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JANE AUSTEN'S EARLY NOVELS: THE EDUCATING
OF JUDGMENT AND SYMPATHY.

The City University of New York, Ph.D., 1975
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**JANE AUSTEN'S EARLY NOVELS:
THE EDUCATING OF JUDGMENT AND SYMPATHY**

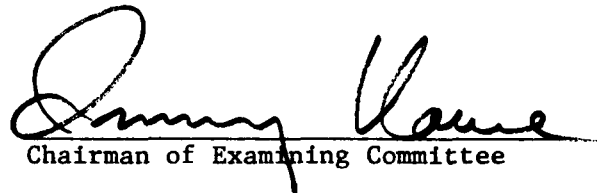
by
JAN STOCKTON FERGUS

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York**

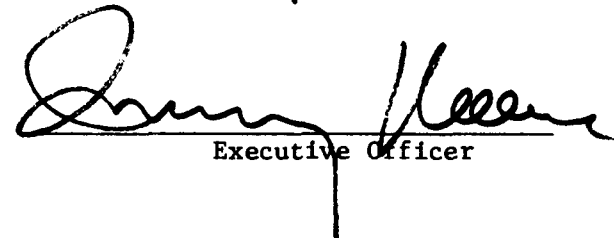
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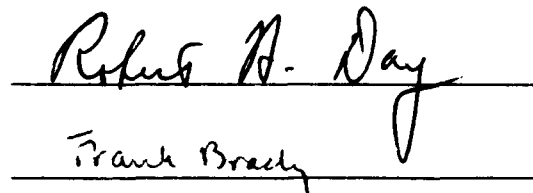
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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My debts to friends are also immense. All deserve more thanks than I can express for their patience, support, understanding, and offers of help during these trying years, but I must mention those whose efforts have been especially heroic: Ginger Brearley, David Hathwell, Viliu Menning, and Ruth Portner. While they are not to be held responsible for it, I can safely say that without them, this dissertation would never have been finished. Their conversation helped me to develop my ideas, and their company and support enabled me to write them. Far more than half of the following pages were written in the company of Ruth, Viliu, or David, for

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Finally, I content myself with the reflection that no one at all can do justice to Jane Austen's own dazzling merit. That granted, I should add that I have very grateful feelings toward her for being so great a writer that years of labor have only increased, not lessened, my pleasure in her work and my admiration for it. To say this is a greater tribute to Austen's powers than anyone who has not written a dissertation can imagine.

By permission of the Oxford University Press, all citations of Jane Austen's fiction are based on the edition

of R. W. Chapman (5 Vols., 3rd ed., Oxford, 1933, and Vol. VI, Minor Works, Oxford, 1954). Page references are inserted directly into the text. Where any ambiguity is possible, the following abbreviations apply:

<u>NA</u>	<u>Northanger Abbey</u>
<u>SS</u>	<u>Sense and Sensibility</u>
<u>PP</u>	<u>Pride and Prejudice</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Mansfield Park</u>
<u>E</u>	<u>Emma</u>
<u>P</u>	<u>Persuasion</u>
<u>MW</u>	<u>Minor Works</u>

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INTRODUCTION

In Jane Austen's early novels, Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice, a great artist can be observed in the process of extending her range and mastering her craft. Each of these novels draws upon and betters the achievement of the previous one, in an artistic development that is highly complex yet remarkably continuous and coherent, lacking the uncertainties which usually accompany experiment and growth. All three early novels succeed in their aims, if rightly understood, and these aims are relatively accessible, for Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice display their themes openly and clearly. This openness separates them from the later novels, Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion, whose greater density can sometimes obscure or complicate their aims and methods. The early novels are also "literary," very explicitly borrowing from, measuring themselves against, or transforming eighteenth-century models, therefore inviting and rewarding comparison with these models. The later novels largely abandon literary jokes and referents, and to compare them with eighteenth-century novels will do little to yield a clearer view of their techniques and concerns. The only comparison which can illuminate the last three novels, in fact, is comparison with each other and with the first three. The early novels have,

then, a special significance for students of Austen and particularly for attempts to define her achievement. Nonetheless, Virginia Woolf's well-known judgment that "of all great writers she is the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness"¹ holds for any critical approach. However frequently studied, Jane Austen's techniques, her concerns, and her power to move her readers elude definition. Yet the openness and allusiveness which make the early novels more accessible than the later ones permit also a closer approach to her intentions, methods, and development than can be obtained by any other means.

