to Botany Bay, Australia.

1793-95: This is probably the period during which Jane Austen writes the untitled epistolary novel published as *Lady Susan* by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh as an appendix to the 1871 edition of his *A Memoir of Jane Austen.*

1794: Jane Austen possibly begins to write *Elinor and Marianne,* the epistolary first version of *Sense and Sensibility.*

Eliza de Feuillide's husband is found guilty of attempting to bribe a witness during the trial of an aristocratic friend charged with conspiracy against the French republic, and he is guillotined in Paris on February 22.

Charles Austen (fifteen) leaves the Royal Naval Academy in Portsmouth and serves as midshipman to Captain Thomas Williams (1761-1841), husband of his cousin Jane Cooper, on HMS *Daedelus.*

Thomas Knight II, Edward Austen's adoptive father, dies and leaves his large estates to his widow, to be inherited by Edward after her death.

The law of *habeas corpus* is suspended in 1794 with the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act and again in 1798, prompted by increased anxiety among the aristocratic classes.[2]

Georges-Jacques Danton (April) and Maximilien-François-Marie-Isadore de Robespierre (July) are executed. The Terror ends in France and is followed by the Directorate.

1795: Jane Austen probably composes most of *Elinor and Marianne.*

The Reverend Thomas Fowle, Cassandra Austen's betrothed, becomes involved with the West Indian campaign when he joins Lord Craven as his private chaplain.

James Austen's wife Anne dies, and Jane Austen's niece Anna, still a toddler, comes to live with the Austens at Steventon.

Tom Lefroy visits his uncle George Lefroy at Ashe Rectory on his way from Ireland to study law in London. His and Jane Austen's mutual attraction is serious enough that his family sends him away to forestall an inconvenient commitment. Lefroy later settled in Ireland, married and had a family, and became Lord Chief Justice of Ireland.

The Seditious Meetings Act and the Treasonable Practices Act pass after George III's coach is attacked on the way to Parliament.[3]

Napoleon Bonaparte becomes commander of the French armed forces.

1796: Austen's surviving letters begin on 9 January. She completes *Elinor and Marianne* and begins*First Impressions,* an early version of *Pride and Prejudice,* and she probably also works on *Sir Charles Grandison.*

Charles Austen is involved in a battle when three French ships are intercepted in British waters.

1797: James Austen marries Mary Lloyd, his second wife, and his young daughter Anna returns from Steventon to live with her father and step-mother at Deane.

Edward Austen's adoptive mother, Mrs. Knight, moves to Canterbury and makes Edward the immediate inheritor of the Knight properties in Kent and Hampshire. Edward and his family move to Godsmersham in Kent.

First Impressions, the first version of *Pride and Prejudice,* is offered to London publisher Thomas Cadell by George Austen and declined by return of post. Austen works on *Sense and Sensibility,* the new title for *Elinor and Marianne.*

Mrs. Austen, Jane, and Cassandra stay with Mrs. Austen's brother and his wife, James and Jane Leigh-Perrot, in Jane Austen's first known visit to Bath.

Henry Austen marries his cousin, the widow Eliza de Feuillide, in London.

1798: Jane Austen is courted by Samuel Blackall, whom she discourages.

Austen completes *Sense and Sensibility* and begins *Susan,* which was published posthumously and given the title *Northanger Abbey* by Henry Austen.

The mechanization of paper manufacture reduces printing costs. Iron printing presses are introduced.

Mrs. Inchbald's version of *Lovers' Vows* (August von Kotzebue's *Natural Son*) is performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden, and published in London. This is the play whose attempted staging forms a key episode in *Mansfield Park.*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes *Fears in Solitude, France, an Ode,* and *Frost at Midnight.* Thomas Malthus's *Principles of Population,* Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman,* and William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* appear. Wordsworth begins to write *The Prelude.* Mary Hays's *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women,* and Friedrich Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy are published.

1799: Jane Austen visits Bath with her mother and Edward and his wife. *Susan* is probably completed by the end of the year. The family also visits the Leighs at Adlestrop, the Coopers at Harpsden, another of Mrs. Austen's cousins in Surrey, and then spends the rest of the year in Steventon.

Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, Jane Austen's aunt, is accused of stealing a one-pound card of lace from a shop in Bath and is sent to Ilchester Gaol. This episode is a family embarrassment. Such a theft (over twelve pence) was considered grand larceny and would have been punishable by death or deportation to Australia.

1800: George Austen retires from his position as Rector of Steventon and leaves his eldest son, James, in charge.

Food shortages spark nationwide food riots.

1801: The Austens move to Bath. At some point between 1801 and 1804 Jane Austen may have had a romance, but no firm evidence survives.

Henry Austen gives up his commission in the Oxfordshire Militia and becomes a banker and army agent in London.

William Pitt resigns as Prime Minister when King George III refuses to agree to Catholic Emancipation, and Henry Addington becomes Prime Minister.

1802: Harris Bigg-Wither (1781-1833) proposes marriage to Jane Austen. She accepts in the evening, then declines the next morning.

Sometime late in 1802 or early in 1803, Jane Austen revises and makes a fair copy of *Susan.*

The Peace of Amiens is signed with France on 25 March, concluding the war. Napoleon Bonaparte is made First Consul for life.

The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act spearheads safety regulation and reform in British factories.

1803: Richard Crosby and Co. purchases the copyright to *Susan* for £10 through a business associate of Henry Austen, but they do not publish it despite a promise to do so by 1804.

Henry and Eliza Austen travel to France to try to reclaim some of the Comte de Feuillide's property, and they narrowly escape detainment. Napoleon had broken the Peace of Amiens, and the war with France resumes in May.

Frank and Charles Austen return to active naval service. Frank is stationed at Ramsgate and given the charge of organizing the coastal defense forces (the “Sea Fencibles”).

Battles resume between France and England, beginning the Napoleonic wars.

1804: Jane Austen begins writing *The Watsons* this year, but never completes it.

Frank Austen returns to sea as captain of HMS *Leopard,* flagship of Rear Admiral Thomas Louis, and is stationed off Boulogne as part of the blockade of Napoleon's fleet.

Charles Austen is promoted to command HMS *Indian* and sent to patrol the Atlantic coast of America to prevent American trade with France. Charles remains headquartered in Bermuda until around 1810.

Anne Brydges Lefroy dies after a riding accident on 16 December, Jane Austen's birthday.

Napoleon Bonaparte becomes Emperor in France in May.

Spain declares war on England.

1805: George Austen dies on 21 January in Bath. Jane Austen abandons *The Watsons* and makes a fair copy of *Lady Susan,* adding the narrated conclusion.

Frank Austen is commanding HMS *Canopus* in the Mediterranean and participates in the chase of Admiral Villeneuve's fleet to the West Indies and back. Frank is sent to Malta.

Martha Craven Lloyd dies at Ibthorpe, and her daughter Martha Lloyd comes to live permanently with the Austens.

Jane Austen composes “Lines *Supposed* to Have Been Sent to an Uncivil Dressmaker.”

1806: Frank Austen marries Mary Gibson at Ramsgate, Kent in July and arranges to set up house with his mother, his sisters, and Martha Lloyd.

Jane Austen writes “Lines to Martha Lloyd” and verses on the marriage of her brother Frank Austen.

1807: Frank Austen is put in command of HMS *St. Albans,* with duties to travel to South Africa, China, and the East Indies. In June, he departs for the Cape of Good Hope.

Jane Austen writes “On Sir Home Popham's Sentence, April, 1807” and possibly composes “Verses to Rhyme with ‘Rose.’”

Charles Austen marries Fanny Palmer (1790-1814) in Bermuda.

The slave trade is abolished in Britain.[4] France invades Spain and Portugal.

1808: Edward Austen's wife, Elizabeth, dies in October at Godsmersham. Later that month, Edward offers his mother and sisters a choice of houses, and they choose Chawton Cottage in Hampshire.

Jane Austen writes “To Miss Bigg with Some Pockethandkerchiefs” and, on the anniversary of Anne Brydges Lefroy's death, “To the Memory of Mrs. Lefroy.”

1809: Jane Austen uses a pseudonym to Richard Crosby to inquire about the status of *Susan* and to offer to send a second copy. Crosby responds that he has no current plans to publish the work, but will not give up the copyright unless it is purchased from him.

Mrs. Austen, Cassandra, and Jane settle with Martha Lloyd at Chawton Cottage on 7 July.

Jane Austen writes a verse letter to celebrate the birth of Frank Austen's first son. She also makes some revisions to *Volume the Third* and begins to revise *Sense and Sensibility,* a process that continues into the next year.

1810: Jane Austen continues to revise *Sense and Sensibility,* and it is accepted for publication on commission late this year or early in 1811 by Thomas Egerton.

Frank Austen returns from China.

Jane Austen possibly composes "Mock Panegyric on a Young Friend."

George III suffers a mental breakdown.

1811: Jane Austen stays with Henry and Eliza Austen in London to correct the proofs of *Sense and Sensibility.*

Jane Austen writes a number of poems: "Lines on Maria Beckford," "On the Weald of Kent Canal Bill," "I am in a Dilemma," "On a Headache," "Mr. Gell and Miss Gill."

Charles Austen returns to England with his wife, Fanny, and two children, and the family sees him for the first time in seven years and meets his family. He is given command of the guardship HMS *Namur,* and he and his family live on board, off Sheerness.

Jane Austen makes substantial revisions to *First Impressions* and retitles it *Pride and Prejudice,* and she begins work on *Mansfield Park.* Thomas Egerton publishes *Sense and Sensibility* in November in three volumes for the price of fifteen shillings; the title page says "By a Lady," and about 750 copies are printed. None of Jane Austen's works appears under her name during her lifetime.

The Regency Act appoints the Prince of Wales to the Regency. (He rules as Regent until 1820, when George III dies, and then becomes George IV.)

Luddites (organized machine-breakers) stage actions in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. Machine-breaking becomes punishable by death.

Nationwide food riots break out in response to economic depression.

1812: Edward Austen's adoptive mother, Mrs. Knight, dies on 14 October, and Edward officially takes the name Knight.

Jane Austen possibly composes "A Middle-Aged Flirt."

Jane Austen sells Thomas Egerton the copyright to *Pride and Prejudice* for £110. She corrects the proofs in December 1812 and January 1813.

England is at war with America (the War of 1812). Napoleon invades Russia in June and retreats from Moscow in October.

The main streets of London are lit by gas.

1813: *Pride and Prejudice* is published on 28 January, with a title page that says "By the Author of *Sense and Sensibility.*" About one thousand copies are printed, at eighteen shillings a copy. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* receive second printings in October. When the first edition of *Sense and Sensibility* sells

out, Jane Austen receives £140 in profit.

Jane Austen stays with Henry Austen in London through his wife Eliza's final illness and death in April.

Jane Austen completes *Mansfield Park.*

In November, Jane Austen returns to London to stay with Henry Austen. During this visit, they probably negotiate the publication terms for *Mansfield Park* with Thomas Egerton, who agrees to publish it on commission.

Robert Southey is made Poet Laureate. The following works appear: Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine, or Adventures of Chirubina,* George Gordon, Lord Byron's *Bride of Abydos* and *The Giaour,* Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Remorse,* Sir Walter Scott's *Rokeby,* Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Queen Mab,* and Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson.*

1814: In January, Jane Austen begins work on *Emma.* Austen corrects the proofs in February, and *Mansfield Park* is published in May in an edition of around twelve hundred copies at eighteen shillings each. The first edition of *Mansfield Park* sells out by November, and Jane Austen receives a profit of between £310 and £350. She and Henry try to arrange a second edition, but Thomas Egerton refuses to issue one.

Charles Austen's wife, Fanny, dies on 6 September on board HMS *Namur* after the birth of their fourth child.

England and its allies invade France and enter Paris on 31 March. Paris falls; Napoleon Bonaparte abdicates in April and is exiled to Elba.

The first steam press is used to print *The Times.* Steam locomotives become increasingly efficient.

The Treaty of Ghent ends the Anglo-American war in December (though the Battle of New Orleans occurs in January 1815).

Frances Burney's *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties,* George Gordon, Lord Byron's *Ode to Napoleon, Lara,* and *Corsair,* Henry Francis Cary's complete translation of Dante's*Divine Comedy,* Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage,* Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley,* Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Refutation of Deism,* Robert Southey's *Roderick,* and William Wordsworth's *The Excursion* are published.

1815: Jane Austen completes *Emma* at the end of March and begins to write *Persuasion* (titled posthumously by Henry Austen).

Jane Austen copies out “Lines of Lord Byron, in the Character of Buonaparté” (Byron's “Napoleon's Farewell”).

Jane and Henry Austen negotiate the publication of *Emma* with publisher John Murray, who receives a positive reader's report by the end of September.

Jane Austen spends most of the end of the year in London with Henry, who becomes seriously ill. He is out of danger within a month, but she remains to nurse him.

Jane Austen is invited to visit the Prince Regent (later George IV) at Carlton House in November. She is asked to dedicate her next novel to him, and although Austen has misgivings, she agrees. The response comes from the Reverend James Stanier Clarke (1765-1834), the regent's chaplain and librarian, and in subsequent correspondence he urges Jane Austen to compose a novel about a clergyman. This suggestion is the basis for

her comic *Plan of a Novel, according to Hints from Various Quarters,* written in 1816, possibly with the help of her niece Fanny Knight.

John Murray offers £450 for the copyright of *Emma* if copyrights for *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* are included in the package. Henry and Jane Austen refuse this offer, and Murray declines to raise it. However, he agrees to publish an edition of 2,000 copies of *Emma* on commission, along with a second edition of 750 copies of *Mansfield Park.* Jane Austen corrects proofs for *Emma* and makes revisions for the second edition of *Mansfield Park. Emma* appears at the end of December (with the title page marked 1816) in an edition priced at twenty-one shillings. It is dedicated to the Prince Regent, and a special presentation set is sent to Carleton House prior to the novel's general publication.

Raison et Sensibilité (*Sense and Sensibility*) is published in France, the first foreign translation of an Austen novel.

The landlords carry the Corn Law Act; the price of bread rises in consequence and causes hardship for the poor.[5] Napoleon Bonaparte escapes from Elba and begins the Hundred Days (from March to June), restarting the war. After the Battle of Waterloo of 18 June, Napoleon surrenders (15 July), the war ends, and he goes into exile on St. Helena. King Louis XVIII is restored to the throne in France and a “holy Alliance” of Europe's monarchs forms when the Congress of Vienna establishes the Quadruple Alliance between Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia.

1816: Jane Austen revises *Susan* after Henry buys back the rights from Crosby and Co. She changes the title to *Catharine,* writes the “Advertisement, by the Authoress,” and intends to seek another publisher. A second, revised edition of *Mansfield Park* is issued. *Le Parc de Mansfield* (*Mansfield Park*) and *La Nouvelle Emma* (*Emma*) are published in France.

Charles Austen's ship, HMS *Phoenix,* is wrecked off the coast of Asia Minor in a hurricane. Charles and his crew survive.

Henry Austen's bank collapses in March. Several family members suffer major losses, including Edward Knight (£20,000) and uncle James Perrot (£10,000).

Jane Austen's health begins to weaken, and she goes with Cassandra to take the waters at Cheltenham.

Jane Austen completes the first draft of *Persuasion* on 18 July and revises the ending by 6 August.

By October, *Emma* has sold 1,248 copies, with a theoretical profit of £221. However, the second edition of *Mansfield Park* is creating losses that offset the profit, so she receives only £38 for *Emma* during her lifetime. In any event, the first edition did not sell out: 539 copies were remaindered in 1821, as well as 498 copies of *Mansfield Park.*

In December, Henry Austen is ordained deacon and takes the curacy of Chawton. He becomes a priest in 1817.

The Spa Fields riot occurs in December amidst the beginnings of economic depression and discontent.[6]

Richard Brinsley Sheridan dies and George Gordon, Lord Byron, leaves England. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Christabel, Kubla Khan, Pains of Sleep,* and *Stateman's Manual* appear.

1817: Jane Austen begins to write *Sanditon,* titled posthumously by the family; she seems to have meant the title to be *The Brothers.* She stops work around mid-March because of illness, and *Sanditon* remains

unfinished. She makes her will in April, leaving everything to her sister, Cassandra, except for a legacy of £50 to her brother Henry and another of the same amount to his French housekeeper, Madame Bigeon.

Jane and Cassandra Austen move to Winchester on 24 May to obtain better medical care for Jane. Jane Austen writes her last work, "Venta," some verses on the Winchester Races and St. Swithin.

Jane Austen dies on 18 July in the early morning. On 22 July, she is publicly identified in the Hampshire Courier obituary as the author of her novels. She is buried in the north aisle of Winchester Cathedral on 24 July.

When Jane Austen's will is proved in September and funeral costs (£239) and other payments deducted, Cassandra is left with £561.2.0. At the time of her death, Austen's earnings from her novels amount to about £630. Posthumous profits, which include selling the five remaining copyrights to publisher Richard Bentley, place her total earnings from her work at about £1,625.

In December, *Northanger Abbey,* a revision of *Susan,* is published by Murray with *Persuasion* in a four-volume set. Included is a "Biographical Notice of the Author" by Henry Austen. Henry probably gave these novels their titles, and negotiated this publication on a commission basis on Cassandra Austen's behalf. The copies number 1,750 and are sold at twenty-four shillings each. By the start of 1821, Cassandra had netted a profit of £519, at which time 283 copies were remaindered.

Pride and Prejudice sells out in its second edition, and Thomas Egerton publishes a third edition.

Habeas Corpus is suspended in March, and the Seditious Meetings Bill is enacted. Princess Charlotte dies.

POSTHUMOUS DATES

1827: Jane Austen's mother, Cassandra Leigh Austen, dies at age 88.

1833: A collected edition of Jane Austen's novels is published with a "Biographical Notice" by her brother Henry Austen.

1845: Jane Austen's sister, Cassandra Elizabeth Austen, dies.

1848: Francis Austen appointed Commander-in-Chief of the North American and West Indian Station.

1852: Admiral Charles John Austen, Jane Austen's youngest brother, is made Commander-in-Chief of the East India state.

1863: Sir Francis Austen, Jane's Austen's other naval brother, is made Admiral of the Fleet.

1866: The first publication of Jane Austen's verses "To the Memory of Mrs. Lefroy."

1870: James Edward Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen's nephew, publishes *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (it appears on 16 December 1869 but is dated 1870). A second, expanded edition of the *Memoir* is published, and this edition includes *Lady Susan, The Watsons,* and a cancelled chapter of *Persuasion.* Austen-Leigh's work is the basis for all subsequent biographies, and it sparked increased interest in Jane Austen.

1884: Jane Austen's great-nephew, Edward, Lord Brabourne, son of Lady Knatchbull (née Fanny Austen-Knight) publishes *Letters of Jane Austen.*

1895: Publication of *Charades, Written a Hundred Years Ago by Jane Austen and Her Family.*

1902: Constance Hill's *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends* is published, with additional biographical information.

1906: *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers,* by Frank Austen's grandson and great-granddaughter, is published with new family information, family prints, the poem "Venta," and letters to Frank.

1913: *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters,* by William Austen-Leigh, James Edward's son, and his nephew Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, is published. This has come to be a primary source record.

1920: *Personal Aspects of Jane Austen,* by Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, James Edward's daughter, is published.

1922: *Volume the Second,* a collection of the juvenilia appears under the title *Love and Freindship* [*sic*].

1923: *The Novels of Jane Austen,* the Oxford edition of the novels, is published under the editorship of R. W. Chapman. This is the first scholarly edition and remains the standard edition. The second edition is issued in 1926 and the third in 1932-1934, with many subsequent reprintings.

1925: The unfinished *Sanditon* is published. *Lady Susan* is reprinted. R. W. Chapman edits both.

1926: Chapman re-edits the original manuscript ending of *Persuasion,* correcting the ending transcription from the 1871 *Memoir.* Chapman also edits *Plan of a Novel, according to Hints from Various Quarters* and Austen's "Opinions of *Mansfield Park* and Opinions of *Emma* accompany this printing."*Two Poems by Jane Austen* ("Mr. Gill and Miss Gell" and "On a Headache") is published.

1927: R. W. Chapman's edition of *The Watsons* is published.

1932: R. W. Chapman publishes *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others.* This volume includes new letters.

1933: *Volume the First* of the juvenilia is published.

1940: W. M. Roth edits Jane Austen's *Three Evening Prayers.*

1942: R. A. Austen-Leigh publishes *Austen Papers 1704-1856,* a collection of previously unpublished material.

1951: *Volume the Third* of the juvenilia is published.

1952: Caroline Mary Craven Austen (1805-1880), James' daughter, publishes *My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir.*

1954: R. W. Chapman publishes *Jane Austen's Minor Works,* which includes all three volumes of the juvenilia and some other previously unpublished pieces of writing. This volume is reprinted in 1965 and further revised in 1969.

1975: B. C. Southam edits *The MS of Sanditon.*

1977: The manuscript of *Sir Charles Grandison* is discovered. Scholar B. C. Southam publishes it as *Jane Austen's "Sir Charles Grandison"* in 1980. The handwriting in the manuscript is Jane Austen's. Family tradition had ascribed the authorship to Austen's niece Anna, but scholars believe that Austen herself wrote it.

1995: Deirdre Le Faye publishes a new edition of *Jane Austen's Letters* with further additions.

1996: David Selwyn edits *Jane Austen: Collected Poems and Verse of the Austen Family.*

Notes

1. A "fair copy" is a neatly recopied manuscript. This is what would have been sent to the printers for publication.
2. *Habeus corpus* is a law that requires a person to be brought before a judge or court to investigate a restraint of the person's freedom, and was used as a protection against illegal imprisonment.
3. These acts represented the response of the government of William Pitt to the mob attack on George III, and derived from efforts to suppress dissidents and to restrict political discussion.
4. Slavery itself was not abolished until 1833.
5. The Corn Law Act restricted imports and thus shored up the price of wheat; the bill was supported by landowners.
6. In this uprising, rioters attempted to seize the Bank of England and the Tower of England but were dispersed. Marilyn Butler suggest that this event may be the subject of a brief reference in *Northanger Abbey,* in which Henry Tilney mentions a riotous mob trying to seize the Tower. See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Revolutionaries, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981): 106.

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: About Jane Austen

Julia Epstein (essay date 2003)

SOURCE: Epstein, Julia. "An Overview of the Life and Career of Jane Austen." In *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism,* vol. 119, edited by Jessica Bomarito, Edna Hedblad, and Russel Whitaker. Farmington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group, 2003.

[*In the following essay, Epstein discusses the major aspects of Austen's life and career, focusing on biographical, textual, and critical avenues of exploration into the author's enduring popularity.*]

Born: 16 December 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire, England.

Marital Status: Single

Education: Jane Austen's only formal schooling consisted of a year in 1783 with Mrs. Cawley at Oxford and Southampton, and two years in 1785-87 at the Abbey School in Reading.

Died: 18 July 1817 in Winchester, Kent, England, at age forty-two.

Jane Austen has been described in multiple ways: as a spinster recluse; as a satirical and biting wit; as a shy and retiring woman of prim moral views; and as a paragon of femininity who never complained and had a kind word for everyone. Yet after her death, a kind of beatification process took place, and over time Jane Austen has become a cultural icon and the patroness of English fiction. The Austen family zealously guarded

her memory and her image. Her sister Cassandra and niece Fanny Austen destroyed many of her letters, her brother Henry wrote a eulogy that praises his sister as brilliant and long-suffering, and her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh published his influential *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1870, in which he described her as a sheltered, unruffled woman whose life was uncommonly uneventful. It has, therefore, been difficult for scholars and biographers to meet the real Jane Austen.

Was she merely an observer of others, without an inner life? Was she a resentful, repressed woman who used her sharp pen to skewer a society that had injured her? Was she the cheerful and tolerant favorite aunt described by her descendants? Was she ignorant of everything that happened in politics, or did she follow the activities of her military brothers Francis and Charles and her Francophile cousin Eliza Hancock de Feuillide with an educated grasp of history and social change? Few writers have been perceived in such varied and contradictory ways.

There is one central fact that we can glean from the existing letters, published books, and memoirs by the Austen family members, and from the archival record of the period in which Austen lived. While Jane Austen was a member of the landed gentry, she was never without financial anxieties. She was a country gentlewoman without economic security. The gentry class suffered enormous changes during Austen's lifetime, which profoundly affected her material circumstances. Her father, George Austen, was the local rector and took in boarding students; his income was merely adequate. Austen eventually earned enough from her writing to supplement their income and to leave something for Cassandra and her mother, but after her father's death in 1805, the women depended for the rest of their lives on the generosity of the Austen brothers. Jane Austen spent her childhood surrounded by an already large family that was expanded by her father's boarding pupils—enough of them to amount to a boys' school.[1] One of Austen's biographers, Claire Tomalin, describes the young Jane as “a tough and unsentimental child, drawn to rude, anarchic imaginings and black jokes.”[2] George Austen had an ample library, and the children were great readers. They attended church regularly, where their father presided. They kept chickens, a dairy, and a vegetable garden, baked bread and brewed beer, milked cows and churned cream for butter, made preserves, raked hay, played in the barn, and generally enjoyed a country existence.

The second Austen son, George, suffered from ill health and seizures from a young age; he may have had cerebral palsy. George lived most of his life with his Uncle Thomas in Monk Sherburne, another Hampshire village. Thomas, his mother's younger brother, had similar disabilities. He only occasionally returned to Steventon as a young boy. Although there is little mention of George in the Austen archival record, he may have been deaf or lacked language, because there is some evidence that Jane Austen knew sign language.

Living with the crowd of assorted siblings and boarding schoolboys, Jane Austen was perhaps especially comfortable with boys. But she often enjoyed the company of her cousin Eliza Hancock, later Comtesse de Feuillide and ultimately the wife of Jane's brother Henry. Eliza was an important worldly influence, who instructed Jane Austen at a young age how to handle complex social situations with all sorts of people.

The Austen brothers were schooled at home with other boys until they were about twelve. But Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra were sent away to school at a younger age, perhaps to make room for additional paying pupils. Jane was seven in the spring of 1783, when she was sent to a school in Oxford run by a Mrs. Cawley. She joined her cousin Jane Cooper, who was eleven years old. Mrs. Cawley ran her school from her home, which was the usual practice and one of the few respectable ways a woman could make a living in late eighteenth-century England. Many accounts of such schools are depressing, and many girls were wretched in them.[3] Although we know little of what went on at Mrs. Cawley's, Jane Austen later wrote scathingly of schoolmistresses. And we do know that in the summer of 1783, Mrs. Cawley decided to move her school to Southampton without informing the girls' families.

As a port, Southampton was home to various military encampments, and the soldiers and sailors stationed there apparently brought an infectious disease (probably typhus) that soon spread through the town. Many of the schoolgirls became ill, including the Austen cousins. Mrs. Cawley did not inform their parents, but Jane Cooper had the sense to write to her mother in Bath, and Mrs. Cooper and Mrs. Austen immediately retrieved their daughters. Jane Austen was by then dangerously ill, and her mother had to nurse her back to health before taking her home. The other girls also recovered, but Mrs. Cooper caught the fever and died in Bath. Jane Cooper began to spend a good deal of her time in Steventon and became part of the Austen family.

Austen's aunt Philadelphia Walter, her father's sister and mother of Eliza Hancock de Feuillide, provides the first physical description we have of Jane, from the summer of 1788. She was “whimsical and affected,” Aunt Phila wrote in a letter to her daughter Eliza, and “not at all pretty” but “very prim.” Jane was then twelve years old, and was often contrasted with her more “sensible” sister Cassandra.

Jane was about twelve when she began to write her bitingly satirical first experiments with social comedy. Her later novels develope a subtle irony; but in her juvenile writings, Austen boldly unmasked polite society with characters who are openly rude, or adulterous, or downright murderous. And she makes great fun of most of them.

In a letter sent from Chawton to her niece Anna Austen on 9 September 1814, Jane Austen made one of her memorable comments about writing novels. Anna was an aspiring novelist, and had sent several manuscripts to her published aunt for a critique.

> You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life; 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on—& I hope you will write a great deal more, & make full use of them while they are so favourably arranged.[4]

Indeed, in addition to describing the circumstances of much of Austen's own fiction, which focuses on details of social interaction and the daily conspiracies of polite society, this passage also seems to describe the world in which Jane Austen lived, the world of country village English gentry.

Austen was always conscious of her choice of literary subject matter. In an equally famous letter to her sister Cassandra on 4 February 1813, she described an evening during which the family read aloud—a common form of household entertainment—her *Pride and Prejudice.* As an authorial description of *Pride and Prejudice,* the phrase “light, and bright, and sparkling” is apt and modest and rightly memorable.

> Upon the whole, however, I am quite vain enough and well satisfied enough. 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 Buonaparté, or anything that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style.[5]

Yet the rest of the passage is also significant. She was not unaware, either of the political or military upheaval in early nineteenth-century Europe or of the literary activities that surrounded her own writing. Rather, Jane Austen reveals her deliberate decision to focus her literary skills on the ways in which the social world impinges upon and dictates how people live with one another.

So to answer Austen's nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, who wrote fifty years after his aunt's death that “Of events, her life was singularly barren: few changes and no great crisis ever broke the smooth current of its course,” we need to ask how this could possibly have been the case. Austen's life spanned the American and

French Revolutions, the Napoleonic wars and the War of 1812, and the depths of European involvement in the slave trade. She witnessed the rise of middle-class culture as the ancient English landed aristocracy slowly declined. Two of her brothers served in the British navy and traveled around the world. Another brother was a banker. Her sister's betrothed died of yellow fever during a voyage to the West Indies. Her cousin married a Frenchman who was guillotined during the Terror in France. Austen's was not a barren life. Even in some of her earliest writings, such as *Catharine, or the Bower* and, in an odd way, *The History of England,* Jane Austen conveys dismay at characters that cultivate a blithe ignorance of the history and politics that shape their worlds.