To speak of Jane Austen's technique of allusiveness or her development as an artist is certainly not new, and in fact any survey of Austen criticism convincingly shows the difficulty of saying anything about her art which has not already been said. Her techniques and her artistic development are endlessly discussed by twentieth-century critics,² and her intentions by all. Nineteenth-century critics succeeded in articulating the possible views of Austen's intentions: for them, she is variously a realist, humorist, didact, ironist, moralist, and social critic.³ These categories either overlap or, as modern critics note, partially contradict each other. The social critic may be at odds with the realist: those contemporaries of Austen who praised her faithful portraits of everyday social life apparently did not notice her astringent criticisms of the society she

portrays.⁴ The contradiction is resolved, usually, by pointing to Austen's irony, which permits her to remain uncommitted or to have it both ways, to "cherish and abominate" the world she lives in, which is also the world she describes in her novels.⁵ But this resolution entails further difficulties. If Austen intends to be an ironist, as detached and uncommitted as some critics assert, other critics ask how she can be a moralist as well, committed to exploring the relations of reason and feeling, or manners and morals, in order to affirm those values all readers detect in her work: good principle, good judgment, and good feeling.⁶ Similarly, if she is a humorist and an entertainer, delighting in folly and absurdity, how can she be didactic, intending to instruct and improve her readers?⁷

These contradictions may be more apparent than real. Austen's moral seriousness and her characteristic irony have been easily reconciled by those critics prepared to accept an ironic attitude as valuable in itself. Accordingly, an excessive and even dogmatic appreciation of irony, sometimes ascribed to the influence of New Criticism, is detectable in studies of Austen through the nineteen-forties and early fifties.⁸ Subsequent criticism has found this attitude unhistorical and corrects it by emphasizing the positive moral values in Jane Austen's work as these are revealed through her language or through her debts to eighteenth-century ideas and fiction. Most of the volumes of criticism

published during the last fifteen years adopt one or both of these approaches, for they cannot be wholly separated, any more than they can be wholly new.⁹ Studies of Austen's moral vocabulary often cite eighteenth-century usage to shed light on terms like sense, sensibility, taste, elegance, and so on. Nevertheless, linguistic and historical criticism differ from each other in approaching Austen's meaning. Linguistic studies emphasize that Jane Austen's style is more expressive than is usually thought. Her vocabulary is capable of registering the finest discriminations among moral and social values, while her narrative techniques allow full expression to the emotions and thoughts of her characters.¹⁰ For linguistic critics, Austen's language thus articulates and confirms her moral seriousness.¹¹ Historical studies point out precedents for Austen's themes and treatment in eighteenth-century fiction and, more recently, in eighteenth-century moral philosophy.¹² Mary Lascelles' Jane Austen and her Art (1939), which remains the finest single work on Austen, contains the first sustained treatment of the relations between Austen and her predecessors in the novel.¹³ Subsequent critics have extended Lascelles' study of Austen's responses and indebtedness to eighteenth-century fiction and have amplified Lascelles' view of Austen's artistic development, as if intending to illustrate and justify F. R. Leavis's well-known dictum that

Jane Austen, in her indebtedness to others, provides an exceptionally illuminating study of the nature of originality,

and she exemplifies beautifully the relations of 'the individual talent' to tradition.¹⁴

Nevertheless, most critics after Lascelles fail to discover relationships between Jane Austen's novels and her predecessors' which are interesting or significant enough to clarify Austen's achievements, probably because few modern critics can share Austen's delight in eighteenth-century popular fiction.¹⁵ The distance between the frequent crudeness of form, style, and substance in the second-rate novels Jane Austen is known to have read (and even admired) and the mastery displayed in her own fiction is so immense that critics hardly know what to make of any parallels they do find. As a rule, either they consider the parallels sufficiently interesting in themselves or they ignore them, taking refuge in wonder at Austen's ability to transcend the limitations of late eighteenth-century popular fiction.

Whatever their limits, linguistic and historical approaches to Jane Austen share one great advantage: they do not encourage assertions of Austen's limitations. Instead, they register even more fully than earlier criticism the depth of Austen's moral seriousness. Formerly, to assert Austen's limitations had been so conventional among her critics that in 1963, Ian Watt could say, in his fine introduction to a collection of essays, that "the enduring problem of Jane Austen criticism" is the problem of "scale versus stature; the slightness of the matter and the authority of the manner."¹⁶ Recent critics reject this view of the "matter"

as slight, most convincingly by reaffirming that the world Austen describes is the one we live in, and that she makes this world "luminous" with meaning.¹⁷

My own view is similar: Jane Austen's limits are those of ordinary life and thus render her work immediate, compelling, powerful, and significant to a degree I find unequalled elsewhere. And like the historical critics cited, I approach the literary techniques which shape Austen's early novels and the artistic development visible in them through eighteenth-century fictional models which influence or are reflected in Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice. I differ from most modern critics in considering Jane Austen's intentions primarily didactic. Nineteenth-century critics do speak of Austen as a didactic novelist, but in passing. The best of them, Richard Whately, George Henry Lewes, and Richard Simpson, rather assume than explicate Austen's intentions to instruct her readers.¹⁸ A few modern critics also suggest that Austen intends to educate her audience.¹⁹ Among them is David Lodge, who asserts, in his fine study of the vocabulary in Mansfield Park, that

she puts every generation of readers to school, and in learning her own subtle and exact vocabulary of discrimination and evaluation, we submit to the authority of her vision, and recognize its relevance to our own world of secularized spirituality.²⁰

I would contend, however, that Jane Austen's readers learn more than a "vocabulary of discrimination" from Mansfield

Park or the other novels. Austen educates her readers' judgments and sympathies.²¹ She intends to instruct and to refine the emotions along with the perceptions and the moral sense. This intention was shared by many of Austen's predecessors in the novel, but none of them anticipate her success in educating the reader's judgment and sympathy, partly because they lack her genius, but also because received ideas about literature, its function, and especially its effect on readers did not encourage the development of literary conventions in the novel which could genuinely delight and instruct.²²

J. M. S. Tompkins' excellent study of the popular novel in the late eighteenth century documents received ideas about the functions of literature, ideas which were applied with special zeal to novels, and concludes:

The champions of the novel . . . took up for the most part the old utile dulci line of defence that had served Sidney to vindicate "delightful feigning." Either the novel teaches directly, by way of moral doctrine and general information, or it educates the emotions and, by displaying various types of human nature, acquaints the reader vicariously with the world.²³

Of these alternatives, the first is less interesting to Jane Austen. Her characters sometimes debate moral doctrine, and precepts of various kinds can be extracted from her works, but a glance at almost any eighteenth-century novel, even Clarissa and Tom Jones, will reveal how comparatively little concern Austen has to teach directly in this manner. She is far more interested in an attempt to "educate the

emotions," as Tompkins says, and so were Richardson and Fielding, however willing they may have been to teach "directly, by way of moral doctrine and general information" as well.

Emotional didacticism, in this sense, is no simple task, and was made no easier by eighteenth-century notions of the effects of literature on readers' emotions and judgments. According to moralists of the period, readers were likely to imitate the actions and adopt the sentiments of characters in fiction, much as modern audiences are supposed by modern moralists to be inclined to violence because they are so exposed to it in films, television, and newspapers. Samuel Johnson formulates the moral problem which results for novelists when life is assumed to imitate art in this way, and dictates the eighteenth-century solution of the problem in his well-known essay from the Rambler:

But if the power of example is so great, as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will, care ought to be taken that, when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited; and that which is likely to operate so strongly, should not be mischievous or uncertain in its effects.²⁴