Austen's daily life involved only the circuit of visits and household duties that she experienced in the villages of the English countryside, and that is where she found her creative home. The West Indies and India appear briefly, but political concerns remain subtle and offstage in Austen's fiction. International events are great catalysts in the novels, however, because the economic system at the center of Austen's English gentry depended on inherited wealth and land and on an entangling colonial system that was the British Empire—and supported the social lives of Austen's characters. Austen's brothers—naval officers, clergymen, and bankers—visited the world and returned home with news. And Austen understood the political and economic structure on which she built her fictional society.

Austen herself lived the only life approved for women of her time, learning household skills such as sewing, gardening, and kitchen work, and developing the feminine talents of drawing, needlework, playing the piano, speaking French, and writing letters. From an early age, she found her creative outlet in composing stories and sharing them with her family.

We do not know exactly when Jane Austen began to write her stories, but by her early teens, she supplied stories and plays for her family to read aloud and perform. She copied many pages of her juvenile writings into three carefully kept notebooks. Most of this work is satirical and reveals her prodigious use of her father's extensive library at Steventon. She was familiar with the poetry, drama, and fiction of her day, and she often used her stories to lampoon the popular excesses of sentimentality or Gothicism. The Austens performed amateur theatricals at home, a common entertainment at the time (and more than somewhat morally suspect, as Austen illustrated in a crucial sequence in *Mansfield Park*).

Jane Austen did not travel beyond the several counties in southern England where she had family members, and she spent relatively little time in London. Yet her brothers and her cousin Eliza brought home tales of a larger world, and she took a great interest in their exploits abroad. So she had reason to be acquainted with India and the European continent as well as with the West Indies and Asia. She chose not to include any direct depictions of these outside worlds in her novels, but many of Austen's characters—from Thomas Bertram of *Mansfield Park* to Captain Wentworth of *Persuasion*—come and go from the circumscribed worlds of Austen's country villages to the greater world of colonial plantations and the slave economy and military exploits. The emotional action of Austen's novels takes place inside the houses of rural country gentlefolk, but it is clear that Jane Austen knew what went on outside those houses in some detail, and understood as well how the country life of her characters reflected the society in which they lived.

Jane Austen's knowledge of family life was vast. Several members of her extended family, such as her cousin Jane Cooper and her brother James' sister-in-law, Martha Lloyd, spent time living with them. Her brothers married and provided her with many nieces and nephews, and she frequently visited neighboring families. The Knights, a wealthy, childless couple, adopted her brother Edward. He took their name and inherited their estates, and he provided Jane and Cassandra Austen and their mother with some further domestic and economic security earlier you say they depended and some knowledge of life in a large country manor. Her brother Henry was reputed to be Austen's favorite and helped her with her publishing activities. Henry married Austen cousin Eliza de Feuillide in 1797, three years after her husband, the Comte de Feuillide, was guillotined. Henry Austen tried a variety of careers and suffered some financial difficulties.

Most of Jane Austen's life was spent either at home or visiting among her numerous family members and neighboring acquaintances, a life that was, by all accounts, profoundly social for a woman who also clearly enjoyed her solitude. She moved around a good deal—from Steventon to Bath to Chawton—and changed lodgings many times.

Austen's knowledge of how human beings interact in complex and delicate social situations, her deep understanding of individual and social psychology, and a lapidary prose style that captures emotional nuances, give us timeless novels that continue to entertain us even as they hold up mirrors to our own contemporary society.

Jane Austen died on 18 July 1817 in Winchester, attended by her beloved sister, Cassandra. She had suffered for months with fevers and weakness, was sometimes irritable, and was often too unwell to sit up in bed. Her skin was pale and mottled, “black & white and every wrong colour” and as she wrote to her niece Fanny, “I must not depend upon ever being blooming again.”[6] *Sanditon,* which she was unable to complete, concerns illness and invalidism, and perhaps her condition led her to this subject matter. When her health forced her to stop writing, she turned to prayers and poetry.

Jane Austen's final literary production was a dictated set of comic verses about the Winchester horse races. She also wrote letters about the devoted attention of her family. Her brothers visited, and of Cassandra she wrote, “Words must fail me in any attempt to describe what a nurse she has been to me.”[7] Cassandra described her final hours to their niece Fanny, ending with this description: “She gave me the idea of a beautiful statue, & even now in her coffin, there is such a sweet serene air over her countenance as is quite pleasant to contemplate.”[8] Scholars have concluded, using what evidence there is, that Jane Austen died from Addison's disease, a condition that could have caused the progressive debility she experienced. We will never have a complete diagnosis, and we can only imagine what works of literature she might have contributed to the canon of English letters had she lived longer.

Notes

1. The Austen family followed the common practice of the time of boarding their infants with local cottagers until they were weaned.
2. Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 31.
3. Perhaps the best-known literary depiction of such a girls' school is the oppressive Lowood School in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* although Lowood is a charitable institution run by the Church and a much bigger establishment than Mrs. Cawley's small home school. In *Emma,* however, Jane Austen depicts Mrs. Goddard's school as a relatively benign institution, and this is probably much closer to her own experience than the horrors of Brontë's Lowood.
4. *Jane Austen's Letters,* ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 275.
5. Ibid., p. 203.
6. Ibid., pp. 335-36.
7. Ibid., p. 340.
8. Ibid., p. 345.

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: Jane Austen At Work

GETTING ESTABLISHED

As a child, Jane Austen seems to have been relatively unsentimental, humorous, and teasing, perhaps because the boys' school run by her father provided an environment of rowdiness and high jinks. She began writing

down her ideas on scraps of paper almost as soon as she could write, and she wrote sketches for her own amusement, and soon for the amusement of her parents, siblings, and extended family members. The first pieces we have were probably composed between 1787 and 1793, when she was twelve to eighteen. Few of the juvenile writings are dated, so the dates scholars have assigned are derived from the little evidence that exists and the recollections of family members.

Austen fair copied her juvenile writings into three carefully tended notebooks consisting of twenty-seven pieces of varying lengths and levels of polish. These quarto notebooks were likely gifts; we know that her father gave her the one she used for *Volume the Second.* She took these productions seriously, including tables of contents, page numbers, and dedications—all the details of a published book. She transcribed these pieces over fifteen or twenty years, and continued to make revisions as late as 1809. But because the original manuscripts from which she made the copies have not survived, we cannot follow the evolution of her craft. Clearly, however, these early pieces were important to her.

Brian Southam offers the following dating of the juvenile writings[1]:

- 1787-1790 (***Volume the First***)
    - **"Frederic and Elfrida"**
    - **"Jack and Alice"**
    - **"Edgar and Emma"**
    - **"Henry and Eliza"**
    - **"Mr. Harley"**
    - **"Sir William Mountague"**
    - **"Mr. Clifford"**
    - **"The beautifull Cassandra"**
    - **"Amelia Webster"**
    - **"The Visit"**
    - **"The Mystery"**
- 1790 (***Volume the Second***)
    - ***Love and Freindship***
- 1791 (***Volume the Second***)
    - ***The History of England***
    - **"Collection of Letters"**
- 1792
    - **"Lesley Castle"** (***Second***)
    - **"The Three Sisters'"** (***First***)
    - **"Evelyn"** (***Third***)
    - **"Catharine"** (***Third***)
- 1793
    - **"Scraps"** (***Second***)
    - **"Detached Pieces"** (***First***)
    - **"Ode to Pity"** (***First***)

In *Volume the First,* the handwriting is childish and the compositions appear to be the earliest of Austen's literary efforts, even though the one date they carry is 1793. The contents of *Volume the Third* are dated 1792. *Volume the First* resides in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, *Volume the Third* is in the British Museum, and *Volume the Second* has a private owner. The publisher Chatto & Windus first published *Love and Freindship* [*sic*] in 1922 with an introduction by English writer G. K. Chesterton.

Family lore maintains that Austen composed these lighthearted and often hilarious early writings simply as family amusements to be read aloud. Many of the pieces are dedicated to family members, and no doubt the

evening readings produced much mirth. Still, Austen must have taken this composition seriously, given the copies she made and the revisions she continued to make.

In addition to humor, her juvenile writings display a characteristic toughness. Austen shows little or no mercy to her satirical targets. She goes beyond simple literary parody to skewer some notable excesses in human behavior, and she already gives evidence of her keen eye and no-nonsense approach to social interactions. She has little patience for arrogance, self-absorption, vanity, or hypocrisy. She spots human weaknesses from a great distance, and she targets them in her character portraits. Even the pieces that seem purely silly ridicule superficiality and self-importance. Still, mischievousness prevails in Austen's early work.[2]

Some of these qualities appear in Austen's later fiction. Several of her characters have exaggerated personality traits. There is Mrs. Allen's obsession with clothes in *Northanger Abbey*; Mr. Palmer's rudeness to his wife in *Sense and Sensibility*; and Mr. Woodhouse's concern with health in *Emma,* reinforcing his portrayal as a fussbudget. However, in her mature fiction, while such characters have a ruling passion or trait, their personalities function in a larger social context, and Austen presents them with real affection and a deep knowledge of the human heart, whereas in the juvenilia, one-dimensional characters are simple puppets for Austen's burlesque effects. As the pieces become more sophisticated, they offer outlines of Austen's later themes and literary techniques. Her characters evolve into complex individuals who interact in more elaborate ways with the society in which they live, and who grow and change in the course of those interactions.

TECHNIQUES

Austen's extensive reading prepared the way for her writing career. Her father apparently placed no restrictions on the books she read as a child. As her biographer Claire Tomalin puts it, “if she was allowed to read Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* as a child, which gives detailed accounts of maternal drunkenness and paternal adultery, and lays out the correct attitude to adopt towards a father's mistress and illegitimate half-brothers, Mr. Austen cannot have kept much from her.”[3] Henry Austen remembers his sister as a precocious reader, but he also emphasizes her piety, and he focuses on her reading of Samuel Johnson's essays, William Cowper's poetry, and sermons.[4] But Austen also enjoyed Henry Fielding's comedy *Tom Thumb* and his ribald novel *Tom Jones,* Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and *Tristram Shandy* (an experimental comic novel based in part on the philosophy of John Locke), and the fiction of Charlotte Lennox, Frances Burney d'Arblay, and Charlotte Smith.[5] The family read plays together, and Austen would have been especially familiar with Shakespeare's plays, which are mentioned throughout her own novels: Edmund Bertram and Henry Crawford discuss Shakespeare in *Mansfield Park*; Catherine Morland mentions Shakespeare in *Northanger Abbey*; and the Dashwood sisters read *Hamlet* with Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility.* She was familiar with Johnson's philosophical novel *Rasselas* and his essays, and she read James Boswell's work. The *Bible,* the *Book of Common Prayer,* and Milton's poetry were, of course, important elements of Austen's formation and education.

We know that Austen's favorite novel was Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison,* published in 1753 and 1754. The novel is a seven-volume work about a paragon of gentlemanliness, the woman he falls in love with after rescuing her from a kidnapping and possible rape, an Italian lady to whom Sir Charles has pledged himself and from whom it takes him many volumes to get honorably extricated, and their families and friends. Austen's only attempt at playwriting was a dramatic version of this story, a manuscript preserved by the Austen family for years but not discovered until the late 1970s, when it was edited and published by Austen scholar Brian Southam.[6]

Given Austen's novelistic preoccupations, some of the features of the plot of *Sir Charles Grandison* are particularly intriguing.[7] For example, Sir Charles's outspoken younger sister Charlotte rails against marriage as a form of imprisonment. When in the end Charlotte agrees to marry, she misbehaves at her own wedding, will not let her new husband sit beside her in the carriage afterwards, and teases him so relentlessly that he

smashes her harpsichord. This novel is full of discussions about women's roles and social place. The marriage between Harriet Byron and Sir Charles exemplifies an ideal for which Austen's heroines also strive: a marriage partnership that represents not only romantic love but a highly developed and respectful friendship between a man and a woman.

Austen's reading gave her philosophical insights, subject matter, and social attitudes to mine for her own work and a firm grasp of novelistic techniques. Her early writings were fictions in the form of letters. Letters also figure prominently in her novels: Darcy writes letters and the characters discuss letter-writing as an activity in *Pride and Prejudice,* and a letter-writing scene provides the climax of Austen's final completed novel, *Persuasion.* Letters were a form of writing practiced by women, and worked easily as a narrative technique that introduced women's voices into fiction. As her craft evolved, Austen developed the early epistolary versions of *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility,* and *Pride and Prejudice* into third-person narratives with her trademark omniscient and ironic voice as the controlling narrative authority.

Austen wrote many of her early pieces and the first versions of *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility,* and *Pride and Prejudice* in epistolary form—a frequent mode of presenting novels in the eighteenth century, and Richardson's particular technique. She uses the mishaps of letters gone astray not only to create plot complications, but to poke fun at the crises and confusions that result. In “Lesley Castle,” one letter begins: “I have but just received your letter, which being directed to Sussex while I was at Bristol was obliged to be forwarded to me here, & from some unaccountable Delay, has but this instant reached me—.”[8] Austen often made fun of herself, and of authorship in general. Her hilariously concise history of England, called *The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st,* is prefaced with an epigraph that reads: “By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian.” A note follows this epigraph and promises: “N.B. There will be very few Dates in this History.”[9]

Jane Austen used a narrative method that has often been misunderstood, in part because of her own self-deprecating references. In December 1816, she wrote to her nephew James Edward Austen about his writings, which she refers to in a bantering tone as “strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of Variety & Glow” in contrast to her own productions, “the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour.”[10] She seemed to see herself as a miniaturist, writing occasional, offhand portraits. In fact, she used a technique of concentration, placing her characters in close proximity and in complex social situations, and then watching them interact and work out their relationships through revealing mechanisms of social negotiation. The “little bit” of ivory tells a bigger tale.

Jane Austen's own writing process itself could have been a scene in one of her novels. Her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh's memoir of his aunt describes the loss of privacy for writing that Austen suffered when the family left Steventon and moved to Chawton. At Chawton Cottage, she had to write in the public sitting room. Because she didn't want servants or visitors to know that she was writing, she wrote on small scraps that could be quickly hidden under a piece of blotting paper if someone entered the room. As Austen-Leigh tells it, the door to the sitting room creaked when it opened or closed, and Austen did not wish it to be repaired because it signaled to her that she needed to spirit away her writing.

Jane Austen's irony and the brilliant thematic structure of her carefully wrought stories are legendary. Her brilliance begins at the level of the individual sentence. Almost any randomly selected sentence from one of her six major novels is a model of prose style. Her syntax is clever and elaborate, with flowing punctuation and lengthy, connected clauses; yet her sentences are never muddled or confusing. To parse them grammatically, or to analyze their vocabulary or their punctuation, might tax most readers; but each sentence satisfies because its complexity never gets in the way of its easy good sense. Austen's syntax is entangled, her points of view and manipulation of perspective are elaborately contrived, but the complexities of her prose flatter as well as speak to her readers' intelligence.

Austen was one of the first and most innovative practitioners of a narrative style known as *style indirect libre,* or free indirect style. While her fame derives largely from her straightforward, canny reportage of ordinary details and personal quirks, she also excels at painting a scene by combining one character's voice or point of view with the perspective of an omniscient narrating voice that speaks from outside the action. Sometimes these voices belong to multiple characters, as in the *tour de force* of indirect style that describes the strawberry sequence at the Donwell Abbey picnic in *Emma.*

> The whole party was assembled, excepting Frank Churchill, who was expected every moment from Richmond; and Mrs. Elton, in all her appartus of happiness, her large bonnet and her basket, was very ready to lead the way in gathering, accepting, or talking—strawberries, and only strawberries, only now be thought or spoken of.—"The best fruit in England—every body's favourite—always wholesome.—These the finest beds and finest sorts.—Delightful to gather for one's self—the only way of really enjoying them.—Morning decidedly the best time—never tired—every sort good—hautboy infinitely superior—no comparison—the others hardly eatable—hautboys very scarce—Chili preferred—white wood finest flavour of all—price of strawberries in London—abundance about Bristol—Maple Grove—cultivation—beds when to be renewed—gardeners thinking exactly different—no general rule—gardeners never to be put out of their way—delicious fruit—only too rich to be eaten much of—inferior to cherries—currants more refreshing—only objection to gathering strawberries the stooping—glaring sun—tired to death—could bear it no longer—must go and sit in the shade."[11]

This passage comes largely from the perspective of vain Mrs. Elton, who has positioned herself as the hostess at Donwell; but it also contrives to deliver a group or community voice that moves from lively pleasure to lethargy in the course of this deliberately disjointed, galloping paragraph. It is not altogether clear who is speaking, and the indeterminacy of the phrases forms part of how they convey a communal sense of the initially delightful and then irritating activity of picking strawberries. The passage is both stylized and almost stream-of-consciousness in its flow.[12]

Austen's prose style welcomes and pleases her readers because she cultivates a rich relationship between the narrator and the reader. The narrator speaks directly to us, and with us consents to view the novel's characters from a certain perspective. Austen's narrative voice assumes that she is speaking to a sensible audience who understands and agrees with her right-minded standards of behavior and morality. There is an amused, critical irony that embraces the reader in the inner circle of those who have insight and perspicacity, those who know and can judge.

Austen nearly independently invented a new and revolutionary form of the English novel. The novel played an increasingly important role in popular literature during the century that preceded Austen, and her work owes a debt to Samuel Richardson and Frances Burney in particular. But she combined the external observations of eighteenth-century adventure fiction (the picaresque novels of Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett) with the interior analyses of women's moral fiction of the period (the psychological novels of Ann Radcliffe and Burney) to achieve a quiet but startlingly influential innovation in the genre of the novel.

Women's domestic experience was circumscribed by gender roles and expectations, and women's lives centered primarily on family activities. Yet women also needed to use their domestic choices to fit themselves into the larger social and economic structures into which they were born. Austen took this confluence of private limitation and public necessity and wove it into some of the most psychologically insightful, socially astute, and complex literature we have in the English language. Given her inauspicious and utterly normal surroundings, one might ask how this was possible.

Austen's narrative voice is her most powerful and influential invention. Writing with distance and judgment, her narrators manage to be didactic and aloof, conversational and charming and, above all, ironic. They testify to the technical prowess and craftsmanship of Austen's mature prose. While her subject matter seems small—the subtle ways in which people interact and form judgments of one another, the nuances of space and language at a public gathering, the meanings of gestures and silences—she painted an overarching and highly moral portrait of social life.

As a stylist, Austen is best known for her use of irony, and this technique already emerges in sharp form in her juvenile writings. Austen's juvenile work frequently turns to wicked satire. One of her favorite targets was the vogue for sentimentality. When Emma learns that Edgar is away at college in "Edgar and Emma," she retires to her room, where she "continued in tears the remainder of her Life."[13] In *Love and Freindship* [*sic*], the friends Sophia and Laura shriek and faint, swoon and run mad, a circumstance that leads to some judicious advice.

> Beware of swoons … A frenzy fit is not one quarter so pernicious; it is an excerise to the Body & if not too violent, is I dare say conducive to health in its consequences.—Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint—.[14]

To understand the finely honed production of Austen's irony, we should look closely at a couple of her mature sentences, because it is at the level of the sentence that Austen's narrative voice succeeds. Here is the famous opening sentence (and paragraph) of *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."[15] This sentence opens the novel with a proposition that the novel's plot proves: Charles Bingley has moved into the neighborhood of the Bennets, who have five unmarried daughters and an entailed estate, and Mrs. Bennet, with every other mother in the area, plans to ensnare him as a marriage partner for one of her girls, preferably the eldest. And in the end, after many vicissitudes and misunderstandings and illnesses and humiliations, the marriage is certain.

But plot foreshadowing is the least of this sentence's importance. It sets up the comical yet deadly serious dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet about the necessity of paying a visit to the new neighbors, and thus initiates the tone of the whole novel: the nature of the Bennet marriage and thus the question of marriage generally and so the social necessities and economic maneuverings that are requirements in this society. The sentence embodies an idea that is both practical and philosophical; it is an opinion both on economics and on social structure. This sentence, critic Julia Prewitt Brown observes, starts a chain reaction because it "reverberates throughout the entire first chapter, indeed the entire novel, and derives its brilliance from that reverberation."[16] The sentence is meaningful in a straightforward way and yet quite outrageous in its implications.

Brown mentions another classically and somewhat cruelly ironic sentence from *Emma.* This sentence also opens a chapter, and it also stands alone as a paragraph: "Human nature is so well disposed towards those who are in interesting situations, that a young person, who either marries or dies, is sure of being kindly spoken of."[17] What occasions this ironic blast is one of the most awkward circumstances into which Emma Woodhouse contrives to trap herself. Emma encourages her friend Harriet Smith to consider Mr. Elton. Mr. Elton misinterprets her manipulations as a sign that Emma herself is well-disposed towards him. Emma is mortified, Harriet is humiliated, and Mr. Elton recovers from his disappointment by affiancing himself to Miss Hawkins and returning to town to tout her merits.

Mrs. Elton, née Hawkins, becomes one of Austen's best satirical targets for self-importance and social obliviousness. The sentence from *Emma* introduces the embarrassing fact that Miss Hawkins becomes an instant celebrity in Highbury, where everyone suddenly thinks well of her. The operative phrase "interesting situations" in the sentence makes it at once a humorous and a significant statement. The word "interesting" had more complex meanings in Austen's time than it does now, when it represents merely the opposite of dull

or boring. Then, it meant something more like “intriguing” or “provocative.” But however we understand the word, it seems staggeringly cruel to call someone's dying “interesting.” (We might note that Mrs. Churchill is not spoken well of in *Emma* until after her offstage death.) Death, of course, is just what we least expect in a comedy of manners, where what we look for is a wedding. Austen subtly made marriage analogous to death in this neat sentence and illuminated another element of her fiction: It investigates the larger scope of human nature.

Saying as little as possible to convey the crux of a situation or a character constitutes another of Austen's ironic techniques. Her lovers' confessions of love and proposals of marriage perfectly illustrate her economy of language. Whole books lead up to these moments, of course, after a range of obstacles and discomfiting circumstances and embarrassments. At the climactic proposal scene in *Emma,* for example, even though the narrator provides two pages of indirect discourse on the agitations of Emma's mind when she realizes that she herself is the object of Mr. Knightley's affections, the moment of truth is delivered only in these lines: “She spoke then, on being so entreated.—What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does.”[18] The scene continues with the tactic of indirect speech, a clipped series of confessions and revelations between the lovers who are to be husband and wife.

Jane Austen also pioneered the use of *style indirect libre* to convey what her characters are thinking without quoting them directly. Austen often used this technique, especially during the climactic scenes when her lovers finally unburden themselves to one another and recapitulate the various musings, miscommunications, and circumstances that have led to plot entanglements and at last to an understanding of mutual love. The revelations between Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* that follow much misreading, self-doubt, and emotional upheaval are preceded by indirect discourse during a concert scene that involves Wentworth's anxious jealousy of Anne's cousin Mr. Elliot, who ends the scene by interrupting them.[19] This conversation has nothing really to do with the concert, but conveys the subtlety and edginess of the unspoken history and feelings between the interlocutors.

When the most important words are spoken in an Austen novel, the reader rarely gets to hear them. The second proposal scene between Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* also uses indirect speech. When it comes to the central moment, the narrator tells us that Darcy “expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do.”[20] And after the exchange between Knightley and Emma in *Emma,* the narrator offers a now famous Austenian observation.

> Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom does it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material.[21]

This sentence tells us a great deal about Austen's novelistic technique. Even as her narrators choreograph their plots around a thicket of misunderstandings and missed opportunities, the characters mature and learn to give one another and themselves the benefit of the doubt.

SUBJECT TO REVISION

Jane Austen's brother Henry, in a “Biographical Notice of the Author,” his preface to his posthumous edition of his sister's first and last novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion,* presented the first public glimpse of his sister's working process as a writer. He stated that she became interested in literature and in her own language abilities at an early age in her father's library. Her novels were polished and sent out for publication from Chawton, but she began many of them, he noted, in earlier periods of her life. In Henry Austen's portrait, Jane Austen appears as a meticulous editor of her own work. “For though in composition she was equally rapid and correct,” he wrote, “yet an invincible distrust of her own judgement induced her to withhold her works from the public, till time and many perusals had satisfied her that the charm of recent composition was resolved.”[22]

As Henry Austen remarked in his "Biographical Notice," Jane Austen read and reread, corrected and revised her work until she was satisfied that she had said what she wanted to say. Thus she began to write what would become her major works at a young age, and she spent many years rereading, revising, and correcting the manuscripts. The origins of the first three of Jane Austen's six great novels overlap with the writing of the juvenile works.

Austen may have begun her first completed novel, *Lady Susan,* as early as 1793 or 1794. We have a fair-copy manuscript with few corrections from 1805, so scholars have had to speculate from other evidence.[23] She began to write *First Impressions,* later called *Pride and Prejudice,* in 1796, when she was just twenty-one, and she completed the first version in 1797. Her family enjoyed it right away. Her father offered it to a publisher, but it was rejected sight unseen. By 1800, Jane Austen had completed a novel she titled *Susan,* and she had revised a third book called *Elinor and Marianne,* written before *First Impressions.* These works were the first versions of *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility.* All three were originally composed in epistolary form.

Austen prepared *Susan* for publication in 1802 or 1803, and sold it to a publisher in 1803 for £10, but it was not published, and in 1809 she arranged to buy back the copyright for the same amount. After her death it was published as *Northanger Abbey.* In 1803, Austen also worked on a novel fragment called *The Watsons*; the manuscript is written on paper watermarked 1803 and was probably composed in Bath. Austen's father died in 1805, and scholars assume that she abandoned this work in her bereavement. Her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh proposed another hypothesis for the abandonment of this promising manuscript: that the Watson family has the most obscure social status of any of Austen's principal families, and that she thought better of such a subject. Whatever the reason, *The Watsons* remains a promising story, if darker than much of her other work, and it is a loss to literature that Austen chose not to complete it.

When the Austen women moved to Chawton Cottage in July of 1809, Jane was thirty-three. Chawton afforded little privacy for writing, but it was here that Austen composed her great mature novels. The first of Austen's completed major novels to be published was *Sense and Sensibility* in November 1811. It was followed in January 1813, by *Pride and Prejudice. Mansfield Park* appeared in May of 1814, and *Emma* in December 1815, the year that Austen began *Persuasion.* She began to lose her health in 1816, but by July of that year she had completed a first draft and a revised version of *Persuasion,* and in January of 1817 she began her last novel, the unfinished *Sanditon. Northanger Abbey* (the first of the six major novels in date of composition) and *Persuasion* were published together, with a biographical note by Henry Austen, in December of 1818, five months after Jane Austen died in Winchester on 18 July at the age of forty-two.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Contrary to popular views that Austen was an amateur who did not take her work seriously, she thought a great deal about remuneration for her writings. Her first effort to publish was in November 1797. Her father, the Reverend George Austen, offered *First Impressions,* later to become *Pride and Prejudice,* to Cadell and Davies in November, offering to take on the costs and the risk himself. He compared the book in length and subject matter to Frances Burney's *Evelina,* but the publisher declined to read it.

The literary marketplace was no longer completely inhospitable to women by Austen's time, but it was difficult to enter. A century earlier, Aphra Behn became the first Englishwoman to support herself by her pen—at the cost of her reputation. Fame for a woman automatically meant infamy, which explains Jane Austen's typical decision to publish her work anonymously. Women could neither own property nor sign personal contracts.[24] She required a male relation to negotiate on her behalf, and her brother Henry performed this service for her.

There were several publishing options in England. Authors could sell subscriptions to their books, printing only the number for which they had prearranged sales. An author could negotiate a one-time sale of the copyright, the method Austen chose for *Susan* (whose copyright she bought back six years after selling it) and *Pride and Prejudice.* The copyright, then as now, was a license to print a book, and was understood to represent property. The House of Lords had eliminated perpetual copyright in 1774, the year before Austen's birth, but publishers still paid blanket fees for a limited copyright ownership of fourteen or twenty-eight years. A copyright sale assured an author of money regardless of the book's sales. However, if the book sold well, its author was not entitled to its profits. There were also various forms of profit sharing.

The method that Austen chose for *Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park,* and *Emma* was to publish on commission. For the author, commission publication entailed underwriting the cost of paper, printing, and advertising, and the publisher distributed the copies and kept the accounts. In practice, the publisher usually fronted the costs of printing and took reimbursements from the profits. The publisher got a ten percent commission on each copy sold, and if things went well, the author made a profit. There was greater risk to commission publication, but also a greater chance of monetary rewards. Of Austen's novels published on commission, only the second edition of *Mansfield Park* lost money.[25]

Austen kept careful records of her literary earnings. Writing to her brother Frank on 15 September 1813, she added a postscript.

> You will be glad to hear that every Copy of S. & S. is sold & that it has brought me £140—besides the Copyright, if that should ever be of any value.—I have now therefore written myself into £250.—which only makes me long for more.[26]

In a letter to Martha Lloyd dated 29 November 1812, Austen informed her close friend that Thomas Egerton had paid £110 for *Pride and Prejudice.* "I would rather have had £150," she writes, "but we could not both be pleased, & I am not at all surprised that he should not chuse to hazard so much."[27] Interestingly, because publications and copyrights represented property and income potential, they also became associated with the notion of authority.[28]

It was not until after her death that any of Jane Austen's novels appeared with her name attached to them, so the reviews that were published during her lifetime never mentioned her by name.