The logical but unfortunate consequence of this position, if Johnson's qualifying "when the choice is unrestrained" is disregarded, will be a character like Richardson's perfect hero Sir Charles Grandison. But if Richardson's choice is better exercised, that is, when his moral purpose requires an exemplary but imperfect heroine and an attractive villain,

then his emotional didacticism can be successful. Its success was acknowledged by Johnson himself when he wrote that in Clarissa, Richardson "enlarged the knowledge of human nature and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue."²⁵ Nonetheless, exemplary characters were thought to be safest. For if the "main business" of the eighteenth-century novel was, as Tompkins declares, "to inculcate morality by example,"²⁶ then a perfect example must be the most efficacious, or at least the most innocuous: "As Clara Reeve pointed out in her Progress of Romance, . . . 'no harm can possibly arise from the imitation of a perfect character, though the attempt should fall short of the original.'"²⁷

These notions certainly did not prevent eighteenth-century novelists from attempting what was known as the "mixed character," but they may have interfered with the eighteenth-century reader's ability to interpret or respond to such characters correctly. The unwarranted admiration and sympathy that Richardson's readers felt for Lovelace are as notorious and well documented as are the consequences: Richardson's exasperation, his explanatory footnotes to Clarissa, and his "good man," Sir Charles Grandison. Yet Richardson declared himself unwilling to read Tom Jones partly because he was so shocked at what he had heard of the hero's mixed character. He concluded that Fielding wrote the novel with a "View . . . to whiten a vicious Character, and to make Morality bend to his Practices."²⁸ Fanny Burney's diary records instances of her

readers' inability to appreciate her own mixed character, Mrs. Delville, in Cecilia. Her readers wanted a character to be all good or all bad, were baffled when Mrs. Delville was not, and accused Burney of making her inconsistent.²⁹

The common reader's recalcitrance does not seem to trouble Austen. However comfortable the eighteenth-century reader may have been with the perfect characters who became a convention of didacticism, Austen refuses to cater to this taste or, rather, she sees its dangers. Although she accepts the eighteenth-century doctrine that literature should educate the emotions and the judgment, she rejects most of the literary conventions associated with the doctrine, and particularly the exemplary character. Her criticism of this convention is implicit in her choice of imperfect heroes or heroines for her novels and explicit in a letter to her niece Fanny Knight, who has relayed the criticism of a reader (one closely resembling those Fanny Burney describes in her diary). Austen's reply to this reader's criticism is playful, but penetrating:

Do not oblige him to read any more. . . . He & I should not in the least agree of course, in our ideas of Novels and Heroines;--pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked--but there is some very good sense in what he says, & I particularly respect him for wishing to think well of all young Ladies; it shews an amiable & a delicate Mind.--And he deserves better treatment than to be obliged to read any more of my Works.³⁰

Austen rejects perfect heroines because they create emotional and moral responses precisely the reverse of edifying, except, of course, when heroines are so lifeless and conventional as to evoke simply an automatically approving

response. Austen is very conscious that an honest (not stock) response to perfection is likely to be annoyance and spite rather than emulation. She knows that fully realized pictures of perfection are unlikely to have any positive effects, much less educative ones--unless they are handled brilliantly, as Austen handles Mr. Knightley in Emma, who is her attractive and completely successful "answer" to Richardson's inhumanly perfect Sir Charles Grandison.³¹ By implication, in this letter to her niece and in her novels, Austen criticizes popular notions of the way readers respond to fiction. In the creation of her own fiction, she discards naïve assumptions about readers' responses to literature, although she respects the naïveté of readers who do not wish their "amiable and delicate" sentiments tampered with. She does not, however, address herself to these readers. As she says, they should read no more.

With equal force, Jane Austen rejects eighteenth-century fiction which pretends to educate the emotions by indulging them. The sentimental novel rendered emotion, particularly distress, in order to provide the reader with opportunities for sympathy, then considered the great enlarger of the human spirit. The didactic aim of this fiction descended readily to a cult of display in which the author and audience collaborated. One contemporary reader has recorded that, when she read Henry Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling, "as I was a girl of fourteen not yet versed in sentiment, I had a