Notes

1. Southam discusses his criteria for this dating in B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).
2. Frances Beer provides a useful introduction to Austen's juvenile writings in the "Introduction" to *The Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë,* ed. Frances Beer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 9-19.
3. Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 67.
4. Henry Austen added a "Biographical Notice of the Author" to his posthumous edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion,* and R. W. Chapman keeps this Notice in *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 3-9.
5. For accounts of Austen's reading, see the chapter "Reading and Response" in Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 41-83 and Margaret Anne Doody, "Jane Austen's Reading," in J. David Grey, A. Walton Litz, and Brian Southam, eds. *The Jane Austen Companion* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 347-63.
6. *Jane Austen's "Sir Charles Grandison,"* transcribed and edited by Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).
7. Austen wrote her own version of this story. See Ibid.

8. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 119.
9. Ibid., 138.
10. *Jane Austen's Letters,* new ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 323.
11. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 358-59.
12. For a useful discussion of Austen's language use, see Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). For a study of the satiric uses of indirect style before Austen, see Claude Rawson, *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London, 1985).
13. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 33.
14. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. II, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 102.
15. Ibid., p. 3.
16. Julia Prewitt Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 26.
17. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 181. Cited and discussed by Julia Prewitt Brown, op. cit., p. 26.
18. Ibid., p. 431.
19. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 190.
20. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. II, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). p. 366.
21. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 431.
22. Henry Austen, “Biographical Notice of the Author,” in *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 4.
23. See B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).
24. Some property strictures applied differently to married and to single women. For a complete discussion, see Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). A widow could inherit and manage property after her husband's death, and individual family arrangements could override property laws by explicitly stipulating alternative inheritance rules for an estate. This explains Lady Catherine de Bourgh's powerful position in *Pride and Prejudice.* She owns the Rosings living and thus has the authority to give it to Mr. Collins. She also makes the telling remark to Charlotte, on the subject of the Longbourne estate, “I see no occasion for entailing estates away from the female line.—It was not thought necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh's family” (*The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. II, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 164). It should be mentioned in this context that Lady Catherine de Bourgh's title derives from her father rather than from her husband, who was of a lower rank.
25. Jan Fergus offers a useful discussion of publishing practices in “Conditions of Authorship for Women,” in *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 1-27.
26. *Jane Austen's Letters,* new ed., ed. Deidre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 217.
27. Ibid., p. 197.
28. For discussions of publishing income and its relation to authorship and authority, see Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, “Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 17 (1987), pp. 198-207.

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: Jane Austen's Era

JANE AUSTEN'S ENGLAND

In the late eighteenth century, England and Wales comprised fifty-two counties, called *shires* until the time of William the Conqueror. Jane Austen's novels, as her life, took place in the counties north and south of London. She came from Hampshire, abbreviated as Hants., southwest of London. Industrial development centered in the north, with heavy manufacturing beginning to grow in Birmingham, cotton factories in Manchester, and coal mining in Newcastle. Bath, west of London, was the social center of fashionable England, and figures prominently in Austen's life and art. Portsmouth, a featured location in *Mansfield Park* and the place where Austen's naval brothers received their early training, was a naval base on the southern coast of England. And London, on the river Thames, was the metropolis.

Change was the predominant characteristic of England during Jane Austen's brief life. Austen was a paramount chronicler of that change in its social manifestations for a particular class: country landowners who were being displaced by the rising mercantile classes. While Austen was discreet about the difficult subject of money, in her life as in her novels, she was acutely aware of wealth: who had it, how it was earned, and what happened when there was not enough of it. The relationship between people whose wealth derived from land ownership and those whose wealth derived from commercial interests evolved in confusing ways during Austen's life, and she was fully aware of this evolution. As social historian Raymond Williams wrote in *The Country and the City,* Austen's world was set against the backdrop of a particularly unsettled time in English social and economic history.[1]

Land—real property—dictated how this social world operated, and critic Tony Tanner usefully points out the etymological and thematic connections between *property* and Austen's other preoccupation, *propriety.* As Tanner shows, property rights were born as a sacred trust with John Locke's 1690 *Second Treatise of Government.* Sir William Blackstone's famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England,* published in four volumes between 1765 and 1769, discussed property rights as a law of nature. Tanner notes that laws about property offenses grew from fifty or so in 1688 to over 200 in 1820. Both economist Adam Smith and political thinker Edmund Burke also weighed in importantly on the relations between property ownership and the social order. Tanner points out that Austen's “proper” heroes all own land and, until *Persuasion,* her heroines all require a propertied man.[2] Similarly, Alistair Duckworth's important critical study of Austen's novels starts with the premise that the estate and its inheritance and improvement are central to Austen's imagined and real worlds.[3]

As the structure of the English economy changed during Austen's lifetime, so did English government and society. Coal and iron technologies and steam power supported new industrial developments and brought changes in agricultural and mechanical production. Material wealth increased and posed a challenge to the monopoly of aristocratic interests, and British power grew across the globe as a consequence. Railroads and free trade would come somewhat later, but the way was paved for these developments in the final decades of the eighteenth century.

When Jane Austen was born, the family was the central institution in English life. It bestowed rank or the lack of it on its members and dictated their place and expectations in the world. Eighteenth-century philosophers built a moral perspective on the notion that order and orderliness could coexist with enlightened self-interest, and that society should be utilitarian. The wealthy were expected to be benevolent and charitable, and the poor hardworking and grateful. Property owners came in ranks as well, with titled proprietors of large holdings at the top of the heap, those with smaller landed holdings beneath them, and the landed gentry, those whose land holdings provided their upkeep and social standing, anchoring this group. Austen's family belonged to this last

group, the gentry, although her brother Edward became a substantial landowner through his adoptive parents the Knights, and Jane Austen, her sister Cassandra, and their mother eventually lived in a cottage he provided them on his estates.

At the same time, the new mercantile classes were gaining steadily in prestige and power. Trade allowed those who were not born into landed wealth to acquire it through commerce; trade provided for the rise of the "middling" or middle classes, those who could support themselves in comfort but without benefit of inherited wealth or land. Trade led to the birth of the British empire, particularly through the activities of the East India Company on the Indian subcontinent and sugar plantation owners in the West Indies. Below the merchant classes were yeoman farmers, artisans or skilled laborers, and country people who supported themselves directly from the land; and below these two groups were servants of the propertied and, increasingly, the moneyed classes.

For landed gentry families, there were two tiers in the passing of generations. Under the system of primogeniture, the eldest son inherited the whole of the estate. Daughters were provided a "portion" to facilitate their marriages, and younger sons sometimes also received a monetary settlement or annuity. But for the most part, younger sons, such as Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park,* had to enter a profession, generally the military or the clergy. Jane Austen's novels depict many such men, from Admiral Crofts and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* to the plethora of churchmen in Austen's novels: John Dashwood and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility,* Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice,* Mr. Norris, Dr. Grant, and Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park,* and Mr. Elton in *Emma.* The Church of England was the country's largest and richest institution in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; its twenty-six bishops each had a cathedral with deans, canon, and prebends, and there were about 26,000 parishes that encompassed all of England and formed part of the local government (parsons also often served as Justices of the Peace).

The church was thickly intertwined with politics and economics. Patronage was the key to clerical posts, and the clergy became an overcrowded profession in Austen's time. At the end of the eighteenth century, there were 11,600 benefices, or livings, which comprised a form of property that could be put up for sale or bestowed on those their owners patronized, and there was a fair amount of trafficking and speculation in church positions. Austen's clerical characters are rectors or vicars: the difference was that rectors received all their parish's tithes, whereas vicars were paid a salary. Both augmented their income by farming the property around the church and rectory. Both positions were forms of incumbency, but as they often paid little, many clergymen held more than one post, a circumstance that was called "pluralism" and provoked some controversy. In these cases, the vicar or rector often paid a stipend to a curate to perform the actual duties of the parish church, baptizing babies, performing weddings and funerals, and conducting Sunday services, while the incumbent served as an absentee. It was also difficult for clergymen to afford to retire, hence when livings were offered for sale, the life expectancy of their incumbents was frequently part of the advertisement. Those who had livings to bestow, such as Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility,* could offer them for sale or as gifts.[4]

As the eighteenth century progressed, new institutions that were devoted to caring for the very poor arose: voluntary social organizations to care for foundlings, orphans, the elderly, and the ill. There also appeared some class mobility for the first time. When they had acquired enough money, merchants could buy land and the social status that came with estate ownership (Charles Bingley does this in *Pride and Prejudice*). So hard work and talent could buy one's way up the social ladder. This occurred in politics as well, because individuals could participate in local governance without benefit of aristocratic birth or title.

Industrial developments in the 1780s and 1790s—the Industrial Revolution—affected population and demographics, the growth of cities, trade expansion, and the enormous increase in production of goods such as cloth and copper. Edmund Cartwright set up the first power loom in 1786, which revolutionized cotton spinning and weaving, and cotton manufacturing became the most powerful industrial interest in England. The

Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce was founded in 1754, and the Manchester Committee for the Protection and Encouragement of Trade appeared in 1774. Coal and iron replaced wood, wind, and water as power sources. Beginning in 1775, James Watt and Matthew Boulton began to patent new types of steam engines. Factories and mines changed the natural landscape and brought new ways of thinking, new social groups, and new social problems as well as wealth and global power to England.

Two other areas experienced major advances: transportation, with an increase in roads and the use of rivers and canals, and banking, with increased circulation and availability of capital, credit, and cash. Houses began to be built of brick rather than timber; sewers were constructed and sanitation improved; and increased use of soap and pottery led, in different ways, to improvements in hygiene and personal cleanliness.

At Austen's birth, England was still largely rural, with its population spread across the countryside and in small villages. By the end of her life, towns and cities were becoming the centers of population. For example, the population of Birmingham doubled in the last 40 years of the eighteenth century. There were industrial towns (such as Manchester and Birmingham), market towns (such as Liverpool), ports (such as Portsmouth and Southampton), and specialized centers such as watering places and university towns (for example, Bath and Oxford). And, of course, London grew enormously during Austen's lifetime, with its population accounting for ten percent of the people in England.

All of these changes produced a larger divide than ever between rich and poor. Individuals could become enormously wealthy almost overnight, and the labor force that the new industries needed to sustain them also expanded at a great rate. This represented a major change from the country squire who looked after the rural poor in his neighborhood. Parish administrations could no longer handle the needs of their poor, and working conditions for laborers in the new factories were often dismal. Philanthropy did not provide enough resources to handle the problem, which required new forms of social organization.

Women and children worked in factories, especially in the cotton industry; in fact, children accounted for up to two-thirds of the work force. Opposition to the new factory system was inspired by deplorable conditions and long hours for many workers; and social philosophers and politicians responded to the new regime of capital owners on the one hand and powerless laborers on the other with new laws. Along the way, traditional views of the social order were altered, in part because of the advent of the modern idea of *class.*[5]

In political terms, the England into which Jane Austen was born was a state run according to a Constitution written in 1688 and based on checks and balances as the guarantors of individual freedom, with the legislature (Parliament), the nobility, the executive (Prime Minister), and the King maintaining the civil order by regulating one another. The political order existed in tandem with the social order of property, the family, and professional rank and education. So inherited hierarchies and the attributes of merit coexisted in the way authority was conferred or denied. In Jane Austen's lifetime, the final decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, social and political interests began to differentiate, the monarchy grew somewhat in power, and what we would call “public opinion” became more politically organized.

George III's madness in the late 1780s inaugurated a prolonged period during which the King relinquished most of the reins of state business, with the exception that he managed to achieve his goal of Catholic emancipation. This lasted until George III's son took over in 1811. (George himself didn't die until 1820, but the country was run by the Prince Regent, to whom *Emma* was dedicated at his request, from 1811 on.) William Pitt became Prime Minister in 1783, partly as a result of the American War of Independence; the loss of the war created a crisis in England. Pitt's administration set the tone of this period. Following the French Revolution, war broke out between England and France and involved two of Austen's brothers. During this period of turmoil abroad, Pitt restored national finances by reducing the national debt and expanding taxes on everything from horses to bricks to candles; put into place administrative reforms by increasing the powers of

the Prime Minister; reorganized the workings of the British empire; and increased England's standing in Europe by making controversial trade agreements with Ireland and France and consolidating British holdings in Asia while the American colonies were being lost.

The American War of Independence was underway when Jane Austen was born, and the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the Peninsular War, and the War of 1812 that followed in its wake marked European politics from the late 1780s until 1815, just three years before Austen's death. English political ideas were strongly influenced by the events in France that brought an end to feudalism and the monarchy, with heated debates between the Jacobins (radicals) and the anti-Jacobins (conservatives). As the French situation turned from revolution to repression and France turned its attention to wider European activities and became aggressive on military fronts, declaring war on Austria in 1792 and on England and Holland in 1793, the British became more Francophobic in public opinion as well as in governmental attitudes. When the French defeated the Austrians and Antwerp fell in 1792, new trade openings changed European diplomacy because France defied long-standing commercial treaties. By 1793 the national mood in England was ready for war. The British navy, the strongest of England's armed forces and the one to which Austen's brothers Francis and Charles belonged, was the decisive military force in England.[6]

Starting in 1792, the English government became more repressive against those seen as agitators or as treasonous, and in 1794, the law of *habeas corpus* was suspended. Two acts passed in 1795, one making some kinds of speech and writing treasonous (the Treasonous Practices Act) and another that required a special permit for large public gatherings (the Seditious Meetings Act). In 1796, stamp taxes were raised for newspapers, and printing presses had to be registered. In 1799, two more acts made it difficult to organize workers' groups.

At the same time, the English government was dealing with other kinds of pressing questions: Catholic emancipation, the Irish question (there had been armed rebellion in Ireland in 1798), and the price of corn (the Corn Law Act of 1815 barred foreign corn from Britain until a price goal was met). Once the wars ended, the influx of former military personnel into the working ranks and a decrease in urban employment meant difficult times.

JANE AUSTEN'S TIME IN HISTORY

Jane Austen was born into the end of the relatively stable world of the neoclassical Enlightenment, but almost immediately, revolutionary wars and often violent and vehement renegotiations of social, political, economic, and philosophical ideas interrupted that stability. Revolutionary claims battled anti-Jacobin resistance to reform, so the massive industrial and social changes of the period occurred against a backdrop of strife that fed into growing discrepancies between rich and poor. Aristocrats and landowners continued to enjoy their comforts while towns grew without benefit of sanitation systems, urban planning, or decent working conditions. When the writer and civil servant Daniel Defoe observed his country during Queen Anne's reign, he noted the orderliness of the social and economic systems. A hundred years later, the social activist William Cobbett noted that the poor had been disinherited and that rival social and economic interests dominated England.[7]

England was at war during most of Jane Austen's life. English soldiers fought against colonists in the American War of Independence, which ended with the defeat of the British at Yorktown in 1781 when Austen was six years old, although the official end did not come until the Treaty of Paris in 1783. From 1789 to 1799, the French Revolution captured the imaginations of the English, who were bitterly divided over which side to support. Beginning in 1793, England fought against France and Napoleon's bid for empire, a fight that did not end until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. And during that same period, from 1812 to 1814, England fought again with America in the War of 1812. There was periodic concern that England's coast would be invaded, and southern ports were filled with military personnel.

The birth of the middle classes introduced a relatively new distinction between the public and the private spheres. Such a distinction always existed between, for example, the state and its laws on the one hand and what went on in people's homes on the other. But something new occurred toward the end of the eighteenth century: a demarcation between the outside world of capitalist markets and rational economic and political forces and the internal world of emotion, religion, and morality. Individuals, predominantly men, began to amass power through their wealth and material activities, while behind them stood a network of family support influenced largely by women. So a sexual division of labor derived from the structure of the family itself and provided the foundation for capitalist values and enterprise outside the home.[8] These private, family activities served not only as a backdrop to public life, but dictated what happened to many social institutions and ideologies.

The new middle classes had much in common with the aristocracy and the gentry in terms of their desires for comfort. At the same time, they acquired their status through individual work, so they also had affinities with the work ethic of the poor and with a desire for independence from the established orders of the past. The revolutionary fervor of the period spoke to those desires, and nonconformist writers and thinkers as disparate as William Cowper, Austen's favorite poet, and the political theorists Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine, spoke out against the corruption of those in power and the need for liberatory reforms. Not surprisingly, there was also a backlash of reaction against such calls for reform. Not until the Reform Act of 1832 (the backdrop for George Eliot's 1872 novel, *Middlemarch*) did middle class households get some political clout, although, ironically, that act explicitly excluded women from political enfranchisement. And through it all, land remained the particular form of property ownership that conferred an authority unavailable from other forms of wealth.

A religious revival in England accompanied these social changes, as people became interested in the idea of individual salvation and turned to Evangelism.[9] The notion of a shared moral code united people from different walks of life—farmers and landowners, manufacturers and factory workers, Whigs and Tories, Anglicans and Puritans. This Evangelism coupled Protestant individualism with humanitarian ideas, public piety and strict morality, and unbending standards of personal conduct. Opponents of the French Revolution made much of the revolutionaries' supposed atheism; to be a supporter of the Constitution meant to be a good Christian, and to be a Jacobin was to be unpatriotic. Beginning as an anti-Jacobin reaction, the new religiosity persisted into the Victorian era. The Church of England, of which Austen was a member, continued to control the majority of England's religious activity, but dissenting groups such as the Evangelicals and the Wesleyan Methodists, not to mention the Roman Catholics, raised issues about everything from spirituality to clerical absenteeism (an issue for Austen in *Mansfield Park*) to political scandals. There was a staunch moral earnestness that made manners and morals into social and philosophical issues.

Austen's novels illustrate, perhaps better than anything else from the period, the crucial ways in which private behavior toward others stood in for broader questions of merit, social standing, and authority. Humanitarian ideals fostered by increased religiosity brought many religious sects into anti-slavery activities, as public opinion became more independent. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807, despite powerful opposition from vested economic interests, demonstrated this free thinking, and in 1834 all slaves in the British empire were freed.[10] There is evidence in Austen's novels that Jane Austen held abolitionist sympathies. In *Emma,* Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax have a conversation concerning Mrs. Elton's offer of help in finding a situation for Jane as a governess.

> “When I am quite determined as to the time, I am not at all afraid of being long unemployed. There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect.”
>
> “Oh! My dear, human flesh! You quite shock me: if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition.”

> "I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade," replied Jane; "governess-trade, I assure you, was all that I had in view; widely differnt certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies."[11]

In *Mansfield Park,* where the Bertram fortune derives from Sir Thomas's plantation holdings in Antigua and the slave-driven economy of the West Indies, a conversation between Fanny Price and her cousin Edmund turns to Sir Thomas's new esteem for his young niece after his return from Antigua. Edmund suggests that Fanny should talk to her uncle more:

> "But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?"
>
> "I did—and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther."
>
> "And I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel."[12]

Claire Tomalin argues that Fanny's abolitionist views are made clear by this exchange.[13]

Jane Austen's favorite poet was William Cowper, known as a vehement abolitionist. The Austens themselves had family connections to the slave trade; Austen's father, George Austen, was a trustee of a plantation in Antigua that belonged to one of his Oxford friends, James Nibbs. Claudia Johnson has made the persuasive point that Sir Thomas Bertram of *Mansfield Park* represents the ideal of the benevolent slave-owner, and that his kindness to Fanny stems from the same impulse of caring paternalism that assumes that dependents are better off being looked after than being granted autonomy.[14] In this way, Jane Austen may have made connections between the plight of enslaved Africans and the situation of dependent women.

Home, or cottage, industries, became fewer because home manufacture could no longer compete with the new machinery, particularly in the textile industry. This development impoverished many rural households and put many women, especially single women, out of work. Many women joined men in fieldwork, and others went to work in factories or as servants in the homes of people better off than they were. Women thus had access to fewer roles and occupations, and they were beset by more expectations about what a "proper lady" should be.

Other than dancing and occasional equestrian exercise or walking, middle- and upper-class women got little physical exercise. So in *Pride and Prejudice,* when Elizabeth Bennet decides to visit her ailing sister at Netherfield, her mother objects that there is too much dirt and that she will not be fit to be seen when she arrives.

> Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of excerise.[15]

She is received with polite surprise by the Bingleys: "That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it."[16]

Home and family dictated the world of women in Jane Austen's time. When capital became liquid and the middle classes redefined notions of property, women could leave production and be supported by their husbands (or fathers or brothers, as was the case for the Austen women after George Austen's death in 1805). At the same time, as marriage became based on the idea of a contract, the position of married women with respect to property became more encumbered by patriarchal ideologies of inheritance. Married women were unable to hold property until the landmark Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882.[17] Property was the key determinant of wealth and status in Austen's lifetime, because ownership of land continued to dominate the economic structure at the end of the eighteenth century. Commerce and credit were coming into play, but “real property” still meant land.

LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

Jane Austen's family was orthodox in its views: Church of England religious ideas and conservative Tory politics. The Austen family belonged to what we would call the upper middle class; they were members of the gentry class that produced landowners, clergymen, military officers, and women with domestic accomplishments and a basic literary education. Austen's novels are justly famous for their highly detailed and meticulously observed portrait of daily life among the English country gentry. Austen depicted a wide range of character types, from the haughty, aristocratic, overbearing Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* to the misguided commonsensical Lady Russell in *Persuasion,* and from the caddishly charming Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* to the moralistic but ambivalently motivated Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and the self-deludedly intelligent title character of *Emma.* Austen had a brilliant ear for realistic dialogue and an amazing intuition about human drama.

A woman of Austen's class was best situated to document the private world of human interaction: the subtle ways that families were built or destroyed; the casual interactions between the sexes and the formal relations that ensued and dictated family power, wealth, and lineage; and how people negotiated between moral strictures and human desires.

Education was a major component of domestic change. Upper-class men had had access to an elite, formal education in Europe since the Middle Ages. In the eighteenth century, forms of education also became available to women and to the poor. Women were given greater access to book learning at home and sometimes were sent off to schools, as the Austen girls were, for several years. The poor had charity schools, though many still argued that these institutions would engender insubordination. One of the major proponents of broad schooling was the reformist philanthropist Hannah More, who opened a school for the poor that local farmers thought would incite children to be disaffected from their families and their lot in life.

Jane Austen received some formal training, but mostly she had the advantage of her father's extensive library. Here is her brother Henry's account of her intellectual accomplishments:

> Her reading was very extensive in history and belles letters; and her memory extremely tenacious. Her favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse. It is difficult to say at what age she was not intimately acquainted with the merits and defects of the best essays and novels in the English language. Richardson's power of creating, and preserving the consistency of his characters, as particularly exemplified in “Sir Charles Grandison,” gratified the natural discrimination of her mind, whilst her taste secured her from the errors of his prolix style and tedious narrative. She did not rank any work of Fielding quite so high.[18]

So Austen had something a woman of her class and place might not have had even fifty years earlier: books and the ability to read.

Education in history, philosophy, and poetry was especially important for women because conversation was one of the arts an elegant, well-bred woman needed for social success. The Bertram sisters study at home in *Mansfield Park* and know how to read maps, and in *Emma,* Harriet Smith receives her training at a boarding school for girls. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Emma Woodhouse in *Emma* demonstrate most powerfully the scope and importance of a woman's ability to be articulate.

In addition to religious training and an education in letters, Jane Austen participated in the range of activities that were considered to be "feminine accomplishments" in the late eighteenth century. She was competent with a needle and made clothing and household textiles; she could draw and paint; she sang and played the pianoforte; and she was a prolific letter-writer. Darcy's sister plays the harp in *Pride and Prejudice,* as does Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park.* Art and music rounded out the most central of women's expected accomplishments, which was needlework.

Much emphasis was placed on a woman's talent at embroidery and the neatness of her handwriting, and Austen excelled in both of these areas—she made shirts for her brothers, stitched a shawl for Cassandra in muslin with satin embroidery, and embroidered handkerchiefs. In 1811 Jane, Cassandra, and their mother created a patchwork quilt. Sometimes young women worked a sampler to complete their education in household skills. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Charlotte Palmer demonstrates the fruits of her education by displaying a landscape in colored silk. Lady Bertram spends her days doing needlework in *Mansfield Park,* and Mrs. Jennings makes a rug in *Sense and Sensibility.* Other artistic hobbies in the home included cutting paper, making designs with shells, and painting with watercolors. These skills fell into the sphere of women's activities; each of them could be undertaken in one's own home or in the homes of others. And certainly one of the goals of perfecting these accomplishments, like the goal of conversational decorum, was to draw the admiration of a suitable young man.

Austen's early anti-heroine, Lady Susan, sends an account to her confidante that satirizes prevailing ideas about women's accomplishments. After writing about her daughter Frederica's education, she remarks that she herself lacks the usual feminine skills.

> Not that I am an advocate for the prevailing fashion of acquiring a perfect knowledge in all the Languages Arts & Sciences; it is throwing time away; to be Mistress of French, Italian, German, Music, Singing, Drawing &c. will gain a Woman some applause, but will not add one Lover to her list. Grace & Manner after all are of the greatest importance. I do not mean therefore that Frederica's acquirements should be more than superficial, & I flatter myself that she will not remain long enough at school to understand anything thoroughly.[19]

While ridiculing the conflation of surface talents with the pitched battle to win a socially and economically appropriate husband, a battle fought feverishly in the novel, Lady Susan's speech nevertheless suggests the stakes involved in preparing women for society. Compare it with the more sophisticated addition Darcy makes to the usual list of "music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages" as well as "a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions" in *Pride and Prejudice.* "All this she must possess," he says, "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."[20]

Like Lady Susan, but utterly without her manipulative motives, Catherine Morland's mother in *Northanger Abbey* "did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste." Catherine's happiest day is when her music-master is dismissed, and she is described as equally mediocre at drawing, French, and accounts. On the other hand, Catherine's ignorance comes in for some satire when the narrator suggests that her shame about her lack of accomplishments is misplaced, as ignorance is a virtue in a woman who wants to attract a man. "To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid," the narrator

writes. “A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can.”[21] Yet both *Lady Susan* and *Northanger Abbey* present, in very different ways, the necessity that a young woman seek an acceptable husband. An unmarried woman risks poverty and humiliation and, as Elizabeth Watson points out in *The Watsons,* “my Father cannot provide for us, & it is very bad to grow old & be poor & laughed at.”[22] This fear pervades Austen's writings.

Austen was also a competent dancer, card player, and dramatic reader, social endeavors that occupied leisure time in country villages. Country dances and balls featured prominently in Austen's life, as they do in her novels. Such dance assemblies had been around for several centuries, but they became especially ritualized events in Austen's time, when dancing was the most popular and most important recreational activity. For a local country dance, someone who could play the piano and wasn't dancing, often an older married woman, provided musical accompaniment, and the music consisted of dance tunes that we would now label as baroque or classical. Several couples (at least three) “stood up” with one another to dance, and they formed separate lines, with the men and women facing one another. Then they proceeded through a sequence of movements or figures in which they would advance and retreat, lock arms and swing one another around, or weave their way through the other couples. Sometimes everyone danced at once, and other times each couple did their set of figures in turn, following the lead couple, in groups that were called “sets.”

Austen made important narrative use of the time a couple stood and watched the others, as these moments provided sanctioned time for an unmarried man and woman to be alone and to converse in private in an acceptable way. These moments also provided useful narrative opportunities for eavesdropping. In Austen's time, a country dance remained a highly social, even intimate, community gathering.

A ball differed from a country dance in that it was much larger, public, and entailed much stricter rules of etiquette. A young girl might participate casually in a country dance at the home of friends or relations, but to attend a ball required that she had officially “come out.” Coming out entailed a formal entry into womanhood and into matrimonial availability. In *Mansfield Park,* for example, Mary Crawford asks whether Fanny Price is *out,* because this is crucial information among young women looking for husbands.[23]

An orchestra provided the music at balls and the décor was often elaborate. Invitations went out weeks in advance and replies were expected almost immediately. A supper room was set up in a space separated from the dance floor, and a cloakroom was provided for attendees' wraps. At a very public gathering, a master of ceremonies made sure that decorum was maintained and introduced gentlemen to ladies they did not know. For example, Mr. King, the actual Master of Ceremonies of the Upper Rooms at Bath during the period the novel takes place, introduces Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey.* Introductions are also stressed at the assembly that opens Austen's unfinished fragment *The Watsons,* where readers can find detailed information about such events and the way they worked. Events where dancing took place were carefully chaperoned and regulated, and the highly codified rules of dancing informed Austen's plots.

A woman could not dance with a man to whom she had not been properly introduced, and it was considered improper for a woman to dance more than two dances with the same partner unless they were engaged or married. The hostess or her eldest daughter would begin the dancing with a gentleman of appropriate rank. Emma is annoyed, for example, when Mrs. Elton's status as a new bride mandates that she be asked to begin the ball in *Emma.* Once engaged to dance with a gentleman, a woman could not accept further offers to dance with others. Dancers took time out for supper, and a standard refreshment was a hot spiked wine punch or soup called negus, mentioned as the refreshment in *The Watsons.*[24]

A highly charged discussion of dancing as a social metaphor occurs in *Northanger Abbey,* when Henry Tilney proposes that dancing serves as an analogue for marriage. He offers the theory that an engagement to dance represents a contract between the parties. “I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage,” Henry says to Catherine Morland. “Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not

chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours." Catherine remonstrates that the two things are very different, in that "People that marry can never part, but must go and keep house together" whereas "People that dance, only stand opposite each other in a long room for half an hour." Henry extends his metaphor in response, arguing that in both dancing and marriage, the man has the advantage of choosing while the woman can only accept or refuse, that both contracts are exclusive and involve duty and fidelity, and that the chief difference lies in a turnabout in the obligations. In marriage, the man must support while the woman please, whereas in dancing, the man is expected to please "while she furnishes the fan and the lavender water."[25]

Those who did not dance often played cards, and card games took place in the evenings after dinner parties as well. Popular card games in Austen's day consisted of, among others, whist, speculation, loo, casino, and quadrille. Whist, like bridge, required a set number of players. Loo and speculation were "round" games, which meant that any number could play. A set of games was called a "rubber." *The Watsons* contains some detailed discussions of card-playing both at the opening ball, where the game of choice is casino, and at a later social visit, where there is a sharp competition between the games speculation and vingt-un (twenty-one) for social superiority. Casino is the game of choice for Lady Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility.* This game entailed trying to match your cards until they were all used up. Mrs. Bates in *Emma* favors quadrille, which was played by four people using a deck from which the 8s, 9s, and 10s had been removed; it was a variant of ombre, an older game that was disappearing by Austen's time. Quadrille resembled whist and had a trump suit. A game of speculation figures in *Mansfield Park.* This is a round game with a trump suit: Players sought to get a card higher than the one displayed as trump; and they could sell the card if they chose. The player with the highest card won. Whist was played by two couples with the partners sitting opposite one another and is the ancestor of bridge; the partners tried to match each other's suits. Round games seem to have been played by younger people and entailed a rowdier, less serious demeanor. In *Mansfield Park,* the speculation players are portrayed as enjoying themselves more than the older, stodgier whist players, who conducted their game in silence.

More intimate social gatherings such as visits to neighbors and dinner parties occupied Jane Austen's time as well. As with dances, there were more elaborate rules of etiquette required by these social rituals than exist today. For example, visitors to one another's homes left a calling card, a small card bearing the visitor's name. The use of cards presupposed a servant to answer the door and take the card to the master or mistress or (if they were "not in") to place it in the card tray for their later inspection. People often displayed these cards in a dish in the hallway or on the mantel as signs of their social status, as they provided a way to show off one's connections in society. And visits needed to be returned in kind in order not to risk impoliteness and social censure. These visits occurred in the morning. The time category "morning" referred to daylight hours and could last until dinner.

Later in the day, the social gathering of choice was the dinner party. In addition to serving one's guests food and drink, these gatherings served as ways to increase one's social acquaintance. Dinner was prepared and brought to the table by servants, but they were not addressed or spoken about during the meal. After dessert, the women adjourned to the drawing (or "withdrawing") room for tea while the men drank port and sometimes smoked (neither of these activities was acceptable behavior in front of women). Later, the men joined the women for tea and conversation. In London during the social "season," dinner guests often proceeded to a ball or assembly at this point.

Rules of etiquette were stringent and strictly defined by gender. Men were introduced to women and not the other way around, and a man waited for a woman to acknowledge or speak to him before he approached or nodded to her. Introductions in general were formal, ritualized, and based on hierarchies. For example, Elizabeth Bennet is highly distressed in *Pride and Prejudice* when the obsequious Mr. Collins insists on introducing himself to his social better, Mr. Darcy. A man also looked after women in various ways: walking or riding along the street side, taking the backward-facing seat in a carriage, entering a public place first to

find a seat for his female companion, removing his hat when women were present, and so on. An unmarried woman under thirty would not usually be in a man's company without a chaperone, and she did not often walk alone other than in a park or to church in the morning. Outdoors, a man and woman could converse only while walking; they would not simply stand in the street to talk, hence the occasional invitation in an Austen novel to “take a turn” round the gardens or wherever the couple happened to be.

Throughout Austen's private correspondence and often in her novels, there is discussion of visiting the homes of relations and friends for what appear to modern readers as extended periods of time. Explanations for these lengthy visits involve the practical details of travel at the turn of the nineteenth century. In the days before the railroad made long-distance travel more feasible, roads were poor and travel took place by horse-drawn carriage or coach. So there was little point, and no practicality, to making a visit that lasted only a few days when the getting there and returning was so arduous and uncomfortable (for example, springs were not invented until the 1790s, and prior to the ability to suspend the coach, a coach ride was stiff and quite grim). During these visits, men spent their days hunting and fishing, while the women went for walks, wrote letters, or went on brief excursions to town; the day's big event was a formal dinner followed by cards or other games.

Mail or stage coaches (so called because they proceeded in stages with fresh horses) took ordinary people long distances. Private carriages of different sorts—such as barouches and landaus, gigs and curricles—had greater social status. These would be additional vehicles (on the order of a second or sports car today), as a family of wealth required a coach-and-four for general transportation. In some cases, as with Mrs. Long and the Hearst family in *Pride and Prejudice,* the family owned the coach but hired the horses. Most of Austen's characters drive in gigs, which were one-horse carriages that could carry two people. In *Northanger Abbey,* Catherine Morland favors the curricle, essentially a gig that accommodates two horses so costs more and has more prestige value, over the chaise and four, a sturdier and more sedate means of transportation. The coachman for the Bertrams in *Mansfield Park* worries about the scratches on his carriage as he is in charge of maintaining the equipage. In general, these vehicles carried the kind of status symbolism that characterizes today's cars. They are toys and prized possessions as well as the means of transportation.

As Austen's novels amply demonstrate, the point of the social life young women led was to yield an appropriate marriage partner. Professional employment for women was out of the question. Jane Austen herself earned money from her writing—enough to increase her comfort and that of her sister and mother—but still an inadequate amount to offer them any real independence. Fanny Price considers with a shudder the dire prospects of returning to life in an impoverished port city with a dissolute father and ill-mannered mother and siblings in *Mansfield Park.*

The continuation of families and the consolidation and maintenance of real property depended upon the orderly and socially acceptable marriages of a family's children, and it was especially crucial that daughters find suitable men to take them off the hands of their fathers and brothers. A woman could not marry without her parents' permission until 1823, a detail made stark in *Pride and Prejudice* when it is pointedly underscored that Lydia and Wickham are in London and have not gone to Gretna Green, just across the border in Scotland, to marry. (After 1823, girls and boys could marry without consent at the startlingly young ages of twelve and fourteen, respectively.)

The institution of marriage underwent some change during the course of the eighteenth century, with the 1753 passage of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act the key event. After the Marriage Act took effect in 1754, only a church wedding legally bound a couple to one another. Prior to 1754, marriage involving a propertied family consisted of five parts: a written legal contract between the couple's parents, stipulating financial arrangements; a formal exchange of oral vows, termed “spousals,” usually before witnesses; three public proclamations of the banns in church to permit claims of pre-contract to be heard; a church wedding; and, finally, the sexual consummation of the marriage. However, the spousals or oral contract were legally binding in and of themselves: any sort of exchange before witnesses followed by cohabitation constituted a legally

valid marriage. In Scotland, Wales, and parts of the southwest of England, the “handfast” was considered an adequate sign of marriage, and unscrupulous clergymen conducted a thriving trade in marriages performed with no questions asked about age or parental consent. The Marriage Act changed that.[26]

After 1754, the only recourse for eloping couples was flight to Scotland, where the new Marriage Act did not apply and a new trade in commercial marriage arose. Marriage was by and large indissoluble except by death; divorce that permitted remarriage was not available within the Church of England, so an unhappy couple could separate with a financial settlement, but neither of them was free to remarry. But by Scottish law, any unchaperoned meeting or an elopement that crossed the border constituted a marriage—and was therefore valid in England. Hence the feverish quality with which the Bennets and Gardiners speculate about whether Lydia and Wickham are “gone to Scotland” (282 and 290) and their palpable relief when they learn that the lovers are in London.[27]

As the frantic search for the eloped Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* illustrates, courtship is a solemn matter of enormous consequence for all parties, and families often intervened. Once the principals and the parents of the bride-to-be agreed upon an engagement, serious economic negotiations ensued and produced detailed, legal marriage settlements. One's place in the larger society depended upon these family connections. The financial health of the whole family often depended on one good marriage among its children. Elizabeth Bennet's marriage to the generous and wealthy Fitzwilliam Darcy sets up the whole clan in comfort in *Pride and Prejudice.* General Tilney opposes the connection between his son Henry and Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* when he discovers that he was mistaken in thinking Catherine an heiress. In *Emma,* Mr. Knightley supports Harriet Smith's connection with the farmer Robert Martin; he recognizes that Emma's ambitions for Harriet will be frustrated by the fact that Harriet's lack of family prevents her from aspiring higher in social rank. And, perhaps most poignantly, Charlotte Lucas is willing to settle for Mr. Collins in preference to a life of dependence in *Pride and Prejudice.*

Austen's lifetime represents the period when, some historians have argued, it became the norm for people to marry for love—or at least to expect that they could find appropriate partners for whom they could feel esteem and affection. This view has been hotly contested by social historians, and probably applies more to the upper bourgeoisie and the aristocracy than to the poor or even the gentry.[28] Nevertheless, Austen's novels are a study in the development and care of the companionate marriage, and historical evidence supports the idea that finding a mate with whom one could share conjugal love became a greater priority and subject of discussion in the eighteenth century than it had been in earlier periods in England.[29] A young woman's life could be influenced in complex and fraught ways by the marital options at her disposal. All of Austen's novels attest to the rich narrative possibilities represented by the courtship plot.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England and throughout the European continent produced an art and culture that has attracted scholars as well as appreciators of the visual arts, music, architecture, and literature. In England, Franz Joseph Haydn composed music, J. M. W. Turner and John Constable painted, and Georgian architecture lent itself to some of the finest domestic buildings in English history, landscaped with the aesthetic ideas of garden designers such as Humphrey Repton and Lancelot “Capability” Brown. Classical order still reigned when Austen was born, but was soon challenged by the Romantic idealism engendered by revolutionary politics and social change. Austen's literary contemporaries included William Blake and William Wordsworth among poets, Frances Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald, Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith, and Maria Edgeworth among novelists, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft among social theorists who also wrote novels, and Adam Smith, Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine among economic and political thinkers. It was a time of cultural richness and diversity, and of artistic ferment.

Notes

1. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

2. Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 16-17. Neither Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* nor Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* are themselves inheritors of estates, but they both come from established landowning families, and they both achieve clerical livings adequate for the support of a family. For a broader discussion of land ownership and its social ramifications, see F. M. L. Thompson, *Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).
3. Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971).
4. For a discussion of the complexities of church positions, see Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993).
5. The terms "common people" and "lower orders" referred to the working poor through most of the eighteenth century; class terminology came into use during the 1790s.
6. For a detailed account of England's role in the Napoleonic wars, see Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London: Longman, 1959), pp. 129-83.
7. For a discussion, see G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1944), pp. 463-66.
8. A fine book about the role of gender in the development of modern capitalism is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
9. Over 100 religious periodicals began publication between 1790 and 1820, and for many people these would have been the main reading material in the home. See A. D. Gilbert and T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
10. After May 1807 ships could not legally sail with slaves from any port in the British empire. The slave trade continued illegally, however, and remained divisive and controversial.
11. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. IV, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 300-01.
12. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. III, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 198. Brian Southam has argued that *Mansfield Park* takes place in the years 1810-1813, after the abolition of the slave trade (that is, after it became illegal to transport slaves by ship; slavery itself continued). Hence, the Bertram silence when Fanny raises the subject. See Brian Southam, "The Silence of the Bertrams," *Times Literary Supplement* (17 February 1995), pp. 13-14.
13. Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 230.
14. Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 107. Johnson discusses the passages in *Mansfield Park* and in *Emma.*
15. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. II, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 32.
16. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* 3rd ed., Vol. II, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 32-33. This passage is a fine example of Austen's use of free, indirect style to represent the thoughts of people without quoting them directly.
17. For a comprehensive history of married women and property law, see Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
18. Henry Austen, "Biographical Notice of the Author," published in 1818 as the front matter to the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* and reprinted in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion,* Vol. V of *The Novels of Jane Austen,* 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 7.
19. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Vol. VI: *Minor Works,* ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 253.
20. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. II, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 39.

21. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 14; 110-111.
22. Ibid., p. 317.
23. There are useful discussions of many of these issues in Susan Watkins, *Jane Austen: In Style* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990).
24. For a useful discussion of dancing and other social activities as Jane Austen depicted them, see David Selwyn, *Jane Austen and Leisure* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1999).
25. Op. cit., pp. 76-77.
26. For a discussion of marriage practices, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).
27. See the article on "Marriage" in *The New Companion to Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993), pp. 208-10.
28. The theory of the development of "affective individualism" is connected largely with Lawrence Stone's influential and controversial book, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, Harper & Row, 1977); the phrase is Stone's. See also Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), and John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). The book that inaugurated the modern study of family social history is Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962).
29. For other discussions, see Jean H. Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: Jane Austen's Works

JUVENILIA

VOLUME THE FIRST, VOLUME THE SECOND, VOLUME THE THIRD

Jane Austen's first literary efforts date from 1787, when she was almost twelve years old, and continue until 1793 or so, when she was nearly eighteen. Two of the juvenile works that bear commentary in their own right—*Love and Freindship* [*sic*] and *Sir Charles Grandison*—are discussed below. One other, *The History of England,* is a minor masterpiece of a sort, compressing centuries of English history into an uproarious synopsis of monarchs and their foibles. Other early writings, such as *Lady Susan* and *The Watsons,* more properly belong to Austen's minor works and are discussed in that section.

Austen divided her earliest works into three volumes and made fair copies of them. She continued to correct and revise these volumes until 1809. She never intended to publish them—they were strictly written for family and private amusement—but she kept them in good order. As Austen's extant letters date only from 1796, these volumes are the earliest surviving Austen writings, and they contain twenty-seven separate items.

In themselves, most of Austen's juvenile writings are slight literary games, fascinating for their window into her stylistic and thematic development and often quite funny, but certainly not masterpieces. For Austen students, however, this work reveals Austen's comprehensive knowledge of eighteenth-century prose traditions, her interest in the nature of women's voices in eighteenth-century narrative, and her sense of how those traditions and voices might be recast. The most common narrative device she used for this work is that of presenting a series of letters. The juvenilia mimic and puncture the conventions of the popular sentimental

fiction of the decades that preceded them, and rework some of those conventions in what are Austen's earliest experiments with narrative presence and narrative voice.

Some of the juvenile pieces are brief anecdotes, while others are more extended burlesques. Many are mere fragments and remain static, and others begin in midstream. There is a tough mind at work here, as Austen shows little mercy to the targets of her satire. As with her later fiction, she attacks vanity and hypocrisy and ridicules superficiality and self-importance. The attacks are real, but so is the sense of mischief that softens them. Austen's subject matter ranges from the decoration of a new carriage to murder, adultery, tea, fainting fits, letter-writing, shoes and bonnets, and the trappings of domestic civility. She practices deploying various rhetorical modes and moral stances, and hones her command of language and ironic wit.

LOVE AND FREINDSHIP

Love and Freindship (this was Austen's spelling) is the best known of Austen's juvenile writings, and the earliest whose transcript bears a date (13 June 1790). She was not yet fifteen when she wrote it, and it is an extended joke on epistolary form and on sentimental fiction. Already in this early work, Austen demonstrates a literary sophistication capable of dissecting both the forms of storytelling and the inherent absurdity of popular sentimental themes. Most comic epistolary intrigues depend upon a continuous revisionism: Each letter corrects, amends, interprets, or contradicts the perceptions gathered in the letter before it. *Love and Freindship,* however, opens with a jab at the conventional apologies that had been synonymous with epistolary novels, undercutting the immediacy of "writing to the moment" that Samuel Richardson had claimed for the form, in which the heroine traditionally fends off unwanted suitors with one hand while writing frantically, and often in the present tense, with the other.

The subject of this hilarious burlesque is "[a] sensibility too tremblingly alive" and the moral is "beware of fainting fits.… Beware of swoons."[1] The story revolves around exaggerated outbursts of emotion, or rather, around the collected, objective, retrospective description of such outbursts, as "Sophia shrieked & fainted on the Ground—I screamed and instantly ran mad—. We remained thus mutually deprived of our Senses some minutes, & on regaining them were deprived of them again—" (p. 99). The humor derives not so much from the instantaneous swooning depicted, which would be merely silly in a third-person narrative, as from the absurdity of a retrospective account of such behavior. The epistolary framework of the story gives it a direct address that claims an utter lack of self-consciousness: "It was too pathetic for the feelings of Sophia and myself—We fainted alternately on a Sofa" (p. 86).

Austen parodies her heroines' hothouse sensibilities by overemphasis as well as by a near-maniacal linguistic skewering of the conventional gestures of sentimentalism in the eighteenth-century novel. Laura's and Sophia's fainting fits also serve as an ironic commentary on the decorative role of women. These heroines manipulate and exaggerate the outward appearance of frailty in order to gain power over others. The heroines' helplessness is a façade, much like the epistolary form in which it is couched. As fainting suggests female frailty and invalidism, so the letter promises an authentic intimacy and confidentiality that it does not deliver.

SIR CHARLES GRANDISON

Sir Charles Grandison or The Happy Man, billed as "A comedy in Five Acts," is a slight dramatic work and the only play of any length that Jane Austen wrote. It is based on Samuel Richardson's seven-volume novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison,* published in 1753 and 1754. The manuscript remained in the family of Austen's oldest brother, James, and was commonly thought to have been the work of James's oldest daughter, Anna Austen Lefroy, but it is in Jane Austen's hand. The manuscript's existence was not widely known outside the Austen family until it emerged in 1977, stunningly, as a "new" work by Jane Austen. Critical consensus now makes it part of the Austen canon, and Brian Southam published a scholarly edition in 1980, with a Foreword by Lord David Cecil.[2]

Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* is not as well known as his earlier novels, *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), and remains virtually unread. But it was the favorite Richardson novel of the Austen family. Southam refers to the book's "chilling reputation for long-windedness and tedium, and its unstomachably perfect hero." Grandison represents exemplary goodness as a Christian virtue, and is "a paragon of gentle gentlemanliness, of English virtues and Christian benevolence, Chaucer's 'verray parfit gentil knight' translated into the mid-Augustan chivalry of domestic honour, social cultivation, and the errantry of good works."[3] Given the perfection of his hero, it is no wonder that the Austen family found Richardson's novel ripe for burlesque treatment in a family theatrical performance.

Austen's *Sir Charles Grandison* belongs with her earlier, slight juvenile work; it is, essentially, an extended joke. There are amusing moments for an Austen reader. Sir Hargrave Pollexfen announces, "I wish women were not quite so delicate, with all their faints and fits!" (p. 42). Charlotte Grandison, Sir Charles's willful sister, presents the satirical view to the heroine, "There is something monstrous frightful, to be sure, my dear Harriet, in marrying a man that one likes" (p. 55). On the whole, however, Austen's *Sir Charles Grandison* cannot compete for stylistic mastery or ironic meaning with the more accomplished of her early work such as *Love and Freindship* [*sic*].

THE SIX MAJOR NOVELS

NORTHANGER ABBEY

The plot of *Northanger Abbey* uses a device standard to many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels: A young woman is either bereft of parental, and especially maternal, guidance, or she finds herself in a situation where this guidance is unavailable to her, or she is given parental figures who are unable or unwilling to provide guidance. Thus the heroine is left on her own to form judgments, make decisions, and forge her way in the world. Catherine Morland's childhood is unexceptional, and her key characteristic is an addiction to reading gothic romances, especially those of Ann Radcliffe.[4] At first glance, she does not appear to embody the usual trappings of a heroine, as the novel's first sentence points out: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine."[5]

Catherine visits Bath under the chaperonage of the Allens, kind but rather ineffectual people, so she is separated from her family and set more or less on her own. In Bath, Catherine forms a friendship with the vapid Isabella Thorpe, and she meets the Tilney siblings, Henry and Eleanor, when Henry arranges to be introduced to her and asks her to dance. She forms an attachment to Henry without fully understanding her own mind. In contrast to the manipulative and self-interested Thorpes, the Tilneys represent good breeding and good family, as well as landed wealth. John Thorpe, Isabella's brother, is pushy, self-absorbed, and boorish. The Thorpes incorrectly believe the Morlands to be wealthy, and Isabella sets out to capture Catherine's brother James. John pursues Catherine, who is too naïve and blind to social nuances and expectations to realize what he is about. The jealous John Thorpe thwarts Catherine's growing intimacy with the Tilney family.

The central action of *Northanger Abbey* concerns Catherine's four-week visit to the house of the title's name, the home of the Tilneys. There she receives her education, in the form of disenchantment from the illusions and fantasies she has harbored about Gothic buildings and the secrets they might hold. Each time she wanders into a corridor or room expecting darkness and cobwebs, she finds light and space. Having talked herself into and out of various sinister surmises and suspicions, including the notion that General Tilney had mistreated his wife, Henry finally sets her right with a famous speech.

> Dear Miss Morland, 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 understaning, 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 perpetuated 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 neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open?

(Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey,* pp. 197-98)

Catherine retreats from this speech with tears of shame: “The visions of romance were over” (p. 199).

Yet, having been humbled by the absurdity of imagining General Tilney a murderer and Montoni-like villain, she misses something more plausible but equally sinister. When General Tilney learns that she has no wealth or portion and believes that she has imposed upon his family, he treats her with real cruelty by abruptly sending her away to travel seventy miles alone by post, and without understanding her offense. When she finally learns the truth, it appears that “in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (p. 247).

Catherine returns to Fullerton after an absence of eleven weeks, and the narrator gives us an ironic picture of this homecoming to an ordinary country village. Her parents and siblings, who join her in the realization that General Tilney has been inhospitable and dishonorable, greet Catherine warmly. Her heart has been broken and her illusions shattered because of money. Throughout this novel, Austen offers detailed discussions of estates and expectations in the form of raw numbers. In *Northanger Abbey,* more than in Austen's later novels where economic foundations are equally present, the reader learns the details of exactly how much wealth each character commands.

But, of course, *Northanger Abbey* is a comedy of manners and must end happily with the settling of the hero and heroine into a marital bliss approved by both their families, and such does occur in due course. Henry breaks faith with his father in a quarrel and follows Catherine home, where he behaves very much like an Austen hero, making his professions of love without the narrative quoting him directly: “his first purpose was to explain himself, and before they reached Mr. Allen's grounds he had done it so well, that Catherine did not think it could ever be repeated too often” (p. 243). Among the earliest of Austen's six major novels in composition date, *Northanger Abbey* is also the lightest. A comedy of manners like the other novels, *Northanger Abbey* at the same time parodies the popular genre of the Gothic romance with which the protagonists are so enamored, and whose heroines Henry Tilney refers to as “Julias and Louisa” (p. 107). At the same time that she makes fun of this sensational, hothouse genre (while extolling the virtues of engrossing fictional entertainments and giving Ann Radcliffe her due as a skillful and imaginative storyteller), Austen also portrays her main character as wanting the life of a romance heroine while actually being a thoroughly ordinary young bourgeois woman with a good heart, very little experience or psychological insight, and a tendency to occasional lapses of rational judgment. Well-educated, widely read, worldly, and prone to intelligent raillery, Henry Tilney represents the mentor figure who teaches Catherine how to read situations and people, how to ascribe motives to others, and how to know her own mind. Henry is a younger and more casual and forgiving version of Austen's later mentor-hero, Mr. Knightley, in *Emma.*

Catherine Morland remains bluntly straightforward in saying what she thinks, thinks the best of everyone until forced to recognize that many people have flaws, and believes what she reads until humiliation makes her realize that common sense does not always accord with romance fiction. People are not what they seem to be, and neither are circumstances or even physical environments.

Northanger Abbey establishes Austen's novel-writing artistry by building on, playing off, and ultimately differentiating itself from the popular strain of women's fiction of the period. Austen takes on a powerful foremother in Ann Radcliffe, and she uses irony to turn General Tilney into a bourgeois villain and to make

his treatment of Catherine underscore the ways in which she represents an ordinary bourgeois woman who slowly learns to think for herself and trust her own moral instincts. Disenchanted at the end, Catherine is nevertheless rewarded with the love of a handsome, comfortable, and kind hero who understands her and loves her for the artless person she is.

Like Don Quixote before her and Emma Bovary after her, Catherine Morland has read too much and believed too much in her formative reading of romances and fantasies. Unlike them, she forms an adult mind of her own in the course of the novel. The narrative irony of *Northanger Abbey* emphasizes these lessons, as Catherine's views are formed in subtle moments of realization. Irony is nowhere used to greater effect than when the narrator, largely through the consciousness of Henry Tilney, makes fun of the propensities of Gothic fiction, as Catherine's "passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney" (p. 141).

Catherine and the Tilneys discuss literature and history in addition to theories of the picturesque in landscape and attitudes toward drawing and taste. This extended conversation covers many kinds of reading and intellectual reverie and includes remarks about the play between fact and invention in historical writings. Catherine has little patience for the "quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome" (p. 108). Catherine also paints an interesting picture of the sort of home schooling many children received when she comments that learning one's letters can be torturous. "You think me foolish to call instruction a torment," she tells Henry and Eleanor Tilney, "but if you had been as much used as myself to hear poor little children first learning their letters and then learning to spell, if you had ever seen how stupid they can be for a whole morning together, and how tired my poor mother is at the end of it, as I am in the habit of seeing almost every day of my life at home, you would allow that to torment and to instruct might sometimes be used as synonymous words" (pp. 109-10).

In many ways, *Northanger Abbey* is Jane Austen's novel of education. As reading is a central activity in *Northanger Abbey,* the novel serves as a precursor to the more psychological focus on the cognitive development of Austen's later and more complex protagonist, Emma Woodhouse of *Emma,* a woman who begins many books but completes few.[6]

Because the parody of a popular genre so defines *Northanger Abbey,* it is especially compelling that this is the work in which Austen offers up her most powerful defense of the novel as a legitimate genre of social commentary and literary artistry. Thus *Northanger Abbey* represents Austen's most self-conscious and self-reflexive work of fiction. While the Tilneys offer a spirited defense of the pleasures of serious history, in the end Catherine Morland and the comic novel carry the day.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

During the final editing of *Sense and Sensibility* in April of 1811, Austen remarked to her sister Cassandra: "I am never too busy to think of S&S. I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child."[7] Written at around the same time as *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility* bears some resemblance to Austen's more overtly satiric effort. Both works contain ironic discussions about the picturesque and the fashion for landscape appreciation; both involve a world where gossip reigns supreme; both delve in detail into the economics of family alliances and marriages; both treat social hypocrisy with ironic contempt; and both concern female protagonists whose romantic idealism causes them difficulties and requires them to suffer disenchantment before they can gain real happiness. Yet *Sense and Sensibility* is notably darker than *Northanger Abbey.* Austen's first published novel tasks its main characters, both female and male, with severe disappointments in love.

Austen writes in *Sense and Sensibility* with a less mature ironic voice, more overt satire, and less sophisticated narrative interventions than she was to develop in her later novels, but the story she tells is as complex and

fraught as any she ever invented. The central characters are the Dashwood women, a mother and her three daughters. Left with little to live on after Mr. Dashwood dies, they leave Sussex for Devonshire, where they encounter a dashing visitor to the neighborhood, John Willoughby, and he and the middle daughter, Marianne, form a flamboyant and ill-disguised liaison that flouts propriety and flourishes on private outings and poetry. When Elinor's beau Edward Ferrars proves to be engaged to another woman and Willoughby abruptly leaves, publicly snubs Marianne, and marries an heiress, Elinor and Marianne are devastated, and each responds to these severe disappointments in accordance with her temperament.

The novel opens with an extended discourse on the financial circumstances of the Dashwoods, and the economic arrangements of John Willoughby and the Ferrars family come importantly into play as the plot unfolds. When Willoughby marries Miss Grey, who brings him the vast sum of £50,000, the voluble Mrs. Jennings reports the gossip: “Fifty thousand pounds! And by all accounts it won't come before it's wanted; for they say he is all to pieces. No wonder! Dashing about with his curricle and hunters!” (p. 194). And when the secret engagement between Edward Ferrars and Lucy Steele is revealed to Edward's imperious mother, Mrs. Ferrars disowns him and bestows the family estate on his younger brother, Robert.

Behind the unfolding of the economic and romantic dramas that take center stage in *Sense and Sensibility* lies an embedded and centrally important story concerning one of Austen's most unprepossessing and unpromising heroes, Colonel Brandon, the 35-year old who is described as “silent and grave”[8] and who falls under Marianne's spell almost immediately. Marianne and Willoughby make fun of him, and he remains a kind of background figure in the novel's first volume. Yet in many ways, Brandon's situation reflects Austen's extensive reading in eighteenth-century fiction and echoes the dark, mysterious circumstances that shadow the romantic heroes created by Austen's predecessors. As a young man, Brandon had fallen in love with a childhood friend named Eliza, who was forced to marry his brother and was mistreated by him in such a way that they divorced. Eliza fell into sexual dissolution and penury, and she died of consumption, leaving an illegitimate infant daughter. Colonel Brandon raises the daughter, also named Eliza, and local gossip purports him to be her natural father. On a chaperoned visit to Bath, the second Eliza is seduced by Willoughby and becomes pregnant, and Willoughby abandons her shortly before he meets the Dashwoods. Brandon sends her and her child to the country and fights a duel with Willoughby.

The importance of the Eliza stories lies in the way the events of the novel echo the secret past that haunts several of the characters. In *Sense and Sensibility,* none of the key romantic alliances that become permanent derive from first loves. This is very much a novel about learning from disappointment, disillusionment, and tragedy, and moving on to find a mature marital love. Elinor is Edward's second attachment, as Marianne is Brandon's second love.

Sense and Sensibility speaks of settlements and annuities, jointures and income, the cost of keeping servants and carriages, furniture and plate, and hunting dogs and horses. The characters all come from the landowning classes, but they are constrained by intricate rules about the way property moves from one generation to the next. The entrenched system of primogeniture—the inheritance by the first-born son of the entire estate, so that younger brothers have to make their way in the world through a career in the Church or the military—makes rivals of siblings. Family values may receive great lip service, but the property system as Austen depicts it in fact divides rather than unites families, especially siblings, and it treats women most unfairly.

Therein lies the novel's moral center. To gain comfort and social standing, a woman needs a man of a certain status. At the same time, to maintain her moral worth, she must resist the goads to pursue and “catch” a wealthy man. When the Dashwood sisters dispute how much money is necessary to maintain a comfortable household, it is the sensible Elinor who speaks a central economic truth. To Marianne's question, “What have wealth and grandeur to do with happiness?” her older sister replies, “Grandeur has but little … but wealth has much to do with it” (p. 91).

While the novel's title appears to suggest that the Dashwood sisters' characters are to be compared and contrasted, in a world in which marriage leads primarily to material prosperity, as critic Margaret Anne Doody points out, the nature of a woman's temperament hardly matters.[9] In many ways, the men are as much reflected in these comparative terms as the women. Colonel Brandon becomes sensible and rational after grievous and tragic disappointments, Edward Ferrars recovers from early impetuosity to become solemn but happily rational, and Willoughby suffers more lastingly from the fruits of his own indulgence in sensibility than any of the other characters. At the same time, Elinor and Marianne differ more in their surface behaviors than in their deepest emotions.

Austen's narrator remains at the side of Elinor, through whose eyes the reader receives and judges the story. The novel seems chilly to many readers, partly because Elinor, long-suffering and selfless, seems insufficiently rewarded in the end with Edward Ferrars, who is one of the more melancholy and feckless men in Austen's repertoire. Elinor thinks for herself and keeps her own counsel. Unlike Austen heroines such as Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price, and Emma Woodhouse, Elinor does not require a moral or romantic education. Until Austen created Anne Elliot in *Persuasion,* Elinor Dashwood represented her most mature, intellectual protagonist, a woman who knows what she has to learn and learns what she has to know.

Much of the novel is told in *style indirect libre* (free indirect style) from Elinor's point of view. That is, Elinor does not speak directly, but the narrator recounts what goes on in her mind in a nearly conversational way. As Doody notes, Elinor's careful approach to the world of appearances is crucial because *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel about knowing and about epistemology, the philosophy of what is knowable.[10]*Sense* and *sensibility* are not so much modes of being or distinctions of character and temperament, as many critics have taken them to be, as they are ways of approaching the world and taking in evidence.

In the world that Austen depicts in *Sense and Sensibility,* there is little hard evidence. Clues abound—rings that contain locks of hair, faces that blush or go pale, behaviors that seem to communicate something but then are followed by actions that communicate the opposite—but it is nearly impossible to know anything for certain. Characters constantly wonder and conjecture, guess and assume, doubt and become misled. As one critic has remarked, the novel's language is filled with modal verbs: “might,” “would,” and “should.”[11] And Elinor understands more than the others both the ways in which she can be misled and the stakes involved. Yet despite this insight, a series of misapprehensions of just these sorts propels the novel's action. Austen's irony serves to ensure that *Sense and Sensibility,* whatever its serious moral lessons, remains a comedy of manners.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

While *Northanger Abbey* parodies the genre of the female Gothic, and *Sense and Sensibility* in part satirizes the novel of sensibility, *Pride and Prejudice* is harder to categorize. The novel features a number of common plot devices: an infelicitously married couple who bear their incompatibility for the sake of social propriety (Mr. and Mrs. Bennet); proud, aristocratic heroes whose first declarations of love to the heroine offend her because of their arrogant claim that only an inability to overcome their feelings prompts them to seek a wife in a lower social circle (Fitzwilliam Darcy); heroes who initially accommodate the wishes of indomitably judgmental elders whose belief in social rules thwarts individual desire (Darcy and Lady Catherine de Bourgh); society women whose frustrations lead them to treat sarcastically those they resent (the Bingley sisters); and hedonistic characters who ruin themselves and bring sorrow to others (Lydia Bennet and George Wickham). But much as *Pride and Prejudice* emerges from various eighteenth-century novel traditions, it does not depend upon the literary forms or conventions of the past, but forges a new and ironic comedy of manners all its own. The verbal sparring between Elizabeth and Darcy perhaps recalls the depiction of courtship in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing,* but it is new to prose fiction.

The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is better known than that of any other Austen novel. The Bennet family has five daughters, and with no male heir, their family home at Longbourn and its £2,000 a year will go to a distant cousin, the obsequious Mr. Collins, upon Mr. Bennet's death. Hence the famous opening line—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"[12]—might be better phrased, as Isobel Armstrong points out, as "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single woman without possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a husband."[13] This novel tells a story about the possibility of social mobility at the turn of the nineteenth century. Can class be overcome, either by moving from the bourgeoisie to the landed gentry as Bingley does, or by forging a contract between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, as Darcy and Elizabeth arguably do in the end through their marriage? Most readers have understood *Pride and Prejudice* to concern only social and personal relations, but the presence of the army and the allusion in the last pages to "the restoration of peace" (p. 387), a reference to the 1802 Peace of Amiens, would have situated the work clearly for contemporary readers as a story set after the French Revolution and during the Napoleonic wars. This was a period in which the merchant and professional classes took up their positions in a challenge to the landed aristocracy, of which Darcy represents one of the last scions.

Charles Bingley rents Netherfield Park with money earned from trade, and brings his sisters to the neighborhood of Longbourn to take up residence there and his friend Darcy to visit. The local families, principally comprising the Bennets and the Lucases, immediately want to be included in this new and high social circle, and everyone meets at the Meryton assembly. The Bingleys admire the eldest Miss Bennet, Jane, and invite her to visit. While at Netherfield she falls ill, prompting her younger sister Elizabeth to walk several miles across muddy fields to tend to her, arriving in the flush of exercise to the ridicule of the Bingley sisters, who think her unrefined. Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley develop an attachment during this visit, while the "lively, playful" (p. 12) Elizabeth judges Darcy cold and critical as he begins to find himself admiring her intelligence and becoming bewitched by her "fine eyes" (p. 27). The key to this courtship lies in the gradual change from Darcy's original contempt for Elizabeth as a dance partner and her persistent dislike of him to something that comes about precisely because she so firmly resists him. The attractiveness of an uninterested woman also plays a role in the later *Mansfield Park,* in which Henry Crawford pursues Fanny Price more intently as she makes it increasingly clear that she will not change her mind and accept him.

Two key subplots augment and interrupt the romantic and satiric conquests of the elder Bennet sisters. The distant cousin upon whom Longbourn is entailed, Mr. Collins, a clergyman, comes to visit because he has heard it reported that the Bennet daughters are amiable, and his position as inheritor of their home leads him to feel obliged to court one of them as a recompense for taking his cousins' estate. Finding that Jane's affections are elsewhere drawn, he settles on Elizabeth. Mr. Collins is one of Austen's finest comic creations, a delightful caricature who is by turns ridiculous and pathetic, oily and awkward; he represents obeisance to the older aristocratic classes in the way that he fawns on Lady Catherine de Bourgh. When Elizabeth declines him, Collins proposes to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's closest friend and a woman who sees the practical need that she marry with clear-eyed sense.

A militia corps encamps at Meryton, and Elizabeth develops an attachment to the charming George Wickham, an officer who tells her that his boyhood friend Darcy has betrayed him by refusing him a living that he had to bestow, fueling Elizabeth's already settled dislike of Darcy into real hostility.

Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth is one of the most amazing and brilliantly contrived scenes in Austen's repertoire and perhaps in all English fiction. Agitated and uncomfortable, he opens his declaration with "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (p. 189). The rest of the discussion follows in free indirect style with Darcy alluding not only to his emotional attachment but also to his sense that a connection with the inferior Bennets will degrade his family. Elizabeth's response, equally indirect at first, consists largely of resentful anger. This unprecedented anti-courtship exchange between an unmarried wealthy man and a comparatively poor

unmarried women remains a literary classic, capped by Elizabeth's pronouncement that “I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry” (p. 193).

Darcy leaves with dignity, and he writes to Elizabeth to explain his history. “How differently did every thing now appear in which he was concerned!” thinks Elizabeth (p. 207). “Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd,” and she feels shame at herself and humiliation at her actions: “Till this moment, I never knew myself” (p. 208). Shortly, Lydia Bennet is invited to Brighton, where the regiment is encamped, “a situation of such double danger as a watering place and a camp” (p. 237). Lydia's heedless behavior produces a key goad to the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* when she runs off with Wickham. Much of the rest of the novel is taken up with laborious efforts to find Lydia and Wickham, to discharge Wickham's debts, and to arrange their marriage, much of it brought about by Darcy's good offices. When Elizabeth learns the details, her view of Darcy undergoes a final metamorphosis: “For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself” (p. 327).

The marriage, however, does not take place until a second unprecedented scene occurs in which Lady Catherine de Bourgh condescends to visit Elizabeth in order to warn her away from her nephew, calling her “a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family” (p. 355) and famously asking, with reference to the scandal of Lydia and Wickham, “Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?” (p. 357). Elizabeth refuses to promise that she will not marry Darcy, asks Lady Catherine to leave, and assets that she is “resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you,* or to any person so wholly unconnected with me” (p. 358).

On one if its surfaces, *Pride and Prejudice* might appear to be a Cinderella fairy tale: two deserving but poor women win the hearts of handsome, rich, and kind men. The Collins and Wickham subplots, however, mar this surface appearance. Wickham's elopement with Lydia rocks even the somewhat fatuous Bennets in its production of gossip, scandal, and threat of ruin, even though Darcy's money and influence salvage the connection. Less obviously, Collins's indiscriminate courting of whoever looks game to be his wife and his acceptance by a talented and sensible woman raises more profound questions about marital arrangements. Charlotte's decision to marry Collins represents the most straightforward comment Austen ever made on the economic constraints that dictate women's ability to choose a husband.

Charlotte bears her lot because marriage to the painfully formal Collins is preferable to the alternative of dependent spinsterhood. Obsequious Collins may be, and embarrassingly gauche in his slavish obeisance to Lady Catherine, but he is neither improper nor evil. Charlotte has become accustomed to being the one sensible person in a silly family, and her marriage will conform to that experience. Mr. Collins saves Charlotte from the even greater humiliation of poverty and dependence, and for her part, Charlotte sees her marriage for exactly what it is and no more.

In contrast, George Wickham is a true if light-hearted and charming villain. Importantly, he first appears in the novel with “all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and a very pleasing address” (p. 72). Like John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility,* Wickham has been brought up and educated with many advantages and has intelligence, good looks, and an easy glibness in conversation. Also like Willoughby, Wickham's tastes are expensive, he grows dissipated and unable to command his own desires, and he adds manipulative economic contrivances and near blackmail to these faults. Unlike Willoughby, Wickham never sees the folly of his ways and repents, nor does he snare a wealthy woman to subsidize his pleasures (although arguably he gains access to Darcy's wealth through his marriage to a Bennet). The Wickham story takes up much of the novel and synthesizes its themes of appearance versus reality and the trials of what people say and think against how they behave.

When the characters fail to understand the nature of social interaction—most notably in the Bennet parents' failure to realize that Lydia cannot be safe in Brighton—misunderstandings ensue. Much of *Pride and Prejudice* turns on the nature of gossip, news, and information in a circumscribed society, where judgments are formed by hearsay and innuendo. What, finally, can be told and what must remain secret? That question haunts the novel as does a related question concerning whether it is ever possible to know others with justice and to judge rightly other people's motives (not to mention one's own).

The original title of this novel, *First Impressions,* alludes to personal characteristics. The changed and final title, *Pride and Prejudice,* is more philosophical. A similar change of title occurs in the predecessor novel when *Elinor and Marianne,* with its lens trained on two particular women, becomes *Sense and Sensibility,* with a focus on more abstract concepts. In *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen does not simply contrast a proud man who learns to be humble and a prejudiced woman who learns to ask more questions before she passes judgment. Rather, she asks the reader to consider to what degree any of us can ever know another fully, without tainting our knowledge with our preconceptions and our wishful thinking. In this sense, Austen's first two published novels resemble one another as works about epistemology, the ability to know. Austen portrays a world where appearances reign and social stature depends on public perception. At the same time, she tells her readers that true knowledge may not be visible through a social lens.

MANSFIELD PARK

Whereas *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility,* and *Pride and Prejudice* all had their beginnings in the 1790s when Austen was in her early twenties, *Mansfield Park* dates from the years immediately preceding its publication, when Austen was in her late thirties. Austen remarked of *Mansfield Park,* "Now I will try to write of something else;—it shall be a complete change of subject—Ordination."[14] This passage also presents Austen's sense that this novel would be a departure from her earlier marriage plots.

Although ordination indeed forms an aspect of the novel—and Austen had asked her sister to inquire about some of its details from their ordained brother James Austen—service to the Church and ideas about Evangelicalism form only a small portion of the concerns of *Mansfield Park.* Indeed, given that the stupefyingly inane Mr. Collins was her previous clergyman character, ordination seems an odd choice for a subject. The story opens with a portrayal of the Ward sisters and their history. Maria Ward married Sir Thomas Bertram and became Lady Bertram, the mistress of a large estate and the mother of two sons and two daughters; Miss Ward had to settle for the Reverend Mr. Norris, a friend of Sir Thomas who was given the Mansfield living (neither member of this couple has a given name and Mr. Norris dies before becoming a real character in the story); and Frances imprudently married a Lieutenant in the Marines, broke with her sisters, and began to have "a superfluity of children."[15] Fanny Price, Frances' eldest daughter, arrives as a charity project at the age of ten amid some concerns on the part of the Bertrams that she can never be an equal to her cousins and might become a burden.

The diffident Fanny Price comes to Mansfield and is lodged in an attic room and treated as though she belongs in a rank somewhere between a servant and a poor relation. She is of no importance to the elder Bertram son, Tom, and is held in contempt by her cousins Maria and Julia. The younger Bertram son, Edmund, befriends her and becomes a welcome companion. Sir Thomas and Tom leave to tend to unspecified troubles on their plantations in the West Indies. During their absence, Maria, the older daughter, becomes engaged to a wealthy neighboring landowner, Mr. Rushworth, "a heavy young man, with not more than common sense" (p. 38) who has little beyond his wealth and family connections to recommend him. The Mansfield living was destined for Edmund but the reversion was sold to help pay Tom's gaming debts; upon Mr. Norris's death it is assumed by the purchaser, Dr. Grant, and Mrs. Grant's half-brother and sister, Henry and Mary Crawford, come to visit. If Fanny and Edmund are the novel's heroine and hero, Mary Crawford and her brother Henry are its anti-heroine and anti-hero.

The first volume of *Mansfield Park* contains two of Austen's great set pieces, the visit to Rushworth's Sotherton estate and the family's plan to put on a play, *Lovers' Vows,* Elizabeth Inchbald's version of August Kotzebue's *Natural Son.* As *Northanger Abbey* had introduced the subject of the landscape picturesque into Austen's works, and *Pride and Prejudice* turns part of its plot on Elizabeth Bennet's visit to Pemberley with the Gardiners into an occasion for disquisitions on views and houses, so *Mansfield Park* uses the houses and grounds of its title location and of Sotherton to depict the domestic spaces, the furnishings, and the gardens of the landed classes, using these geographical and spatial markers as metaphors for the scope of their class influence. This was an age of "improvements" and "prospects" and competing theories of landscape architecture. Several of Austen's novels, most notably *Mansfield Park,* contain references to the chief garden designer of the day, Humphrey Repton. The playacting episode focuses on the morality of the particular play *Lovers' Vows* and of acting more generally, and sets up the novel's key plot developments in the intricate erotic dance of jealousy between Edmund and Mary and Fanny, and Maria and Henry and Julia and Rushworth.

At Sotherton, Mary and Edmund discuss the clergy, the expectations of second sons, and morality and wit. As they fall into a dispute about the size of the woods, they leave Fanny alone on a bench, and Maria Bertram, Rushworth, and Henry Crawford join her. When Maria wants to pass through a locked iron gate into the park, Mr. Rushworth goes off to fetch its key. Henry urges Maria to pass around the edge of the gate to circumvent its "feeling of restraint and hardship" (p. 99) and, thus challenged, the two leave Fanny alone a second time, to be joined by Julia, who likewise "scrambled across the fence" (p. 101). Rushworth arrives soon after, "mortified and displeased" (p. 101) to find the others gone off without waiting for him. Rushworth, too, leaves, using his key. Fanny goes off to seek Edmund and Mary, and finds them after their own visit to the park through an unfastened side gate. Eventually, everyone reconvenes, many of them quite out of sorts or out of breath: "By their own accounts they had all been walking after each other, and the junction which had taken place at last seemed, to Fanny's observation, to have been … much too late for re-establishing harmony" (p. 104).

The maneuverings and conversations of all these characters at Sotherton mirror the operations of the novel as a whole. Clusters of characters come together, part, and regroup in an elaborate choreography that reflects one of Austen's concerns in *Mansfield Park,* to depict a world in which alliances shift and reform, and where very high stakes attend the arrangements that remain when the music stops. The Sotherton episode opens in the confined chapel with serious discussions about family prayers, the role and status of the clergy, and the moral value of marriage, then moves outdoors to a more expansive round of imprisonment and escape through and around locked gates and doors, where the game of partnering and triangulating has clear erotic overtones.

Tom Bertram returns from Antigua before his father, who is detained by business, and he introduces to Mansfield an Oxford friend, John Yates, a younger son of a lord, who is as idle and irresponsible as Tom. The two young men put forward a theatrical presentation, and they turn Sir Thomas's billiard room into a theater for the purpose. Edmund at first objects on moral grounds.

> I think it would be very wrong. In a *general* light, private theatricals are open to some objections, but as *we* are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt any thing of the kind. It would show great want of feeling on my father's account; absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger; and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering every thing, extremely delicate.

(Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park,* p. 125.)

Maria's flirtations with Henry Crawford have become evident to all, including Rushworth, and Julia Bertram has set her marital sights on Henry, with the family's approbation, as well. Edmund calls upon the rigidity of

Sir Thomas's sense of decorum, especially for his daughters, but he is overruled and eventually, through the seductions of Mary Crawford, he joins in the acting plans after saying unequivocally at first that he would not do so. The group scraps over what sort of play to put on—comedy or tragedy—before settling on *Lovers' Vows,* a play that turns on the abandonment of a pregnant woman, the recognition of an illegitimate child, and a woman who avows her love to her tutor, and would have been considered quite risqué in Austen's time.

Edmund asks Maria to give up her idea of acting in the play, finding it unsuitable, but is laughed at for his prim scruples. In the event, everyone participates, even luring Fanny into a small part. The play serves as a microcosmic variant on the relationships between these characters, with jealousy flaring as Rushworth slowly realizes how Henry Crawford and Maria are making a fool of him, and Fanny uneasily watches the growing attraction between Mary Crawford and Edmund. Fanny herself becomes a more central figure in the household through this episode. Once Edmund compromises with his conviction that acting is wrong and decides to be in the play, the novel's moral compass turns.

The household begins to deteriorate as scene painters arrive, Fanny and Julia retreat, and “Every body began to have their vexation” (p. 164). This episode contains both burlesque elements and aspects of near-tragic chaos, and hence remains one of Austen's most unsettling extended narrative sequences. The climax occurs when Edmund and Mary ask Fanny to help them to rehearse a scene that Fanny finds shocking and, to end the first volume of the novel, Sir Thomas unexpectedly arrives home, announced by Julia throwing open the door and uttering the news with “a face all aghast” (p. 172).

Sir Thomas finds his house in disarray, disapproves, and in short order burns every copy of *Lovers' Vows* he finds. A cynicism pervades *Mansfield Park.* The novel focuses on two sets of threesomes: Edmund and Mary and Fanny on the one hand, and Henry and Maria and Fanny on the other. They work in opposition to one another. The decent and judicious Edmund is nearly seduced into a calculated and too worldly love by Mary, who disapproves of his professional plans, until he finds redemption in Fanny's devotion and propriety. And Henry is nearly redeemed by his love for Fanny until he runs off with the married Maria Bertram Rushworth and condemns her to irrevocable ignominy.

Austen readers tend to hold extreme views about her third published novel. Readers either love it passionately as their favorite of the six major novels, or they find it to be the weakest of the six. Few hold a middle position about this complex work. The reason for this polarizing of positions about *Mansfield Park* rests in its heroine. Fanny Price begins the novel as a diffident refugee brought to her uncle's mannered estate from her dubious lower-class home in Portsmouth. The most docile, mousiest, and oddest of Austen's heroines, Fanny moves more and more to the center of the novel, until at the end she represents the moral anchor of Mansfield itself.

A key source of recent critical debate about *Mansfield Park* has concerned the Bertram colonial possessions in the West Indies, where they raise sugar cane and keep slaves. In some ways, this backdrop, alluded to frequently but only clearly discussed a handful of times in the novel, relates to the theme of ordination, in that the Evangelical movement in which Edmund would seem to fit opposed slavery and worked for the abolition of the slave trade during Austen's lifetime, and Austen's own religious and moral sympathies lay in that direction. *Mansfield Park* was written during the final years of the Napoleonic wars, a period in which agriculture in England was relatively depressed, much of the economy depended upon sugar from the West Indies, and the professional classes were beginning to forge new ideas about public service. The younger son Edmund in this novel represents hard work and self-discipline in opposition to characters such as Tom Bertram and John Yates, who represent the lazy self-importance of the dissolute gentry. Edward Said has argued that the colonial background to *Mansfield Park* makes the novel a landmark in colonial literature, and much has been written in response to his argument.[16] Certainly, Fanny Price is the only character in the novel who purports to be interested in her uncle's stories about Antigua.[17]

The colonial debates have focused on Austen's interpretation of the economic underpinnings of life on an estate such as Mansfield Park. Another approach might be to examine the microcosm of colonialism represented by the way Fanny is plucked from her impoverished and disadvantaged home in a naval port to be rescued with education and civility at Mansfield in the safe interior of Northamptonshire. Treated virtually as a servant and given accommodations unlike those of the rest of the family, Fanny eventually asserts herself, revolts against expectations by refusing to marry Henry Crawford, and returns to redeem at least two of her siblings, William and Susan, the latter of whom takes her place at Mansfield. Ironically, William's naval promotion is a calculated part of Henry Crawford's courtship of Fanny; his situation also makes likely the success of the younger seagoing Price brothers. Fanny wins her emancipation and eventually marries one of her colonizers, the benevolent second son Edmund Bertram. The turnabout in Fanny's situation might, after all, be a clearer way to understand Austen's global and economic politics than an attempt to elevate the brief discussions of slavery in Antigua to the forefront of the novel. The younger Prices have more energy, capacity, and ambition than any of the Bertrams; this, too, provides clues to Austen's class politics.

EMMA

John Murray offered Austen £450 for the copyright of *Emma,* but he wanted *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility* to be included in the package, and she turned down the offer. Austen wrote a letter in December 1815 in which she expressed anxiety that readers would find *Emma* less witty than *Pride and Prejudice* and less sensible than *Mansfield Park.* To the Countess of Morley, an early reader of the novel who had sent a note of praise, Austen wrote on December 31, 1815, that she was encouraged to find "that I have not yet—as almost every Writer of Fancy does sooner or later—overwritten myself."[18]

Emma returns Austen to her preoccupation with epistemology: What can we know and, more important, how can we make sense of our knowledge? She asks other questions as well: What should we try to know about others, and when should we mind our own business? All of Austen's major works are comedies of manners, but *Emma* is Austen's purest comedy and her most reassuring portrait of manners. There are no tragic backgrounds with stories like those of Colonel Brandon and the two Elizas, no charming but dangerous seducers such as Willoughby and Wickham, not even a difficult and unforgiving character such as General Tilney. Characters have their weaknesses, but none is so glaringly weak and misjudging as Emma Woodhouse herself, a beautiful and wealthy young woman who dominates the village of Highbury.

Emma contains forays into the problems of class mobility and exegeses on social hypocrisy, as do all of Austen's works. But in *Emma,* these passages are comically ironic without having a submerged dark side. The secret engagement of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax exhibits qualities of deception that verge on the sinister but never arrive there. The spirit of separation that creates an almost carnivalesque disorder at Box Hill is ultimately put right, and everyone's happy place is restored.

Emma believes her understanding and psychological insight to be completely reliable. In the course of the novel, she discovers the opposite to be true, and learns to exert less power over others and to pay more attention to knowing and controlling herself. In her first disagreement with Mr. Knightley concerning Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, Knightley expostulates, "Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have. … Better be without sense, than misapply it as you do."[19] The novel abounds with variations on the word "blunder," a word that at one point is the answer to a word game in a story filled with riddles, charades, puzzles, and enigmas. Emma improves in sense as her small humiliations mount, and she is finally rewarded with knowing who she is and what she wants. Because the novel's village is so circumscribed, and Austen's focus remains so thoroughly on Emma and stays almost entirely within Emma's perspective on events and feelings, *Emma* has the tightest plot line of the major novels.

The opening sentence lays open the whole of the Emma problem, as Austen's opening sentences tend to do: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to

unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twentyone years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (p. 5). Emma's problems derive, in fact, from her comfort and her temperament.

> 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; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her.

(On Emma Woodhouse in *Emma,* pp. 5-6)

Emma centers on the education of Emma Woodhouse: learning to be humble and to examine her own motives as she comes to an enlightening self-knowledge.

Pride and Prejudice features a mother who does a poor job of raising her daughters in Mrs. Bennet, and *Mansfield Park* features bad mothers indeed, with Lady Bertram's indolent inattention to her children, Mrs. Price's overlooking her daughters and poor household management that creates chaos around them, and the childless Mrs. Norris's busybody meddling in the affairs of other people's children. In *Emma,* the adult characters have virtually no mothers at all. The characters Emma, Harriet Smith, Frank Churchill, and Jane Fairfax each must manage without mothers, and when Miss Taylor leaves, Emma experiences her first real grief from the loss. Harriet Smith, "the natural daughter of somebody" (p. 22), lives as a boarder in a girls' school. Jane Fairfax faces the real possibility of having to work as a governess, a position she likens to that of a slave whose life is not her own to regulate. Churchill himself bears an oblique relation to the woman who might have mothered him, his vain and tyrannical aunt Mrs. Churchill, and some of his weakness and vanity might be said to derive from poor or absent mothering.

However, the focus stays fully on Emma Woodhouse throughout this novel. First, she takes up the unpromising Harriet Smith as a project. She finds Harriet attractive and pleasant to be with and at the same time unthreatening to Emma's own reign in Highbury. She separates Harriet from Robert Martin, a local farmer, and decides on a plan of action: "she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners" (p. 24). Emma persuades Harriet to aspire to Mr. Elton, the Highbury vicar and "a young man whom any woman not fastidious might like" (p. 35). Then she encourages Harriet to fantasize about first, Frank Churchill (fantasies that exist only in Emma's mind) and, by accident, Mr. Knightley himself, the highest-ranking man in the village, as potential suitors before poor Harriet is finally able to get out of Emma's clutches and reconcile with Mr. Martin, a man she loves and with whom she can be happy and appropriately settled.

Emma misses the fact that she is the woman Elton, in fact, aspires to, and that he is a conceited man who thinks Harriet too common for him. Emma endures an embarrassing but wonderfully rendered carriage ride while Elton makes his unwanted professions to her, and she has to take responsibility for humiliating her friend. Emma's conversation with Mr. Knightley about class and rank, along with Elton's more self-serving definitions of these positions, anchor the novel in its social analysis as a book with a very clear sense of who belongs where. Those who maneuver around their class positions, such as Jane Fairfax, find themselves in a social limbo that disconcerts everyone around them and makes them vulnerable to embarrassment and hardship.

The story of the secret engagement between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax provides one of the novel's central intrigues. Even before she meets Frank, Emma decides that, were she to marry, he might be a suitable match for her. And even before Jane Fairfax arrives in Highbury, she feels threatened by having a potential rival for the role of most beautiful and accomplished young woman in Highbury. Unlike Emma, Jane is a woman educated to be a governess; however, her relative impoverishment does not take away her independence of experience or spirit. Emma indeed has reason to be jealous, because Jane is her equal except

in social and economic rank. Her presence reminds readers that Emma's position in society very much depends upon her family and her wealth.

From early in the novel, the consummate matchmaker Emma declares that she herself will never marry. “I cannot really change for the better,” Emma tells Harriet. “If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it.” “I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry,” she goes on. “Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's” (p. 84). Mr. Woodhouse, a cantankerous invalid, indeed proves a small obstacle to Emma's marriage to Knightley, and will have to be accommodated with unorthodox measures, requiring that her husband come live with her rather than the reverse. When Harriet worries that Emma will have the dreadful fate of being an old maid if she persists in her decision not to marry, Emma makes an odd speech about independence and economics in relation to marital alliances:

> “Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else.”

(p. 85)

As it happens, these remarks describe one version of Miss Bates, and suggest the cloud that hangs over both Jane Fairfax, who speaks of the governess trade as akin to the slave trade, and Harriet Smith. The trajectory of the novel works away from Emma's rather thoughtless if sociologically astute musings, until she comes to find herself alone and discontent and self-reproachful at the moment when she learns to understand herself at last.

The set piece and climax of *Emma* comes in the Box Hill episode, which takes place on midsummer's day and bears some phantasmagoric relation to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* As critic Terry Castle points out, Austen captures in this scene the quality of cranky, overheated discontent that a failed group outing can have, and it causes Emma to be struck with a stab of malice delivered toward the comic-pathetic character of Miss Bates, a poor spinster who is always good-natured despite her rather depressed situation.[20] The outing begins well, then rapidly deteriorates:

> Nothing was wanting but to be happy when they got there. Seven miles were traveled in expectation of enjoyment, and every body had a burst of admiration on first arriving; but in the general amount of the day there was deficiency. There was a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over. They separated too much into parties … during the whole two hours that were spent on the hill, there seemed a principle of separation … too strong for any fine prospects, or any cold collation, or any cheerful Mr. Weston to remove.

(p. 367)

The wandering disharmony at Box Hill reminds Austen readers of the gate-evading misconnections and annoyances that plague the party at Sotherton in *Mansfield Park.* Some of the same principles of misunderstanding and self-delusion operate at Box Hill, though without the adulterous undercurrent of sexual immorality that buzzes around Sotherton. Frank works to amuse Emma, and she becomes “gay and thoughtless” (p. 368), producing the most trivial yet also the most heinous of Emma's social misjudgments when she openly insults Miss Bates by making fun of her tendency to talk incessantly about nothing. Even Miss Bates, slow on the uptake and nearly incapable of anger, realizes that she has been insulted.

As he hands her into the carriage to leave Box Hill, Knightley, who is “one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them” (p. 11), upbraids her for using insolent wit “to a woman of her character, age, and situation” (p. 374). Emma blushes and tries to shrug off the reprimand, which comes not because Miss Bates is not as ridiculous as Emma sees her to be, but because her poverty and discomfort require compassion. Her mortification at the rightness of his reproach causes her to act sullen, and the day ends with Emma “vexed beyond what could have been expressed—almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life” (p. 376). Extraordinarily, Emma weeps “almost all the way home,” tears that Castle argues may be the first real tears, and the most realistic, in all of English literature.[21]

Emma visits Miss Bates, makes amends, and is forgiven, but the episode remains odd. In a story in which Emma's deluded errors cause real mischief to the material lives of others, it is a brief, thoughtless remark to an older woman who is a relative nonentity in Highbury society that reveals the crux of Emma's self-destructive lack of insight and self-knowledge. In minding the manners of everyone around her, she has failed to mind her own.

Some critics have proposed that *Emma* bears a resemblance to the detective novel, as Emma tries to solve various mysteries, notably concerning the shady character presentations of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. If so, Emma Woodhouse may be the literary world's most inept detective, missing every clue and hint until she is thunderstruck with the realization that she loves Mr. Knightley: “It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!” (p. 408). After Knightley's profession of love and Emma's famous and maddening non-reply—“What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does” (p. 431)—the narrator provides a commentary on their zigzagging non-courtship that could stand for the novel as a whole: “Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken” (p. 431). In the comic world of Highbury, relative truth rises to the surface and wins the day, but not before it is ringed about with the enticing possibilities of self-deception.

PERSUASION

Jane Austen spent almost a year composing *Persuasion,* from August 1815 to August 1816. There are two versions of the ending, and the two final chapters of *Persuasion* represent the only surviving manuscript portions of any of Austen's major novels. In the last months of her life before illness forced her to stop writing, Austen worked on *Sanditon,* a work that, even in its unfinished state, suggests a return to high satire and the precise delineation of social and personal absurdities. But *Persuasion* was a bit of a departure from her usual affectionate assault on sentimentality and romance.

Persuasion continues a narrative tactic that also characterized *Emma*: There is a rhythm that moves from ease to tension, then to reversal and renewed ease. Both novels have theatrical qualities in their plot trajectories, as circumstances build to a suspenseful turn, coalesce and explode, calm again, then crystallize into significance. This rhythm derives from the central plot scenario. When she was nineteen, Anne Elliot fell in love with Frederick Wentworth, a naval officer, and accepted his proposal of marriage. Anne's father, the proud and snobbish Sir Walter Elliot for whose character “vanity was the beginning and the end,”[22] opposed their alliance, as did Lady Russell, a family neighbor and friend who became a mother-figure to Anne when Lady Elliot died. Neither Sir Walter nor Lady Russell could brook an alliance with a man who had no fortune and not much of a family name, and Lady Russell persuaded Anne to give up an imprudent engagement and separate from Wentworth. At the same time, Anne is little valued by her family. Although she possesses “an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, [Anne] was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne” (p. 5).

The title of *Persuasion* returns Austen to the abstract conceptual titling of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice.* Anne "had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure," Wentworth believes, and he remains resentful. "She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity" (p. 61).

When the novel opens, nearly eight years have passed since the lovers' parting; the Elliot finances have seriously dwindled; and Sir Walter is forced to let Kellynch Hall to Admiral and Mrs. Croft. This arrangement brings Wentworth, now a Captain in the Navy who has distinguished himself in the service, advanced in rank, and "made a handsome fortune" (p. 30), back into Anne's purview, as Mrs. Croft is his sister. Wentworth has not married; and Anne, who "had been forced into prudence in her youth, … learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (p. 30). Anne Elliot is twenty-seven years old when the novel opens, by far the most mature of Austen's heroines. She is the only Austen heroine who has a past.

Persuasion is a more physical novel than Austen had previously written. Two accidents form climactic moments: young Charles Musgrove's fall in which he breaks his collar bone and injures his back, and Louisa Musgrove's near-fatal fall on the Cobb in Lyme Regis. Both accidents test Anne's resilience and coolness in a crisis. Captain Harville's lameness dates from a war injury, and Richard Musgrove died of a fever in the West Indies. Multiple deaths precede the novel's action as well, most notably those of Lady Elliot and of Mrs. Elliot. Mr. Elliot wears a black band around his hat and the Elliot women wear black ribbons. Mrs. Smith's illness defines her decline and makes her helpless and older than her years. Anne Elliot herself begins the novel with the note that "her bloom had vanished early" and she has become "faded and thin" (p. 6); Wentworth remarks to Anne's sister Mary Musgrove that Anne is "so altered he should not have known" her again (p. 60). Critic John Wiltshire has argued that the human body is at its most vulnerable in *Persuasion.*[23] From this perspective, *Persuasion* may have paved the way for Austen's focus on invalidism in her final fictional effort, *Sanditon,* a fragment in which she otherwise seems to move in new directions.

Human emotions are more vulnerable in *Persuasion* as well. As Anne has to come to terms with having been influenced in an intensely private decision and repented of that decision, so Wentworth has to overcome his bitterness in order to find his way back to Anne and to forgive her. Austen carries out the details of these emotional developments with some of her most powerful and effectively staged scenes. Most notable is her use of eavesdropping, an activity often engaged in by Austen characters, but nowhere more intensely than in *Persuasion.*

On a walk early in the story, Anne finds herself behind a hedgerow from which vantage point she overhears a conversation between Louisa Musgrove and Wentworth. The conversation snippet begins *in medias res* and its context makes no difference. Anne hears Louisa tell Wentworth, "What!—would I be turned back from doing a thing that I had determined to do, and that I knew to be right, by the airs and interference of such a person?—or, of any person, I may say. No,—I have no idea of being so easily persuaded. When I have made up my mind, I have made it" (p. 87). Wentworth responds, "It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.—You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm" (p. 88). The second notable eavesdropping scene decides the conclusion of the novel. Wentworth overhears a conversation about constancy in men and women.

Emma moved Austen in the direction of a tighter plot structure; *Persuasion* is Austen's shortest and most tightly plotted novel. There is the usual allotment of misunderstandings; however, all the plot elements serve the tension—erotic and narrative—that builds when Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth meet so many years after their failed engagement.

Persuasion has one of the clearest temporal structures of any of Austen's novels. Characters frequently allude to the precise dates of events, and the years that have intervened between the broken engagement and the current narrative loom large. For Sir Walter, the past represents the family tradition and status that he wishes to uphold; for his daughter, who looks toward the future, the past represents the mistake of her life and its turning point. Like Elinor Dashwood, Anne must struggle for self-control, and she must balance self-respect with emotional repression as she confronts a renewal of acquaintance with Wentworth.

Most of Austen's novels offer little prehistory before the narrative begins. In *Persuasion,* foreshadowing and decisive pasts abound: Sir Walter Elliot has lost his wife and become estranged from his male heir, Mr. Elliot. Mr. Elliot has failed to marry Elizabeth, Anne's older sister, and then married a woman who has died. Charles Musgrove proposed first to Anne before he married her younger sister, Mary. At school, Anne Elliot became friends with Miss Hamilton, now Mrs. Smith, who has her own sad history. Frederick Wentworth has a long and distinguished war history and set of naval friends in Harville and Benwick. And, of course, Anne and Wentworth became engaged and then Anne succumbed to “persuasion” and broke the engagement.

This dwelling on the past establishes one of the novel's major themes, the changing of the guard from the old, landed aristocracy typified by Sir Walter Elliot and his obsession with Debrett's *Baronetage of England* [that “book of books” (p. 7) to the new professional classes]. The Napoleonic wars that pitted Britain against France enriched a new group of military and commercial men whose class claims have nothing to do with inherited estates or birth. The narrator holds up for ridicule Sir Walter and the other representatives of the aristocracy in the novel, Lady Dalrymple and her daughter Miss Carteret. In contrast, the naval officers who abound in *Persuasion* represent education and self-sufficiency. The aristocrats lack manners and hospitality and fall back on empty formality, while the professional men exemplify inner substance, the value of friendship, tolerance, an embrace of change, and inner strength.

An early conversation about naval men sets up the class conflict that anchors part of the plot of *Persuasion.* “The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give,” Anne argues when Admiral Croft presents himself as a possible tenant for Kellynch Hall. “Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow,” she continues. Sir Walter feels differently, finding the naval profession offensive, “as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of” (p. 19). In Sir Walter's world, personal worth is based on birth and heritage. In the new professional world, worth (part of Wentworth's name) depends upon merit.

Austen's previous heroes had been landowners or clergymen; Wentworth deviates from that background in important ways. As a consequence, the ending of the novel contains some ambiguities. Whereas Austen's earlier heroines move into a world they know when they marry, Anne Elliot looks forward to a life of adventure, movement, and change. Admiral and Mrs. Croft represent not only the happiest married couple in all of Austen's works, but also the most unconventional couple. Mrs. Crofts challenges gender roles when she accompanies her husband on board ship, participates in financial negotiations, and intervenes to give the reins of the family equipage “a better direction.” Self-sufficiency and new forms of status may be available for women as well as men, the novel suggests.

The long series of wars between France and England that ended in 1814 made naval officers wealthy and rendered them prominent social figures as well. Napoleon's unexpected escape from Elba renewed hostilities in Europe and suggested that no peace would ever be reliably lasting. The “dread of a future War” (p. 273) referred to in the novel's last sentences is quite real. So readers cannot be sure what the future holds for the Wentworths, other than a happy acceptance of change and social progress.

MINOR AND INCOMPLETE WORKS

LADY SUSAN

Lady Susan did not appear in print during Austen's lifetime. James Edward Austen-Leigh published it for the first time in the 1871 edition of his *Memoir of Jane Austen,* and he gave the work its title.

Two eighteenth-century novels may have influenced *Lady Susan*: Henry Fielding's 1741 parody of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela,* a wicked send-up of its inspiration called *Shamela,* and French novelist Choderlos de Laclos' 1782 *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*). These earlier works use epistolary form with multiple correspondents, and their competing and crossing letters, like those of *Lady Susan,* unmask rank hypocrisy and display outrageous manipulation of the emotions of the characters whom the protagonists exploit. Lady Susan Vernon, like her notorious predecessor Madame de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons dangereuses,* captivates the reader's imagination even as she behaves with repellent amorality to get what she wants.[24]

The plot of *Lady Susan* is as outrageously complicated as its heroine. Lady Susan Vernon, thirty-five and a widow billed as "the most accomplished Coquette in England," comes to visit her brother-in-law and his wife in "that insupportable spot, a Country Village"[25] in order to escape a mess that she has created by having an affair with a married man. On arrival, Lady Susan promptly sets about to seduce Mrs. Vernon's brother Reginald de Courcy, the only son and heir of his venerable family. At the same time, she plots to marry her daughter Frederica to the oblivious, dim-witted, but wealthy buffoon Sir James Martin. Lady Susan uncharitably and unfairly describes her daughter as "the greatest simpleton on Earth … who was born to be the torment of my life" (p. 245), and "a stupid girl, & has nothing to recommend her" (p. 252).

Letters fly chiefly between Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson, her confidante and co-conspirator in London, and between Mrs. Vernon and her mother, Lady de Courcy, with occasional missives from others and a lot of quoted and indirect dialogue. The pleasure in *Lady Susan* derives from its eponymous heroine's "captivating Deceit" (pp. 248-49). While Lady Susan herself delights in what she calls the "exquisite pleasure in subduing an insolent spirit, in making a person pre-determined to dislike, acknowledge one's superiority" (p. 254), the other characters are alternately charmed by her considerable art and artifice and horrified at her duplicity and their own susceptibility to it. The reader follows suit.

Lady Susan works her art through her linguistic fluency, and she prides herself on being able to persuade anyone of anything and being able to talk her way out of any difficulty. "If I am vain of anything, it is of my eloquence," she writes. "Consideration & Esteem as surely follow command of Language, as Admiration waits on Beauty" (p. 268). Her technique involves the fine use of words to maneuver through any social pitfall.

Lady Susan's analysis of her first pass at coercing her daughter into a marriage with Sir James illustrates her simple philosophy: She aims to maximize her economic and social status and her emotional power over others, because for her, all personal pleasure derives from status and power.

> Upon this whole I commend my own conduct in this affair extremely, & regard it as a very happy mixture of circumspection & tenderness. Some Mothers would have insisted on their daughter's accepting so great an offer on the first overture, but I could not answer it to myself to force Frederica into a marriage from which her heart revolted; & instead of adopting so harsh a measure, merely propose to make it her own choice by rendering her thoroughly uncomfortable till she does accept him. But enough of this tiresome girl.

(Lady Susan in *Lady Susan,* pp. 253-54)

For Lady Susan, social life is a game that involves high stakes and risks, and she is its consummate player. In complaining about her daughter, she writes, "Artlessness will never do in Love matters, & that girl is born a

simpleton who has it either by nature or affectation" (p. 274).

Yet, of course, Lady Susan gets her comeuppance in the end. An expository "Conclusion" to the epistolary narrative explains that because some of the characters are together and others permanently estranged, the correspondence has ended ("to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue" [p. 311]). Readers learn that Frederica is living under the care of her aunt and uncle, and that Lady Susan herself will marry Sir James Martin. The narrator remarks at the end that it is not possible to know whether Lady Susan was happy with the choice of Sir James, "for who would take her assurance of it, on either side of the question?" She remains an anti-heroine and tantalizingly enigmatic.

Critic Terry Castle has pointed out that Lady Susan's double standard infects the reader and that Austen herself does not entirely condemn her character's subversive talents. Castle writes of Lady Susan's "incorrigible will to power, her gaiety, her erotic rebelliousness, her triumphant contempt for all the 'romantic nonsense' that keeps other women subservient."[26] She may be evil, but the form that evil takes is quite compelling.

In *Lady Susan,* Jane Austen initiated the fictional use of twin psychological concepts, employing the terms *consciousness* (in the sense of "self-consciousness") and *embarrassment* in what were early instances of these rather modern concepts.[27] So while *Lady Susan* carries on the parodic digs at hypocrisy that preoccupy Austen's earlier juvenile writings, this extended and more accomplished short novel moves significantly toward Austen's mature facility with ironic social satire and psychological judgment.

THE WATSONS

Jane Austen began writing *The Watsons* in Bath in 1804 (the manuscript bears an 1803 watermark), and she abandoned it in 1805 following her father's death. Austen never returned to this story despite hints about how the plot would have unfolded and real narrative promise. *The Watsons* is the darkest of Austen's fictions, and when she put it aside, she remained silent, with the exception of some verses and an inquiry concerning the copyright of *Susan,* until she began to revise *Elinor and Marianne* into *Sense and Sensibility* in 1809 or 1810.

If Jane Austen introduced modern psychological concepts into her work with *Lady Susan,* she constructed a story around the psychology of anxiety and dread in the unfinished *The Watsons.* This brief work abounds with multiple references to awkwardness and anxiety and mentions of consciousness and conscience, embarrassment, shame, and alienation, all relatively new terms for the period. Emma Watson is a sophisticated heroine who analyzes her social and emotional situation with acute insight.

The plot of *The Watsons* is complex. Emma Watson has been living with her aunt and uncle, and she returns home at age nineteen after her uncle has died and her aunt has remarried an Irishman, thus cutting her out of the inheritance she and her family had expected for her. After an absence of fourteen years, during which she has had no contact with her family, Emma finds a sensible but invalid father, two petulant, irritable, and self-interested sisters who see her as an unwelcome rival for the small number of available men in the neighborhood, and a boorish brother who has moved to a neighboring town and married a wealthy but vain wife. An older sister, Elizabeth, worries and meddles but is good-natured and warm-hearted. As with many novels from the eighteenth century, the Watson mother has died before the novel begins.

The Watsons opens with a local ball, a segment that offers an intriguing historical account of the social protocols of assemblies. Emma finds herself the center of attention as a new face in the circumscribed social gathering. She marks herself as kind, amiable, and morally responsible when she rescues a boy of ten whose haughty dance partner has reneged on her promise to him, thus making herself interesting to the boy's aristocratic companions. By the end of the fragment we have of this story, Emma has attracted the attentions of the arrogant and socially inept Lord Osborne, the smooth-talking but vapid social climber Tom Musgrave,

and the agreeable, gentlemanly clergyman Mr. Howard.

Meanwhile, Emma's straitened economic situation pains her, and she fights back tears when her cruelly dismissive brother remarks, “What a blow it must have been upon you!—To find yourself, instead of heiress of 8 or 9000£, sent back a weight upon your family, without a sixpence.” He goes on mercilessly: “After keeping you at a distance from your family for such a length of time as must do away all natural affection among us & breeding you up (I suppose) in a superior stile, you are returned upon their hands without a sixpence.”[28] Toward the end of the fragment, the narrator sums up Emma Watson's predicament quite grimly:

> [S]he was become of importance to no one, a burden on those, whose affection she could not expect, an addition in an House, already overstocked, surrounded by inferior minds with little chance of domestic comfort, & as little hope of future support.

(pp. 361-62)

A dismal set of circumstances indeed, with people characterized by “Hard-hearted prosperity, low-minded Conceit, & wrong ûheaded folly” (p. 361).

For all the gloomy prognostications, the existing text of *The Watsons* hints that Emma, more congenial and better brought up than her sisters, may find a husband who is both in possession of a comfortable income and social standing and worthy of her affections. Cassandra Austen reported that Emma would have received and declined an offer of marriage from the wealthy if slightly creepy aristocrat Lord Osborne, who can speak of nothing but horses and ladies' fashions in shoes, and she was to have ended up happily engaged to Mr. Howard, whose love she was to have won despite the efforts of Miss Osborne to secure him for herself.

Yet despite the apparently intended happy ending, *The Watsons* diverges from the plot of *Pride and Prejudice,* with which it shares some superficial plot resemblances: a group of sisters with little fortune to recommend them as marriage partners; ineffectual parental guidance; obnoxious suitors; and a heroine whose sensibility permits her to see with great acuity precisely where her social situation places her. In *The Watsons,* the sisters without means who are in search of suitors are snappish, cross, jealous, and resentful of one another and the world. More important, women must compete fiercely with one another for eligible men in the world of *The Watsons,* a world of palpable social awkwardness, disappointments in love that cause shame as well as heartache, and excruciating anxieties about the future.

In addition to the psychological complexity and anxiety exhibited in *The Watsons,* bursts of inspired prose enliven this work. As the novel progresses, Austen reveals a developing narrative style and set of writerly techniques that she was later able to deploy more fully. The fragment opens with an effective method of speaking for and about a group consciousness with a writing method that might be called the communal passive voice. Here is the opening sentence:

> The first winter assembly in the Town of D. in Surry was to be held on Tuesday October 13th, & it was generally expected to be a very good one; a long list of Country Families was confidently run over as sure of attending, & sanguine hopes were entertained that the Osbornes themselves would be there.

(p. 314)

Far from representing a lack of agency, the passive verbs here and throughout *The Watsons* present a social ethos that controls the lives of everyone in this well-defined, hierarchical, rule-bound community, introducing a theme of social politics that defines all of Austen's mature fiction.

Given the unpromising future the Watson sisters face, it would have been interesting to know how Austen would have resolved their fates. Austen's grasp of economics is forthright in this fragment of a novel, extending even to the stunning moment when Emma chastises Lord Osborne for not understanding that "Female Economy will do a great deal my Lord, but it cannot turn a small income into a large one," at which "Lord Osborne was silenced" (p. 346).

Snatches of the famous Austenian irony appear in *The Watsons.* Using a combination of the communal passive voice and indirect discourse, the narrator paints a satiric picture of the ball atmosphere:

> The cold & empty appearance of the Room & the demure air of the small cluster of Females at one end of it began soon to give way; the inspiriting sound of other Carriages was heard, & continual accessions of portly Chaperons, & strings of smartly-dressed girls were received, with now & then a fresh gentleman straggler, who if not enough in Love to station himself near any fair Creature seemed glad to escape into the Card-room.

(p. 328)

Some turns of phrase reflect Austen at her wicked best. The tongue-tied, dense Lord Osborne can think, for example, of little to say when he pays a post-ball visit, but "after hard labour of mind, he produced the remark of it's being a very fine day" (p. 345). And Emma's self-absorbed, conceited sister-in-law "eyed her with much familiar curiosity & Triumphant Compassion" (p. 349), lording it over her impoverished relative at the same time that she reveals her own moral inferiority in this brief phrase.

Austen also sets out her trademark character and plot devices in *The Watsons.* The dilemmas Emma Watson faces seem trivial—how to avoid being escorted home in Tom Musgrave's curricle, for example—but represent the typical Austenian method for revealing depth of character in confrontation with social proprieties. Emma wants to get home as quickly as possible and Tom's offer would facilitate this. Yet she does not want to invite intimacy with this forward young man. She needs to remain proper and polite, yet dislikes the pressure to act in a way that displeases her and invites misunderstanding. These are the moments in Austen's fiction that prove decisive, and Emma's superior strength of will emerges as she negotiates this social precipice with aplomb, creativity, and decorum, as befits an Austen heroine.

SANDITON

Nothing can be quite so simultaneously depressing and exhilarating for a lover of Jane Austen than to read the wonderful fragment of a novel she left when she died. In the last months of her life, Austen composed the beginnings of *Sanditon,* a work she was obliged to abandon during her final illness. She began to write *Sanditon* in January 1817, and the last date on the manuscript is 18 March 1817. She died on 18 July, exactly four months later, and her health quickly deteriorated during the period in which she composed this last work of fiction. It seems fitting, then, that *Sanditon* concerns health and invalidism and paints an especially vivid picture of hypochondriacs.

This novel fragment is magnificent, and thus underscores the enormous loss to the canon of English literature represented by Austen's premature death. "There are some great writers who wrote too much," novelist Margaret Drabble wrote. "There are others who wrote enough. There are yet others who wrote nothing like enough to satisfy their admirers, and Jane Austen is certainly one of these."[29]

Sanditon departs from Austen's serious later novels and returns to the sort of burlesque she practiced in *Northanger Abbey,* but on a different subject, that of invalidism and fashionable watering places. The idea that a dying woman depicted hypochondriacal characters with so much energy and real fun and such a skewering of the state of medical knowledge gives some hints about Austen's own character and courage in the face of

her last illness.

Highly satirical and at times hilarious, *Sanditon* presents some of Austen's most promising comic characters and situations. Mr. Parker is “an Enthusiast;—on the subject of Sanditon, a complete Enthusiast” and a man “of a sanguine turn of mind, with more Imagination than Judgement.”[30] His wife is “the properest wife in the World for a Man of strong Understanding, but not of capacity to supply the cooler reflection which her own Husband sometimes needed, & so entirely waiting to be guided on every occasion, that whether he were risking his Fortune or spraining an Ancle, she remained equally useless” (p. 372). As “Every Neighbourhood should have a great Lady,” the imperious Lady Denham, seventy years old, “born to Wealth but not to Education” (p. 375) fills that role exquisitely. When the heroine Charlotte Heywood becomes experienced with Lady Denham's economic interactions and judgments and her notion that lawyers and clergymen and military officers are worthless because they produce no heiresses for her nephew to marry, she thinks, “She is thoroughly mean. I had not expected any thing so bad.” “Thus it is, when Rich people are Sordid,” she concludes (p. 402).

The three hypochondriacs, Diana, Susan, and Arthur Parker, are drawn with exaggerated raillery and comic glee. The Parker siblings combine extreme preoccupation with their bodies and bodily functions, with eating and exercise and air, that they take to extravagances such as bleeding themselves with leeches for ten days running or pulling three teeth at once. Their vocabulary tends to phrases such as “Spasmodic Bile” (p. 386). Far from appearing to be as ill as they pretend, Diana officiously organizes the lives even of strangers; Arthur sits next to a roaring fire to nurse his burly constitution with cocoa and buttered toast; and Susan “had no Hysterics of consequence” on their journey until they arrived just in sight of Sanditon (p. 407).

The pompous sentimentalist Sir Edward Denham provides equal mirth to the reader and returns us to Austen's narrative concerns about novel-reading in *Northanger Abbey.* Sir Edward fancies himself erudite and sensitive, and he virtually pummels Charlotte with ridiculous quotations from Scott, Campbell, and Burns until she “began to think him downright silly” (p. 398). Sir Edward's disquisition on novels and literary taste beautifully sends up the intellectual snobbery of the day while offering a parody of fashionable language. Poor Charlotte survives this onslaught of words to conclude that their tastes in reading do not coincide and to discover that Sir Edward has primarily enlarged his vocabulary and denigrated his own style through his reading, without in any way improving his mental acuity or capacity for critical judgment.

Sanditon begins more actively than other Austen fictions, with a dramatic carriage accident on a country lane. In the twelve extant chapters, an intriguing scene is set for various plot developments, but not much actually transpires. It is clear that more raillery at the expense of invalidism and hypochondria would have filled many pages. In addition, Austen presents a strong grasp of economic conditions in the Parker-Denham effort to merchandize and turn a profit from Sanditon. The presence of several unmarried and various situated young men and women—one of them described as a West Indian mulatto—offered rich material for Austen to have mined had she lived to do so. It is not surprising that several writers have made attempts to complete this promising narrative material.

ADAPTATIONS

A spate of imitators and completers have finished Jane Austen's unfinished works, published fictional sequels to the novels, and even published historical murder mysteries with a fantasy Jane Austen playing the plucky detective.[31] The latest entry into what we might call the Austen augmentation market—often these works pretend to be found manuscripts—is a slim volume purporting to print the expurgated sex scenes from the Austen *oeuvre.*[32] These works are not part of the Austen canon, but they represent a phenomenon that is very much tied to the world of Jane Austen and deserves some attention.

In addition to the literary additions to Jane Austen's output—with works by writers such as Joan Aiken, Julia Barrett, and Emma Tennant, entries by Austen kin Anna Austen Lefroy and Joan Austen-Leigh, and a novel inspired by Austen by Fay Weldon[33]—the movie industries in England and the United States have found Austen's novels to be fertile ground for cinematic treatment. Austen movies first appeared in 1940, with a production of *Pride and Prejudice* that starred Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson. Interestingly, it was Harpo Marx who presented this idea to Hollywood after seeing a 1935 Australian theatrical production based on *Pride and Prejudice.* Marx sent a telegram to producer Irving Thalberg proposing that the role of Elizabeth Bennet would be perfect for Thalberg's wife, actress Norma Shearer. Shearer postponed the project, and Thalberg died before MGM made the film. The English writer Aldous Huxley helped with the screenplay, and the studio advertised the movie with the tag line "Bachelors Beware! Five Gorgeous Beauties are on a Madcap Manhunt!" The plot is significantly altered by having Lady Catherine de Bourgh, played by Edna May Oliver, arrange the match between Darcy and Elizabeth.[34]

A particularly strong set of movie productions of Austen novels appeared in the mid-1990s. Seven movies or television series came out between 1970 and 1986, and in 1995 and 1996, six additional adaptations of Austen novels for the screen appeared. These movies of Austen fiction brought with them new mass market editions of the novels on which they were based. Scholars and literary critics have begun to look at the Austen filmography as a way to recover how readers have interpreted Austen's meanings for their own times.[35]

In 1995, British actress Emma Thompson worked with director Ang Lee to produce a relatively faithful screenplay of *Sense and Sensibility.* Thompson played Elinor Dashwood, with Kate Winslet as Marianne, Hugh Grant as Edward Ferrars, Greg Wise as Willoughby, and Alan Rickman as Colonel Brandon. The movie enjoyed box office as well as critical success and brought renewed popular attention to Austen's work. Also in 1995, the BBC and writer Nick Dear produced a film of *Persuasion,* directed by Roger Michell, with Amanda Root as Anne Elliot, Ciaran Hinds as Captain Wentworth, Corin Redgrave as Sir Walter Elliot, and Sophie Thompson as Mary Musgrove. The same year, a BBC and Arts and Entertainment production of *Pride and Prejudice* written by Andrew Davies and directed by Simon Langton scandalized some Austenites with a version of *Pride and Prejudice* in which Colin Firth, playing Darcy, dived into a lake on the Pemberley property and emerged dripping wet. This sexualized portrait made Firth a screen idol. That production also starred Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet and was shown on television in a mini-series format.

The following year, in 1996, another major movie star, Gwyneth Paltrow, brought attention to Austen with a movie of *Emma.* Jeremy Northam played Mr. Knightley and Ewan McGregor played Frank Churchill in this movie, written and directed by Douglas McGrath. The same year, a television production for the Arts and Entertainment Network, written by Andrew Davies (who also wrote the televised version of *Pride and Prejudice*) and directed by Diarmuid Lawrence, featured Kate Beckinsale as Emma. So suddenly in 1995 and 1996, Austen novels seemed to be everywhere in popular culture.

In 1999, a movie adaptation of *Mansfield Park* took more liberties with the story than had the earlier films. Writer and director Patricia Rozema, known for experimental and feminist movie work, created a movie that brought some of the recent critical work on colonialism to bear on *Mansfield Park,* the epicenter for global analyses of Austen. Rozema gave Fanny Price more backbone than she appears to have at the beginning of the novel. In addition and more controversially, she created a movie in which the slave trade and the presence of slaves at the Bertram plantations in Antigua figure as a nightmarish backdrop to the action in England.

The renewed and popular appeal of Austen's work in Hollywood cannot be explained simply. The factors that help us understand the sudden ubiquitous mass cultural presence of Austen in the 1990s might include the fact that Austen's work, after all, arguably focuses on three best-selling topics: money, sex, and love. In addition, in a period in which values are splintering and new forms of technological media are proliferating, Austen provides a glimpse into a simpler world where moral issues were clearer, life options were more circumscribed, and choices were, in general, fewer.

Two recent Austen-related works, updates rather than true adaptations, deserve some mention. In 1995, alongside the Austen movie mania, Paramount produced a movie titled *Clueless,* written and directed by Amy Heckerling, and starring Alicia Silverstone and Paul Rudd. The movie is set at a high school in Los Angeles and offers a comic send-up of angst among wealthy American teenagers with cell phones. *Clueless* is a funny coming of age story that works in its own right. At the same time, its plot closely follows that of Austen's *Emma.* The protagonist meddles in the affairs of others while failing to understand the nature of her own feelings. Other parallels abound. The protagonist falls for a man who turns out to be unavailable, as was Frank Churchill, but here because he is gay, and everyone realizes it but the heroine. The man the protagonist loves is under her nose all along—he is her stepbrother. And an incident in a mall replaces the attack by gypsies in the novel. In *Clueless,* albeit in a late twentieth-century context, Heckerling captures on film Austen's ironic voice, something most of the movie adaptations of Austen's novels fail to do.

Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones' Diary,* is less successful than *Clueless,* both as a work of fiction and as a movie, but it became wildly popular.[36] The movie casts Colin Firth, to date the sexiest Darcy, as Mark Darcy. Like *Clueless,* the story is set entirely in the modern day, in fashionable London rather than Los Angeles, and features a plot closely based on the plot of *Pride and Prejudice.* Renée Zellweger is the heroine torn between a handsome cad (Hugh Grant as the Wickham character) who is her boss and the distant and proper Darcy, about whom the cad has told her what turn out to be lies to cover for his own misdeeds with respect to Darcy. Both *Clueless* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* bring a sharp focus to the ongoing appeal of Austen's irony and cutting wit. At the same time, these contemporary stories also update and renegotiate the marriage plot for a post-feminist era.

Notes

1. *The Works of Jane Austen*, Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 78; 102. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
2. *Jane Austen's "Sir Charles Grandison,"* ed. Brian Southam (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980). References to the text of the play will be given parenthetically.
3. Southam, "Introduction," ibid., p. 20.
4. Ann Radcliffe was the major practitioner of the female Gothic novel that Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland so dote on. Her two best-known works are *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797).
5. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 13. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.
6. Many Austen characters are judged by what and how much they read and by how they respond to their reading.
7. Ibid., p. 182.
8. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. I, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 34. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.
9. Margaret Anne Doody, "Introduction" to *Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility,* ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xiii.
10. Ibid., p. xxxiii.
11. Zelda Boyd, "The Language of Supposing: Modal Auxiliaries in *Sense and Sensibility,*" in Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983), pp. 142-52.
12. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. II, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 3. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.
13. Isobel Armstrong, "Introduction" to *Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice,* ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xxiv. Note that this revision, however apt, destroys the comic irony of the original.
14. *Jane Austen's Letters,* 3rd ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 202. *Mansfield Park* is set in Northamptonshire.

15. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. III, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 5. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.
16. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 92-93. Moira Ferguson offers a postcolonial analysis of *Mansfield Park* in "*Mansfield Park*: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen,* ed. Laura Mooneyham White (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), pp. 103-120. See also *The Postcolonial Jane Austen,* ed. You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (London: Routledge: 2000) for readings of *Mansfield Park* from a global economic perspective.
17. Austen does require, to be sure, a plot device for removing Sir Thomas from Mansfield. The lack of his moral guidance fuels much of the story; the Rushworth engagement would no doubt not have taken place had he remained at home.
18. *Jane Austen's Letters,* 3rd ed., ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 309.
19. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. IV, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 64. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.
20. Terry Castle, "Introduction" to Jane Austen, *Emma,* ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
21. Ibid., p. xx.
22. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. V, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 4. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.
23. John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body: "The Picture of Health"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992).
24. The situation in *Lady Susan* also forecasts Austen's portrait in *Mansfield Park* of the complicity between Mary Crawford and her brother Henry in his amorous intrigues and, ultimately, his pursuit of Fanny Price.
25. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 248; 245-46. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
26. Terry Castle, "Introduction," to Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. xxvii-xxviii.
27. Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* defines "consciousness" as the perception of what passes in one's own mind, citing Locke, and the internal sense of guilt or innocence. Johnson offers two definitions of "embarrassment": perplexity and entanglement. Margaret Anne Doody has written about Frances Burney's modern and new presentation of embarrassment in *Evelina,* a novel published in 1778 that Jane Austen knew well, in *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988). Ruth Bernard Yeazell writes about these concepts in women's fiction in *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), which includes a chapter on *Mansfield Park.*
28. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 352. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
29. Margaret Drabble, "Introduction," *Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 7.
30. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 371; 372. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
31. Helen Barton has written *The Jane Austen Quiz Book* and Maggie Lane published *The Jane Austen Quiz & Puzzle Book.* Stephanie Barron has written five detective novels that feature Jane Austen as the main character. There are also whole industries of Austen memorabilia, from umbrellas to playing cards to bumper stickers.
32. Arielle Eckstrut and Dennis Ashton, *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). For a list of pre-1975 adaptations, see Andrew Wright, "Jane Austen Adapted," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30 (1975): 421-53.
33. This is only a very partial list of the most prolific of the Austen adapters. Joan Aiken's books include *Emma Watson: The Watsons Completed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), *Eliza's Daughter* (New

York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), *Jane Fairfax: A Novel to Complement Emma by Jane Austen* (London: Gollancz, 1990), *Mansfield Revisited: A Novel* (London: Gollancz, 1984), and *The Youngest Miss Ward* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Julia Barrett's books include *Presumption* (New York: M. Evans, 1993), *The Third Sister: A Continuation of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1996), and *Jane Austen's Charlotte: Her Fragment of A Last Novel* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 2000). Emma Tennant has published *Emma in Love: Jane Austen's Emma Continued* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), *Pemberley, or, Pride and Prejudice Continued* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), and *An Unequal Marriage, or, Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

Austen's niece Anna Austen Lefroy (1793-1872) wrote *Jane Austen's Sanditon: a Continuation,* ed. Mary Gaither Marshal. (Chicago: Chiron Press, 1983). A great-great-grandniece, Joan Austen-Leigh, published *A Visit to Highbury/Another View of Emma* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) and *Later Days at Highbury* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Fay Weldon wrote *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co., 1984). Weldon also wrote a novel called *Darcy's Utopia* (London: Collins, 1990) and a screenplay of *Pride and Prejudice* that the BBC produced in 1979.

34. See Rachel M. Brownstein, “Out of the Drawing Room, Onto the Lawn,” in *Jane Austen in Hollywood,* second ed., ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001): 13-14.
35. For a collection of such essays, see *Jane Austen in Hollywood,* second ed., ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001).
36. Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary: A Novel* (New York: Viking, 1998); the Miramax film appeared in 2001 and was written by Richard Curtis and directed by Sharon Maguire.

Special Commissioned Essay on Jane Austen, Julia Epstein: Jane Austen As Studied

Jane Austen's works made a small splash when they were published, fell into relative neglect for a time, were revived in the later part of the nineteenth century, and have become increasingly popular. The novels enjoyed fair success during Austen's lifetime, and received relatively positive critical reviews. But the books were published anonymously, and nothing was known about the novels' author outside her immediate circle.

Following Jane Austen's death, her brother Henry Austen published a “Biographical Notice” in the 1818 posthumous printing of *Northanger Abbey* with *Persuasion.* Henry Austen's “Biographical Notice” painted a portrait of a traditional, devout spinster who existed solely in the bosom of her family. The “Notice” included some details about profits from the novels, presented Austen as having read extensively in history and literature (with a special fondness for Samuel Johnson's prose, Samuel Richardson's novels, and William Cowper's poetry), and extolled her quiet kindness to others, her wit, her “placidity of temper” and lack of affectation, and her piety (saying that “her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church”).[1] Henry Austen also cited the famous passage in which she describes her novelistic technique as “the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour”[2]; he dubbed this “a playful defence of herself,”[3] but critics then as now have often neglected to see that she was being ironic and self-deprecating.

Austen's novels were reissued as a set in 1833 in the Bentley *Standard Novels* series, an inexpensive series of reprints. The printings diminished in size over time as sales were smaller than the publisher had anticipated. So Austen's readership remained steady if relatively small through the middle part of the nineteenth century. Critics during this period treated her work as old-fashioned and out-of-date until another family member's biography in 1870 changed Austen reception.

Austen's novels have attracted two overlapping but disparate types of readers: general readers who tend to be overwhelmingly middle-class white women and are sometimes referred to as “Janeites,” and literary scholars, who come in many different stripes, from formalist to Marxist, feminist to new historicist and postcolonial. The only other major English author of whom this kind of doubled readership—both popular and academic—can be said to exist side-by-side is William Shakespeare.[4] In 1948, R. W. Chapman wrote, “I have it on good authority that Jane Austen is now the only nineteenth-century prose writer with whom the rising generation (including aspirants to honours in English Literature) can be assumed familiar.”[5]

Yet even more than Shakespeare, Austen's dramatic predecessor in the English canon of literary masters, Austen has inspired a dual approach to reading her works. Austen readers in the general public identify with her plots and people and think of characters such as Elizabeth Bennet and Captain Wentworth as friends, or at least as people to identify with and gossip about. Scholars, in contrast, mine the relation of Austen's works to a range of academic concerns, from their use of an omniscient narrator and an ironic voice to British politics and the status of women during the regency, social conservatism, feminist literary strategies, and postcolonial critical theory.

Renewed attention came to the novels with the publication of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1870 by Austen's nephew James-Edward Austen-Leigh. The scholarship of R. W. Chapman and B. C. Southam and the 1932 publication of Austen's letters and the subsequent editions of the juvenile and minor writings caught the attention of the scholarly community.[6] Other writers have responded with varying degrees of admiration and disdain for Austen's work, from Sir Walter Scott's contrasting of Austen's delicacy to his own “Big Bow-wow strain” of writing to Charlotte Brontë's notion that “Miss Austen is only shrewd and brilliant” to Henry James' commentary on readers who turned the author into “their ‘dear,’ our dear, everybody's dear Jane.”[7] Even Mark Twain weighed in with this biting remark: “Whenever I take up *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility,* I feel like a barkeeper entering the Kingdom of Heaven.”[8]

Austen's influence as a quintessential representative of British culture is famously apparent in Rudyard Kipling's 1924 short story, “The Janeites,” in which a company of artillerymen in World War I establishes a secret Austen society as a way to cope with the atrocities of trench warfare.[9] To the uninitiated, Austen is described this way: “Why, she was a little old maid 'oo'd written 'alf a dozen books about a hundred years ago. 'Twasn't as if there was anythin' *to* 'em either.… They weren't adventurous, nor smutty, nor what you'd call even interestin'—all about girls o' seventeen (they begun young then, I tell you), not certain 'oom they'd like to marry; an' their dances an' card-parties an' picnics, and their young blokes goin' off to London on 'orseback for 'air-cuts an' shaves.” In the end, the main character and last surviving Janeite explains that he continues to reread the six novels and proclaims “there's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place. Gawd bless 'er, whoever she was.”[10]

There are two parts to Austen's continuing popularity. First and foremost, of course, she was a great artist: She invented a new genre of fiction, and her ironic prose style is often compared to Shakespeare's use of language for its power and mastery. She is much read in middle and high schools and in university literature courses, some of which are devoted exclusively to her writings. Scholars have dissected every scrap of evidence from her writings to produce multiple biographies and editions of her six major novels, her juvenile writings, and her letters, and collections of critical essays on every imaginable topic and theme in Austen's work. Conferences are held to discuss Austen's work, and Jane Austen societies and Web sites have appeared in England and the United States and even in Japan. Contemporary writers have produced sequels, spin-offs, and parodies of the novels as well as multiple television and movie adaptations, not to mention the puzzles, cards, clothing, and bumper stickers (“I'd rather be reading Jane Austen”) that have made Jane Austen a virtual industry. Jane Austen's consummate skill as a storyteller and prose stylist repays all this attention with continuing new insights into her methods and her meanings.

At the same time, there is a second aspect to the popularity of Jane Austen as one of the greatest of all literary artists in the English language. While scholars and university syllabi ply the Austen trade, there is a parallel cultural phenomenon that makes Austen's novels books well-loved by people who have no aspirations to or interest in the academic study of literature. Henry James referred to this phenomenon disparagingly when he wrote impatiently of “everybody's dear Jane”; Katherine Mansfield, a twentieth-century English novelist, wrote similarly: “The truth is that every true admirer of the novels cherishes the happy thought that he alone—reading between the lines—has become the secret friend of the author.”[11] Readers feel as though they know Jane Austen, that she is their friend, and there is a rhapsodic quality to some of her fans, for “fans” does seem to be the apt word. It is interesting to ask why this should be the case.

Austen has also been misread. As we have seen, Austen wrote her fiction against the backdrop of churning social turmoil at home and political and military turmoil abroad. Yet she also managed not to transgress in any obvious way the strictures on behavior or the social expectations that genteel women contended with at the turn of the nineteenth century. With a nod to Kipling's conceit in “The Janeites,” some doctors even recommended that shell-shocked soldiers in World War I hospitals read Austen for therapy. In this view of Austen, her novels represent a world of limitation, of clear rules, of domestic life as a sanctuary; thus reading these books is reassuring, unthreatening, and salutary.

OTHER AUTHORS FREQUENTLY STUDIED WITH JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen wrote in a pivotal moment in literary history. Her dates place her squarely in the Romantic period, but her poetry receives little attention and her forays into Gothic fiction are satiric, so she fits uncomfortably in literature classes studying Mary Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron. The novels occasionally surface in discussions of the Romantic period; there are critical debates about her place in Romanticism, and she is sometimes understood to represent sensible moral prudence as a counter-Romantic.

Austen's importance rests with the genre of the novel. She tends either to serve as the culminating point for courses on the novel's first major century in England, the eighteenth century, or as the starting point for its second flowering in the Victorian period. So sometimes she is the goal to which Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Frances Burney lead. At other times, she inaugurates a tradition of epic prose narrative epitomized by Emily and Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Henry James. In women's studies classes, she is read alongside lesser-known women novelists such as Jane West, Mary Manley, Charlotte Lennox, Frances Sheridan, Elizabeth Inchbald, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Wollstonecraft, with French women sometimes added to the mix: Madame de Lafayette, Madame de Genlis, and Madame de Staël. She is also studied with more modern women writers such as Jean Rhys and Barbara Pym.

And, of course, Austen often appears on the reading lists of survey and “Great Books” courses that sample a range of literary classics. Austen's novels also appear, often as the first assigned reading, in courses on the English novel that go on to read the Brontës, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens, Eliot, and James. No matter where Austen appears on a school or college syllabus, she represents the apex of novelistic achievement: She invented the detached, all-knowing narrator whose intelligent perspective provides the story's moral underpinnings.

NINETEENTHHCENTURY VIEWS OF JANE AUSTEN

Early critical writings on Jane Austen's novels make pretty unexciting reading. There were twelve contemporary reviews published as the novels were issued, and not much of substance before 1870. The novel itself remained somewhat suspect as a literary form, so novel criticism wasn't of much scholarly interest.

While Austen's novels were fashionable during her lifetime, she was well-regarded but not much read in the fifty years or so after her death. As Virginia Woolf later put it, Jane Austen is “of all great writers … the most

difficult to catch in the act of greatness."[12] The first critic to read Austen with critical seriousness may have been Richard Whately (1787-1863), Archbishop of Dublin, who wrote an unsigned review of the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in the *Quarterly Review* of January 1821. Whately was the first to realize the important literary innovation represented by Austen's focus on ordinary middle-class life, and to see that writing about ordinariness need not itself be ordinary. He understood that Austen conveyed a moral world-view and set of values in her novels.

Austen's consummate skill at depicting people as they are is also a source of negative criticism for those who downplay this talent as "mere" miniature portraiture. An unsigned 1830 essay makes this point well, asserting that readers undervalue the skill required to present characters who behave "as any body might be expected to behave under similar circumstances in real life." This writer goes on to point out that Jane Austen is "too natural" for some readers, as "the highest triumph of art consists in its concealment; and here the art was so little perceptible, that they believed there was none. Her works, like well-proportioned rooms, are rendered less apparently grand and imposing by the very excellence of their adjustment." And Austen's plots and characters are probable and commonplace, in this view: "No novelist perhaps ever employed more unpromising materials, and by none have those materials been more admirably treated."[13]

This strain of criticism characterized commentaries for the first hundred years or so after Austen's death. Her works are seen as judicious, prudent, proper, sensible, and instructive. In short, Austen was a safe writer, one whose works could be recommended for impressionable young people, quite the opposite of the sensational kinds of fictions Catherine Morland so loves in *Northanger Abbey.* Here, for example, is the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on her novels: "She has great power of discrimination in delineating common-place people; and her writings are a capital picture of real life, with all the little wheels and machinery laid bare like a patent clock."[14]

In this view, Austen avoided romance at all costs, a point of view that would surprise the current crop of Austen aficionados. Still, readers (and moviegoers) continue to agree that Austen surpassed all others in representing human nature in all its foibles and insecurities and ridiculousness. As Thomas Babington Macauley, historian and politician, wrote in 1843, Austen comes nearest in stature to Shakespeare of all English writers because she "has given us a multitude of characters, all in a certain sense, common-place, all such as we meet every day. Yet they are all perfectly discriminated from each other as if they were the most eccentric of human beings."[15]

George Henry Lewes, a journalist who was the companion of Victorian novelist George Eliot, concurred with the Shakespeare comparison.

> A novel may by the dashing brilliancy of its style create a momentary sensation; by some well-kept mystery, some rapid incidents, or some subject of horror dragged from the reeking shambles of civilization, it may hurry the reader onward through its three volumes; but to produce a pleasant, satisfactory, and lasting impression, it must be true to nature. It will then live. It will bear reading and re-reading.[16]

(George Henry Lewes on Jane Austen)

Not everyone was this positive. One of Austen's notable detractors was Charlotte Brontë, author of *Jane Eyre,* for whom Austen's anti-Romanticism represents a failure of imagination. Brontë responded to G. H. Lewes's assertion that he would rather have written *Pride and Prejudice* than any of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels with a letter:

> I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully

> fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses."[17]

G. H. Lewes remained one of Austen's staunch early champions, despite Charlotte Brontë's protestations. His 1859 article in *Blackwood's Magazine,* entitled "The Novels of Jane Austen," praises Austen as "the greatest artist that has ever written, using the term to signify the most perfect mastery over the means to her end."[18]

In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson recorded a view similar to that of Charlotte Brontë in a journal entry written in 1861:

> I am at a loss to understand why people hold Miss Austen's novels at so high a rate, which seem to me vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit, or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow.[19]

Again, Lewes was her major defender against charges of prosaic smallness of reach and lack of passion. And each of these positions had its counterpart. Where Emerson condemns Austen for the meanness of what he sees as her exclusive focus on marriageability, Richard Simpson justified his praise by arguing that Austen's irony derived from her acute understanding of the distance between the ideal of romantic love and the social realities of alliances made under the pressures of economics and family expectations.[20]

RESPONSE TO THE *MEMOIR OF JANE AUSTEN* OF 1870

Prior to 1870, there was little formal commentary on Jane Austen's works other than the reviews that appeared in periodicals as the novels were published. Even so, Austen was not in danger of complete obscurity, thanks to the attention paid to her by Sir Walter Scott and other well-known literary personages. In 1870, Austen's nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh published a full-length memoir of his aunt that produced a spike of critical attention, as the *Memoir of Jane Austen* was widely reviewed.[21] Austen-Leigh, a clergyman, presented a quite staid portrait of his aunt, presenting her, in the words of one reviewer, as "easily contented, a small modicum of general approbation satisfied her, and what she coveted most was that of her own family. She was willing, like the mole, to make her ingenious structures in the dark."[22] Austen-Leigh's genteel portrait of tranquil, unruffled domesticity, similar to the 1818 portrait presented by her brother Henry Austen, provided the basis for subsequent biographies. And for the first time, Jane Austen the woman was someone about whom at least something was known.

Austen-Leigh was concerned about his family; when he first planned to write a biography of his aunt, several family members had objected to the invasion of her privacy (and, presumably, theirs). In 1865, Austen's last surviving brother, Frank, died, and the family objections seemed to wane. The *Memoir*'s publication sparked immediate public interest and renewed critical appreciation. Virginia Woolf cites one of the most striking assertions that the *Memoir* makes, quoting Austen-Leigh: "I doubt whether it would be possible to mention any other author of note whose personal obscurity was so complete."[23] Through her nephew, we receive a vision of Aunt Jane as a woman who seized on the spare moment to put down her sewing and take up her pen as a private amusement, and who otherwise quietly watched the world go by, paying attention to conversations and manners along the way, a spinster clergyman's daughter. In many ways, this version of Austen did not begin to be challenged until after World War II, and recent biographies have made it clear that, not surprisingly, Austen's life was not quite this uncomplicated.

In a review of Austen-Leigh's biography of his aunt, Richard Simpson presented for the first time the view that Austen has a distinctive ironic voice and moral philosophy. "She is neat, epigrammatic, and incisive, but

always a lady; there is no brandy and cayenne in her farrago," wrote Richard Simpson. Simpson's long article dealt with philosophical issues, yet it also ended with this sentence: "Might we not for like reasons borrow from Miss Austen's biographer the title which the affection of a nephew bestows upon her, and recognize her officially as 'dear aunt Jane'?"[24]

In one of the most important post-1870 appreciations of Austen, Henry James echoed Simpson's epithet. In a 1905 essay called "The Lesson of Balzac," James commented on the resuscitation of Austen by a publishing industry that had overlooked her for several decades following her death. Publishers and editors, James wrote, "have found their 'dear,' our dear, everybody's dear, Jane." He went on to write that Austen's art was "unconscious"; James's Austen has no premeditated artistry.

In 1883, George Routledge published the first inexpensive, popular edition of Austen's novels, with gaudy covers to attract browsers at bookshops. Then Routledge began to issue illustrated versions of the novels in the Sixpenny Novels series. In 1884, Lord Brabourne edited a two-volume edition of Austen's *Letters* and dedicated the publication to Queen Victoria.[25] Brabourne was Austen's great-nephew through his mother, Fanny Knight, and he inherited letters from Knight and from Cassandra Austen. There were ninety-four letters in his collection, and their publication followed soon after Fanny Knight's death.

By the late nineteenth century, publishers began to compete for popular editions with well-known illustrators who could render period costumes, and at the same time more ornate editions aimed at bibliophiles began to appear, sometimes in limited releases. These editions needed prefaces as well, so some of the important early critical and scholarly commentaries came in this form, by writers such as Austen Dobson, E. V. Lucas, R. Brimley Johnson, Joseph Jacobs, and George Saintsbury. Writers such as H. G. Wells, William Dean Howells, G. K. Chesterton, E. M. Forster, Thornton Wilder, and Willa Cather commented positively about Austen's contribution to literature and influence on the history of fiction. Mark Twain was an exception to the general accolades Austen's works received; he set himself as an enemy and admitted to feeling an "animal repugnance" for her writing. In a letter from 1898, Twain wrote: "Every time I read '*Pride and Prejudice*' I want to dig her up and hit her over the skull with her own shin-bone."[26] And Austen began to appear on university syllabi as well. By 1907, when Henry James rated Austen with Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Fielding, her literary stature was secure.

Reginald Ferrar wrote several influential essays in the second decade of the twentieth century. Notably, Ferrar referred to "the Divine Jane" in an article he published on the occasion of the centenary of her death in 1917, in which he seemed to be addressing Janeites. Ferrar wrote:

> When we speak of her as our greatest artist in English fiction we do not mean that she has the loudest mastery of any particular mood, the most clamant voice, the widest gamut of subjects; we mean that she stands supreme and alone among English writers in possession of the secret which so many French ones possess—that is, a most perfect mastery of her weapons, a most faultless and precise adjustment of means to end. She is, in English fiction, as Milton in English poetry, the one completely conscious and almost unerring artist.[27]

Ferrar here comes full circle from Henry James' castigation of Austen's "unconsciousness" in 1883.

MODERN AUSTEN CRITICISM

A landmark in Austen reception occurred when R. W. Chapman published a complete scholarly edition of the novels in 1923 with Oxford University Press.[28] In 1932, Chapman published an edition of Austen's collected letters, and in 1954 his edition of her *Minor Works,* including juvenile writings and fragments, appeared.[29] The Chapman editions continue to provide the basis for scholarship, as they serve as the definitive texts of the novels, correcting textual errors and restoring Austen's original volume divisions. At the same time, a

complete edition with scholarly apparatus gave Austen's work canonical status in the pantheon of English literature.

The first serious full-length study of Austen as a great writer is Mary Lascelles' 1939 *Jane Austen and Her Art.*[30] Lascelles pointed out the subtlety of the way Austen's social criticism emerged through the consciousness of her characters and examined the art in the apparent simplicity of Austen's prose style and narrative voice. At this point, Austen began to earn her current unshakeable reputation among scholars and popular readers alike as one of the greatest writers in the English language. One important commentator was the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who proposed that Jane Austen was interested in theoretical problems of human nature and human conduct, and that the consideration of moral dilemmas in her novels amounts to a secular ethics.[31]

D. W. Harding's 1940 article, “Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen,” represents another turning point in Austen studies in the twentieth century.[32] Harding's thesis remains controversial, and sparked debate. He proposed that what many critics call Austen's satire is actually her way of resolving a dilemma. On the one hand, there are distasteful and difficult people in the world, and on the other hand, one has need of these people for maintaining social decency and respect. Harding views Austen as portraying the “eruption of fear and hatred into the relationships of everyday social life.”[33] For Harding, Austen was a writer who found a measured method for expressing her values without risking censure.

Since World War II, the volume and range of Austen criticism has spanned every conceivable approach to literature. As Lionel Trilling put it, writings about Austen are almost as provocative as her work.[34] In fact, it might be possible to claim that the major strain of Austen criticism from the mid-twentieth century onward has been “political” in the broadest sense of that term. That is, critics have wanted to pin down Jane Austen's ideological worldview as either conservative, subversive, or radical. At the same time, much modern criticism continues to take an aesthetic or formalist approach, reading the novels as works of artistic imagination that deploy literary language to enshrine universal truths about human nature, and an underlying appreciation of Austen's artistry founds political readings of her work as well, of course. That the novels are masterpieces of their form is now an assured and established fact, accepted by critics from every approach and every camp of literary interpretation. As Austen criticism is second in quantity perhaps only to Shakespeare criticism, no brief sketch can cover the entire, ever-expanding territory of Austeniana.

Marvin Mudrick, one of the most influential of twentieth-century Austen critics, noted the crucial role of irony as a defining attitude in his 1952 study, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery.*[35] The particularities of Mudrick's readings have been disputed, but not his assertion that irony is central to Austen's art. A decade later, Frank W. Bradbrook took up the proposal made by the important British critic F. R. Leavis in 1948 that Jane Austen was heavily indebted to the novelists who came before her, and therefore she provides a fruitful test case for the nature of originality.[36] Bradbrook examined in Austen what T. S. Eliot has called the relationship of the “individual talent” to literary tradition.[37] Following Leavis and R. W. Chapman, Bradbrook studied Austen's readings in philosophy, journalism, and fiction to understand what had influenced her views about life and her artistic production. Ian Watt also considered Austen's inheritance of eighteenth-century novel conventions, and argued that her strength comes from a fusion of the external techniques of Fielding with the internal psychological understanding of Richardson.[38]

In 1962, a year after Bradbrook's work appeared, Howard S. Babb published a close study of Austen's language use.[39] Babb analyzed Austen's use of dialogue and the way she balances syntax, and he argued that her characters' use of language provides the key to their moral worth. Three years later, A. Walton Litz argued that Austen worked rhetorically and thematically to accommodate the eighteenth-century antitheses she had inherited, such as those between art and nature and reason and feeling (sense and sensibility).[40]

In *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels,* Alistair M. Duckworth proposed that "Jane Austen maintained an ideal conception of society, even as she represented, ironically and critically, her experience of morally corrupt and economically debased behavior." Duckworth reads *Mansfield Park* as the centerpiece of Austen's *oeuvre* in that it presents "the estate as an ordered physical structure" that also represents other ordered structures in society, such as inherited values, manners, social systems, and codes of morality. According to Duckworth, whose approach has been placed with that of Marilyn Butler and pigeonholed as politically conservative, the theme of the estate unifies Austen's major work and articulates "an authentic commitment to a social morality and a continuous awareness and exposure of attitudes destructive of social continuity."[41] For Austen, in this view, the individual's ultimate responsibility lies in improving traditional society.

Marilyn Butler's 1975 book, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* and her 1981 study, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1860-1830,* which contains an important section on Austen, also follow a conservative point of view in arguing that Austen championed the individual and was "the gentry's greatest artist" even while engaging in "the controversies of her class and generation."[42] For Butler, Austen was an anti-Jacobin who supported the established social order against the radical ideas of the French Revolution and Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism. Butler was among the first scholars to recognize the political ramifications of Austen's portraits of the domestic sphere of women, and she placed her novels in the context of the Jacobin debates of the 1790s. Butler saw Austen as a counterrevolutionary who believed that the individual should submit to the larger social and moral order and who distrusted Romantic notions of the self.

Later in the 1970s, the conservative view of Austen was challenged by the landmark publication of a book by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar called *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.*[43] Gilbert and Gubar inaugurated the notion that while Austen appeared to hold conservative views, her ironic stance actually disguised a subversive attitude toward the social world in which she lived and, especially, toward the place and treatment of women in that world. This view was given substantive and subtle support by Mary Poovey in 1984; Poovey understood Austen to be offering a critique of the ideologies of marriage and romantic love as regulators of social and sexual life for women.[44] In 1986, Jane Spencer took an intermediate position, placing Austen within a conservative didactic tradition of reformed heroines, but at the same time recognizing that Austen "wants a better status for women within [the established] hierarchy."[45]

Other important feminist work followed. Critics such as Margaret Kirkham, Nancy Armstrong, Claudia Johnson, Alison Sulloway, and Deborah Kaplan published important book-length studies of Austen from varying feminist perspectives.[46] Kirkham presented the view that Austen was a conscious feminist whose "viewpoint on the moral nature and status of women, female education, marriage, authority and the family, and the representation of women in literature is strikingly similar to that shown by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*"[47] Armstrong reads Austen through the lens of historical materialism, analyzing Austen's depiction of the bourgeois marriage market that prescribes heterosexual monogamy and endorses a sexual contract that disempowers women. Johnson argued that Austen belongs to "a largely feminine tradition of political novels" and that it is crucial to consider her sex in understanding her work. In Johnson's view, Austen uses irony in a political way.

Sulloway reads Austen primarily as a satirist, but one who comes to her satirical voice as an outsider and who uses it to channel her anger at women's circumscribed roles. Sulloway wrote that Austen was "a provincial Christian gentlewoman whose contempt for the overt and hidden ethical disjunctions at the heart of all satire politely but obsessively pierces destructive myths and assumptions about her own sex."[48] Kaplan saw Austen as part of a women's culture that needs to be evaluated in its historical context and social circumstances. Although she falls short of being someone we can claim for twenty-first century feminist goals, Austen still represents for Kaplan a figure who may have spoken for the patriarchal values of her gentry class but who

also understood the stakes involved in the domestic ideology that she wrote about.

A recent strain of Austen criticism has controversially examined her emphasis on close relationships between women.[49] The suggestion that there might be something "queer" in this emphasis created an outcry of scandal, explained by Claudia Johnson as deriving from "the enormity of Austen's status as a cultural institution" and her "centrality to the canon of British literature.[50] In fact, gender as a factor has simply become a given in recent scholarly and critical work on Austen.[51]

Feminist scholars have been, with Marxists and other historical materialists and cultural critics, among the first to read Austen ideologically, but certainly not the only critics or the last ones to do so. In a comprehensive 1986 study of Austen's work, Tony Tanner examined what he called Austen's "habitual cool irony" and her "wit, ironic reflectiveness and moral intelligence" to argue that she was better informed about and more aware of the main historical events through which she lived than she has been given credit for, and that this awareness comes through in her fiction. "That Jane Austen held many Tory sympathies need hardly be questioned," Tanner wrote, "but it does not follow that her work is uncritical of her society in many profound ways." Indeed, he concluded, "by the end of her work social systems themselves are called in question and found increasingly inadequate to satisfy her heroines' needs."[52]

New historicists and followers of Michel Foucault's approach to cultural studies have also taken up the banner of ideology, but have subordinated gender to class and economics in their readings of Austen's novels. The Marxist scholar Raymond Williams, who insisted that we not idealize rural poverty and country nostalgia, has influenced some interpretations of this sort. Williams wrote this intriguing passage comparing Austen to the social thinker William Cobbett, who lived during the same period and in the same part of England:

> What [Cobbett] names, riding past on the road, are classes. Jane Austen, from inside the house, can never see that, for all the intricacy of her social description. All her discrimination is, understandably, internal and exclusive.[53]

Cultural historian James Thompson has written that Austen portrays the conflicts between landed property interests and the new values of commodity exchange.[54] Mary Evans published a book with the title *Jane Austen and the State* in 1987 and argued that Austen deplored economic individualism and skewered the world of monetary self-interest that her novels depict.[55]

A 1999 book about Austen's politics contends that Austen has achieved such a mythic stature because she represents something fundamental about English patriotism. Jane Austen, Edward Neill writes, is "one of the great formative and founding influences on how we think about 'England' and 'Englishness'" and has become "something of a Tribal Totem, a prime exhibit in a version of Our Heritage."[56] This argument quarrels with Marilyn Butler about Austen's alleged Burkean Toryism. Julian North puts forth a similar perspective:

> Austen has become something of a conservative icon in popular culture: a canonical author whose life and work signify English national heritage and all that implies of the past as an idyll of village life in a pre-industrial society, of traditional class and gender hierarchies, sexual propriety, and Christian values.[57]

The contemporary British novelist Fay Weldon, author of a novel entitled *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen,*[58] has also weighed in on Austen as an icon of English patriotism and culture in a discussion of recent movie adaptations.

> When we say 'Jane Austen' everyone knows what we're talking about. Austen means class, literature, virginity and family viewing.… The clip-clop of horses over cobbles suggests the past, and the past was when jobs were safe, and bouquets flowed, not brickbats.… or one

> could say, with a little more charity, but not much: 'Why we love Jane Austen because she's Heritage'.[59]

Fay Weldon on Jane Austen

Janet Sorenson writes in a similar vein:

> Interested in the experiences of a gentry located in the lush green Home Counties and offering only fleeting impressions of spaces beyond fashionable watering holes and country residences, let alone the country of England, Jane Austen's novels have come to signal to generations of critics and readers the Englishness of England.[60]

The focus on the "Englishness" of Austen's world arguably comes from the writer herself. After all, in *Emma,* she has the narrator refer to "English verdure, English culture, English comfort."[61]

The controversy over the offstage events beyond England in *Mansfield Park*—the Bertram sugar plantation holdings in Antigua that take Sir Thomas and Tom Bertram away from the central plot for so many pages—focuses on the flip side of Austen's Englishness. The historical and Marxist strands of Austen criticism have put economics on center stage. In particular, critics have raised the question of the effects of British colonial imperialism on Austen's perspective. Palestinian activist and literary critic Edward Said famously put forward this analysis in a reading of *Mansfield Park,* the novel around which the colonial allegations swirl. (*Mansfield Park* has taken its place with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as a core text of English colonialism.) According to Said, Austen's moral philosophy cannot be separated from the economic substrate which shores it up materially: "[R]ight up to the last sentence," Said wrote, "Austen affirms and repeats the geographical process of expansion involving trade, production, and consumption that predates, underlies, and guarantees the morality."[62]

This global, postcolonial approach to Austen studies characterizes a major strain of recent Austen criticism influenced by the work of Said and cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This criticism claims, as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan phrases it, that "[r]eading Austen postcolonially is not one critical 'approach' among others, uniquely propagated by 'postcolonial' critics, but rather, an inescapable historical imperative in our times."[63] This argument looks at the particular geographical world of European expansion and commerce and sees Austen's country village worlds as representations of a certain type of Western power in a world dominated by imperialism. Raymond Williams inaugurated this approach when he situated Austen with the journalist William Cobbett and the naturalist Gilbert White as residents of Hampshire and Surrey and proposed that Austen provides us with a "social history of the landed families."[64]

It is also plausible to say that Austen portrays only a carefully selected subset of English people, those in the "middling" classes. Servants and the poor do not find their portraits in Austen's fiction, even though this was the period in which class distinctions began to blur. Austen's gentry class, from the struggling to the aristocratic, seems to represent the heart of a broader national experience. "Austen's focus on the domestic does not make her novels apolitical," writes critic Barbara K. Seeber, "for it is precisely the private matters that were the site of the ideological battles of the times."[65]

It is difficult to find any consensus in political readings of Austen. If Marilyn Butler sees her as a crusty antifeminist and staunch conservative who disliked romantic individualism, Alison Sulloway allows her to be "as insurrectionary as Mary Wollstonecraft" and Mary Poovey and Claudia Johnson try to find a middle ground between the two in which Austen can be viewed as a careful progressive. It may even be that this plethora of approaches and views adds to Austen's immense popularity by letting readers choose for themselves in what vein to read her work.[66]

So the question posed by critics who give pride of place to economics and politics is this: Did Austen champion the old order of gentry tradition, or did she recognize the social instabilities of the new order and the precarious place of women during this period of turbulent socioeconomic change? Was she a nationalistic Church of England Tory, or a progressive egalitarian feminist? One argument that all sides might agree upon is that for Austen, the personal is never isolated from the social. We become who we are in relationship and connectedness to others and to a larger social fabric that defines our choices and our options.

Notes

1. R. W. Chapman reprints the "Biographical Notice" in Volume V of *The Novels of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 6, 8.
2. Letter 146 to James Edward Austen, 16-17 December 1816. *Jane Austen's Letters,* New Edition, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 323.
3. "Biographical Notice," p. 8.
4. For general accounts of the history of Austen readership and criticism, see the introduction to *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) and Southam's "Janeites and Anti-Janeites," in *The Jane Austen Companion,* ed. J. David Grey, A. Walton Litz, and Brian Southam (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 237-43; Juliet McMaster, "Jane Austen as a Cultural Phenomenon," in her *Jane Austen the Novelist: Essays Past and Present* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 3-17; Claudia Johnson, "The Divine Jane Austen: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies," *boundary* 2.23 (1996) and reprinted in *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees,* ed. Deirdre Lynch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 25-44; Laura Mooneyham White, "Introduction," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen,* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), pp. 1-12; Barbara K. Seeber, "Introduction: 'Directly opposite notions': Critical Disputes," in *General Consent in Jane Austen: A Study of Dialogism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), pp. 3-17.
5. R. W. Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 161.
6. Jane Austen, *Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others,* two vols., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932). *Volume the First,* ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), *Volume the Second,* ed. B. C. Southam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), and *Volume the Third,* ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).
7. *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.106 (Scott) and p. 126 (C. Brontë); Henry James, "The Lessons of Balzac," in *The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel,* ed. Leon Edel (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1957), pp. 61-63. James' essay first appeared in 1905.
8. Cited in "Introduction," *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 7. B. C. Southam discusses Twain's antipathy in the "Introduction" to his *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 74-75. The 1898 letter sentiment is cited in ibid., p. 232.
9. Rudyard Kipling, "The Janeites," in *Debits and Credits,* ed. Sandra Kemp (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 99-128. Many scholars have noted that Austen novels were often prescribed to World War I veterans who suffered from shell shock.
10. Ibid., pp. 132; 146.
11. Katherine Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* ed. J. Middleton Murray (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 302.
12. Cited by Southam in the "Introduction" to *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam, Vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 3.
13. Unsigned review by Thomas Henry Lister in the *Edinburgh Review* (July 1830), in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam, Vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 113-114.
14. Extract from Longfellow's journal entry of March 23, 1839. Ibid., p. 117.
15. From an article on Frances Burney in the *Edinburgh Review* (January 1843). Ibid., p. 122.

16. From an unsigned review in *Fraser's Magazine* (December 1847). Ibid., p. 124.
17. Ibid., p. 126.
18. Cited by John Lauber, *Jane Austen* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), p. 123.
19. Cited by B. C. Southam in the "Introduction" to *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam, Vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 28.
20. From an unsigned review of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* in *North British Review* (April 1870). Ibid., pp. 241-265.
21. *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1st ed., London, 1870; 2nd ed., enlarged, London, 1871); ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926). A second expanded edition appeared in 1871, accompanied by the most important of the unpublished manuscripts: *Lady Susan, The Watsons,* and parts of *Sanditon* as well as the cancelled chapter from *Persuasion* and some letters.
22. From an unsigned article in *St. Paul's Magazine* (March 1870); R. W. Chapman supposed that novelist Anthony Trollope might have been the reviewer, but B. C. Southam disagrees. *The Critical Heritage,* op. cit., p. 237.
23. From a 1923 review of the five-volume Oxford edition of *Jane Austen's Works,* reprinted in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 182.
24. Ibid., p. 265.
25. Edward Brabourne, 1st Lord, *Letters of Jane Austen,* 2 vols. (London, 1884).
26. B. C. Southam discusses Twain's antipathy in the "Introduction" to his *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987): 74-75. The 1898 letter sentiment is cited in ibid., p. 232.
27. From "Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817," *Quarterly Review* (July 1917). Rpt. in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. B. C. Southam, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987): 250.
28. The first edition of R. W. Chapman's *The Novels of Jane Austen* was published by Oxford University Press in 1923 in five volumes. Volume I contains *Sense and Sensibility,* Volume II *Pride and Prejudice,* Volume III *Mansfield Park,* Volume IV *Emma,* and Volume V *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion.* A second edition appeared in 1926 and a third in 1933. The set was subsequently reprinted in 1940, 1944, 1946, 1949, 1952, 1959, 1965 (with revisions), 1967, 1971, 1973, 1976, and 1982. In 1954, Chapman published Volume VI, *Minor Works,* which contains the Juvenilia, *Lady Susan,* the unfinished novels *The Watsons* and *Sanditon,* the *Plan of a Novel,* Austen's gathering of opinions of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma,* and Austen's extant poetry and prayers.
29. *The Works of Jane Austen,* Volume VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).
30. Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1963).
31. Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen,* ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968): 118.
32. *Scrutiny* 8 (March 1940): 346-362. Reprinted in *Critics on Jane Austen,* ed. Judith O'Neill (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1970): 42-49.
33. Ibid., 45.
34. Lionel Trilling, "*Emma* and the Legend of Jane Austen," written as the "Introduction" to the Riverside edition of *Emma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957) and reprinted in Trilling's *Beyond Culture* (New York: Viking, 1968).
35. Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).
36. F. R. Leavis made his claim in *The Great Tradition* (London, 1948), 5.
37. Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). T. S. Eliot's influential essay is called "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and was published in a collection of his essays, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920).
38. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977): 338. For a more recent discussion of Austen's literary forbears and their influence on her work, see Jo Alyson Parker, *The Author's Inheritance: Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and the Establishment of the Novel* (Dekalb: Northern

Illinois University Press, 1998). Parker connects Austen's focus on the inheritance plot with her effort to claim a literary inheritance, and thus literary authority, for herself.

39. Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962).
40. A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965).
41. Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971). Duckworth's book was reissued in 1994 in paper with a new introduction that illuminatingly reviews the criticism subsequent to its first publication. Quotations come from the 1994 edition: xv, xxix.
42. Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1860-1830* (1981; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 99, 98. Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
43. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
44. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
45. Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986): 169. Both Spencer and Dale Spender, in *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora Press, 1986), place Austen squarely within a tradition of women's writing.
46. Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Alison G. Sulloway, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
47. Kirkham, op.cit., xi.
48. Sulloway, op.cit., xvii.
49. See the chapter on *Sense and Sensibility* in George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) and the chapter on *Emma* in Lisa L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
50. The controversy over Austen and lesbianism erupted when a review by Terry Castle of Deirdre Le Faye's edition of Austen's letters was headlined by editors with the title “Sister-Sister” in the *London Review of Books,* 3 August 1995, 3-6. Castle mildly and judiciously raised the issue of a homosocial and homoerotic dimension in Austen's depictions of female friendship, especially that between sisters such as Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility.* A great brouhaha ensued, and the letters, with Castle's response, were published in the next issue, on 24 August 1995. Even *Time* magazine reported on what they called this “kerfuffle” (4 September 1995). Claudia L. Johnson offers a useful discussion of this incident, which really amounted to a scandal, in “The Divine Miss Jane: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies,” in *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees,* ed. Deirdre Lynch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 25-44; the quotation appears on p. 27.
51. A useful collection of feminist essays on Austen's work reflects the legacy of these early feminist readings: *Jane Austen and Discourse of Feminism,* ed. Devoney Looser (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
52. Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986): 1, 9, 5, 11.
53. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973): 117.
54. James Thompson, *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981). See also Beth Fowkes Tobin, who understands Austen to respond in her works to her contradictory circumstances by depicting property ownership as a virtue

and commerce as a sign of corruption in "The Moral and Political Economy of Property in Jane Austen's *Emma,*" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2 (April 1990): 229-54; Terry Lovell, "Jane Austen and Gentry Society," in *Literature, Society, and the Sociology of Literature,* ed. Francis Barker et al. (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1977); and Judith Weissman's chapter on Austen in *Half Savage and Hardy and Free: Women and Rural Radicalism in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

55. Mary Evans, *Jane Austen and the State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987).
56. Edward Neill, *The Politics of Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1999): ix, 1.
57. Julian North, "Conservative Austen, Radical Austen: *Sense and Sensibility* from Text to Screen," in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text,* ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelchan (London: Routledge, 1999): 38.
58. Fay Weldon, *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* (c. 1984; New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1985). This book concerns the nature of fictional worlds, with Jane Austen serving as a touchstone for the discussion.
59. Fay Weldon, "Star of Stage and Screen," *Guardian* 2, 12 April 1995, 2.
60. Janet Sorenson, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 197.
61. *The Novels of Jane Austen,* Vol. IV, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 360.
62. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993): 92-93. Moira Ferguson offers another postcolonial analysis of *Mansfield Park* in "*Mansfield Park*: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen,* ed. Laura Mooneyham White (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998): 103-20. White's "Introduction" to this volume usefully reviews critical approaches to Jane Austen's work (1-12). Many of the essays in *The Postcolonial Jane Austen,* ed. You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (London: Routledge, 2000) offer readings of *Mansfield Park* from a global economic perspective.
63. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Austen in the World: Postcolonial Mappings," in *The Postcolonial Jane Austen,* ed. Rajan and Park, op. cit., 3.
64. Williams, *The Country and the City,* op. cit., 113.
65. Barbara K. Seeber, *General Consent in Jane Austen: A Study of Dialogism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000): 5.
66. This appealing view is presented by Christopher Clausen in "Jane Austen Changes Her Mind," *The American Scholar* 68.2 (Spring 1999): 90. Clausen goes on to argue that *Persuasion* represents a distinct shift away from the claustrophobic world of the landed gentry and offers a new and riskier approach to the world.

Additional coverage of Austen's life and career is contained in the following sources published by the Gale Group: *Authors and Artists for Young Adults,* Vol. 19; *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography, 1789-1832*; *DISCovering Authors*; *Dictionary of Literary Biograhpy,* Vol. 116; *DISCovering Authors: British*; *DISCovering Authors: Canadian*; *DISCovering Authors: Modules, Most-studied Authors and Novelists*; *DISCovering Authors 3.0*; *Novels for Students,* Vol. 1; *World Literature Criticism.*

Analysis

Analysis

Jane Austen's novels present English country gentry of the early nineteenth century in such tartly intelligent and witty terms that her subjects are both particular to their time and place and universally human. She has never lacked for readers since *Sense and Sensibility*first appeared in 1811. Born in 1775, Austen died in 1817, having completed six novels, of which four had been published at the time of her death.

The events of her life, as measured against the turbulent backdrop of history, were slight. The American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars all raged as she lived, as one of eight children in a country parsonage, and as she circulated in her familiar social circle. Never married, she became "dear Aunt Jane" to a lively brood of nieces and nephews. After her death, her family cherished her memory as that of a veritable saint, a devoted daughter and sister who was witty and wise, unfailingly kind, and almost too good to be true.

David Nokes, in *Jane Austen: A Life*, attempts to prove that "too good to be true" is not good enough for Jane Austen. Instead of a bland, angelic maiden aunt, she was a woman of wit and temper, often sharp-tongued, and at times profoundly discontented with her lot in life. Nokes uses a broad perspective to explore the family in which Austen lived and the wider world to which they belonged. The book begins with a vignette centered on a distant relative by marriage, one Tysoe Saul Hancock, a surgeon general in English colonial India. His wife, the beautiful Philadelphia Austen, was the sister of George Austen, Jane's father.

The story of the Hancocks carries the tang of scandal. Philadelphia's only daughter was rumored to be the child of Warren Hastings, later governor of India, rather than Hancock's own. The luxuries that Hancock provided for his wife in England, from his post in the East, were an integral element in her place in the Austen family. Letters exchanged by the Hancocks are among Nokes's primary sources for the early years of George Austen's marriage to Cassandra Leigh. Hancock even wrote from India to deplore the reckless rate at which the Austen family grew.

As deeply rooted as the Austens were in English country life, they also were connected with the exotic and corrupt world of the English colonial system. Two of Jane's brothers served as naval officers in the Napoleonic Wars, thus heightening the family involvement in the greater world. A third brother would marry Philadelphia's daughter Eliza, after the execution of her first husband, a French count, during the French Revolution.

Jane Austen's clergyman father, George, was never rich and was imprudent enough to sire a large family. His wife, Cassandra Leigh, was a clever woman, given to expressing herself in verse. She bore six sons and two daughters. Of her sons, one would be adopted by wealthy relatives and live out his days in financial ease. Another would follow his father as a clergyman. Two became naval heroes. The fifth, Eliza Hancock's husband, was a banker. The sixth son was an idiot, one of the family secrets that Nokes explores. Cassandra Leigh's family had already faced the sad circumstance of a mentally handicapped son, her brother, who had been permanently boarded with a farmer near the family home. When her own son proved to be similarly impaired, he was placed along with his uncle. Nokes maintains that this hidden brother provided Jane Austen with at least one character, the dead Dick Musgrove of*Persuasion* (1818), an object of pity and interest only to his overly sentimental, often ridiculous mother. The perceivable impact on Austen's life and family relationships of her own brother's condition seems minimal.

The other, ambitious Austen sons were able to pursue various careers, but more limited avenues were open to

the Austen daughters, Cassandra (the older) and Jane. Women of their day and class could plan on dependency of one kind or another, as a wife and mother, as a governess in a wealthy family, as a teacher in a school, or as a poor relation in the home of relatives. Cassandra was devoutly religious and serious in character. After the death of her fiancé, a young chaplain in the Royal Navy, she seemed content in her role of family caregiver.

Jane Austen, devotedly fond of her older sister, was less humble in her aspirations. She hated being poor; she valued money and the independence it could buy, as well as the frivolous luxuries and pleasures Cassandra scorned. It was a perpetual frustration to Jane to never have much disposable income, and she made many bitter jokes about her penniless condition. She envied the estate to which her brother Edward, adopted by wealthy relatives, fell heir. She rejected the possibility of teaching, as a governess or in a school, but also could not accept loveless marriage and its "conjugal duties" as the price of financial security. As pretty, lively, and agreeable as she was when young, she could look forward with optimism to a suitable match with a suitable man.

Nokes tells several stories of Jane's abortive romances: a charming young man sent away by his wealthy aunt before a serious misalliance with the poor parson's daughter could occur, an unacceptable proposal from the awkward brother of close friends, and a mysterious seaside encounter with a possible suitor so enchanting that Cassandra was still speaking of him to her nieces years after Jane's death. Although Cassandra Austen destroyed the letters from her sister that might have told these stories in definitive form, they hardly need to be fleshed out. After all, they could easily be the outlines of subplots in Austen's own novels and, indeed, may have become just that.

A large part of Nokes's narration is devoted to the gradual process of self-discovery through which Jane Austen came to realize that her particular qualities of intelligence and independence, her impatience with stupidity and her acute sense of the ridiculous in social life, would find no match among the men of her acquaintance. With no fortune, she could not compete in the marriage market. Simultaneously, she was finding her way into her life as that odd and unusual being, a novelist.

From early childhood, Jane Austen indulged the family love and talent for words by writing stories based on the popular novels of the day. Her writing, as Nokes shows, was not a thing apart from her family life, but an integral part of it. She shared her work with her family and friends, who often returned the favor. Her mother's verses accompanied all family occasions. Her brothers also were versifiers, and for a short time, two of them published a literary magazine. As time passed, her juvenile literary pastiches and awkward imitations of Gothic thrillers gave way to stories of young women in situations similar to those to be seen in the Austens' own milieu. Her family encouraged her to think of publishing her work, and in 1803, she sent the manuscript of a novel, *Susan*, to a London publisher, who accepted it but never took the trouble of actually bringing it out. This text, retitled *Northanger Abbey*, was not published until after Austen's death.

Although the suspension of *Susan* in literary limbo discouraged further attempts at publication for some years, Austen continued to work on her novels and to share them with her family, reading aloud to her sister Cassandra and their mother and discussing different aspects of plot and character. The success of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was a delightful surprise to her. The small income that her novels provided seems to have brought her great satisfaction. If her first novels were written as amusement, her later ones were meant for publication, and with critics in mind. Readers of *Mansfield Park* (1814) will be particularly interested in the story of its genesis as a deliberately sober and moral tale, meant to abandon the light and witty tone of *Pride and Prejudice* so as to please the sober Cassandra. What a disappointment to find that critics and public alike preferred headstrong but witty Elizabeth Bennet to shy, devout Fanny Price! *Emma* appeared in 1815, once again with a lively, witty central character, lovable in spite of her faults. *Persuasion*, which pays pointed compliments to the Royal Navy, in which two Austen brothers made their career, was completed before Austen's death in mid-1817, although it was not published until later in the

year, along with the resurrected *Northanger Abbey*.

One of the charms of *Jane Austen: A Life* is the tone of Nokes's narrative. The even tenor of long periods of Austen's life precludes surprising plot developments and exotic settings. Instead, the reader will find an orderly, chronological development of the central characters of that life: parents, brothers and sister, closest friends. The houses and villages are described and the everyday conditions evoked. The development of each of the novels within these contexts is suggested, but nowhere does Nokes lean too weightily on these connections.

The biography is accompanied by some of the armature of critical apparatus: There are basic notes for each citation and a somewhat sketchy index. There is no bibliography, and references to secondary works are relatively few. Nokes does not advance particular hard-and-fast theses, being much more prone to suggest than to argue. The portrait he produces of Jane Austen and her family is built gradually, by many small touches of color. Much of the text of *Jane Austen: A Life* is actually citation from Austen's letters and novels, as well as the reminiscences of family members and friends. Nokes has consulted unpublished letter archives, such as the Hancock correspondence, which add immeasurably to his work.

The Austens are an articulate circle, and many of the personalities and stories evoked here are fascinating in their own right. Near prim Cassandra and Jane Austen we find the exotic Hancock family and their dubious connection, Warren Hastings, who was accused of official corruption as governor of India. One wealthy aunt, Mrs. Leigh Perrot, was twice accused of shoplifting—perhaps as a blackmail scam, perhaps rightly—and ended her life in seclusion. Austen's willful and charming niece Anna followed her Aunt Jane's example of novel writing, but she married, bore several children in close succession, and eventually burned her manuscripts. The Austen family members are full of interest, and the reader will follow their developing characters and careers, their marriages and children, as if they too were walking through the pages of one of Jane Austen's novels. A few family portraits are included among the illustrations.

The family scandals that Nokes unearths simply add more depth to his portrait. They are not intended to discredit Austen but to demonstrate that she was a complex person who could question her destiny of poverty and dependence. By the exercise of her intelligence and wit, and a pen dipped in the wry knowledge of human failings, Jane Austen earned her central place in her family and made herself a towering figure in English literature. The reader will come away from this long book wishing it longer, and will return to it as a constructive companion to Austen's novels.

Sources for Further Study

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Analysis: Other Literary Forms

Jane Austen is best known for her six novels about middle-class life in the nineteenth century. Four were published during her lifetime: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1815). *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818) were published posthumously.

Analysis: Achievements

Although she was not widely recognized in her own day, Jane Austen did enjoy the appreciation of discriminating readers whose contemporary esteem has since become the critical consensus. The scrupulous accuracy, complex irony, and serious moral speculation of Austen's novels of middle-class life provided the groundwork for the "great tradition" of the nineteenth century novel. Austen's short fiction, written before she turned seventeen, is experimental work in which the beginning writer mocks the absurdities and limitation of the sentimental novel popular at the end of the eighteenth century and tentatively explores the possibilities of themes and literary techniques that she will later develop in her mature work. By slightly exaggerating the sensibility of a heroine, the refinement of a hero, the effusiveness of their conversations, and the unlikelihood of their adventures, Austen makes plain the absurdity of the worldview purveyed by sentimental novels.

Analysis: Other literary forms

In addition to writing novels, Jane Austen (AWS-tuhn) was the author of various short juvenile pieces, most of them literary burlesques mocking theconventions of the eighteenth century novel. Her other works are *Lady Susan*, a story told in letters (written c. 1805); *The Watsons*, a fragment of a novel written about the same time; and *Sanditon*, another fragmentary novel begun in 1817. All these pieces appear in *Minor Works* (volume 6 of the *Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen*, 1954), edited by R. W. Chapman. Jane Austen's surviving letters have also been edited and published by Chapman.

Analysis: Achievements

Jane Austen, who published her novels anonymously, was not a writer famous in her time, nor did she wish to be. From the first, however, her novels, written in and largely for her own family circle, gained the notice and esteem of a wider audience. Among her early admirers were the Prince Regent and the foremost novelist of the day, Sir Walter Scott, who deprecated his own aptitude for the "big Bow-Wow" and praised Austen as possessing a "talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with." Since the days of Scott's somewhat prescient praise, her reputation has steadily grown. The critical consensus now places Jane Austen in what F. R. Leavis has termed the "Great Tradition" of the English novel. Her talent was the first to forge, from the eighteenth century novel of external incident and internal sensibility, an art form that fully and faithfully presented a vision of real life in a specific segment of the real world. Austen's particular excellences—the elegant economy of her prose, the strength and delicacy of her judgment and moral discrimination, the subtlety of her wit, the imaginative vividness of her character drawing—have been emulated but not surpassed by subsequent writers.

Analysis: Discussion Topics

Explain how Jane Austen, working in a narrow social range and with limited experience of the world, could succeed so brilliantly as a novelist.

Distinguish the main characteristics of her novels that differentiate them from the eighteenth century novels that made up a great deal of her literary background.

How does Austen help her readers to become better readers?

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor develops sympathy for the incorrigible Willoughby. Determine whether or not that is a flaw in Elinor's personality.

Pride and Prejudice begins with Mr. Bennet's problem of finding suitors for his five daughters. Explain Austen's avoidance of making his problem the theme of the novel.

How does one explain the popularity of Austen's novels with filmmakers?