secret dread I should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility."³² At fifteen, Jane Austen's criticism of the sentimental novel was so acute that she could write the hilarious burlesque, "Love and Freindship." In Sense and Sensibility, she gives shape to her mature criticism of sentimental convention and reveals her conviction that literature is not meant to offer or to encourage easy opportunities for sympathy: the reader's propensity to feel for Marianne Dashwood in preference to her sister Elinor is exposed and combatted. At the same time, Austen recognizes that in life and in literature, certain easy responses must (or at least may) prevail: wit, charm, openness, confidence, energy, and good looks will guarantee favorable or sympathetic responses wherever they appear, for these attractions are powerful enough to suspend or disarm judgment. Instead of deploring these truths about sympathy and judgment, like a moralizer, she learns to exploit them in her novels to help create the more complex and sensitive responses she requires. Although she is fully aware of the recalcitrance of the average reader, she intends and designs her novels to exercise and challenge his responses. He is asked to produce more intricate, more complex, and, sometimes, more unconventional responses than he may be prepared for.

In obtaining these responses, Austen is a manipulator, but in no negative sense. She manipulates her readers' responses to didactic and moral ends. Her power to do so

arises both from her highly sophisticated awareness of readers' probable responses to fiction as well as from her increasing mastery of technique. At the same time, her power to evoke and to manipulate response is not tyrannical; she does not harass the reader or bully him. He feels her power only if he pays close attention, and Austen does not make the explicit or obtrusive demands upon a reader's attention typical of the great novelists of the eighteenth century, Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne. In manipulating her readers' responses to didactic and moral ends, Austen is no tyrant but a teacher and moralist in the best sense. She practices an emotional didacticism which her contemporaries and even her greatest predecessors often sought and missed: a refining that amounts to an educating of judgment and sympathy.

Manipulation of response to didactic ends, then, underlies all Jane Austen's novels except Northanger Abbey. In it, Austen limits herself to the two responses of suspense and distress which Gothic and sentimental novels were designed to obtain from their readers. She first exposes everything false and absurd in the conventions these novels rely on to elicit suspense and distress, and then surprises her readers by using the conventions more successfully than her predecessors ever could to evoke the same responses. In thus creating suspense and distress, Austen shows her own power over her readers at the same time that she reveals a shrewd consciousness

that in literature as in life, the simplest emotional responses are among the most powerful and also among the most readily obtained, even from readers who have been taught to laugh at them.

Austen's interests in Northanger Abbey are, nevertheless, comic more than didactic. She jolts and manipulates her readers' conventional responses more in behalf of fun than an educative intent. By Sense and Sensibility her didactic intentions mature. Jane Austen addresses herself to the moral and emotional responses of judgment and sympathy rather than to the parallel and simpler responses of suspense and distress, and she develops techniques to educate her readers' judgments and sympathies which necessarily differ from the techniques of Northanger Abbey. First, the joke on the relation between literature and life which the narrator in Northanger Abbey never stops playing on the reader and on Catherine Morland is assimilated to character in Sense and Sensibility. Marianne Dashwood's ideas about beauty, love, marriage, grief, and loss are derived from books and "'all romantic'" (SS, p. 56). Partly as a result, Marianne is a heroine as Catherine cannot be. Her faults of conduct, feeling, and judgment cause serious consequences for herself and others as Catherine's do not. To allow these consequences to be registered, Austen employs a technique she never relinquishes afterward, the technique of contrast. She constructs parallels and contrasts among the feelings, judgments, predicaments, and conduct of all her

characters so elaborate and insistent that the reader cannot escape comparing, weighing, and evaluating them. Austen further assists this process by allowing the characters themselves to weigh and to evaluate their own conduct, feelings, and judgments. Sense and Sensibility is, then, a novel of conduct in relation to feeling. Elinor and Marianne consciously regulate their conduct according to their ideas about emotion, and they debate the questions of conduct and judgment which arise because of their different attitudes toward feeling.

Nevertheless, the central issue of Sense and Sensibility is not really articulated by the characters in their debates. The reader is left to infer and decide it himself. This issue is, of course, what kind of judgment and what degree of sympathy to accord Elinor and Marianne? Jane Austen intends that the reader's tendency to be charmed by Marianne and to be alienated by Elinor should be subtly redirected by the text, so that Marianne's continual failure to perceive or to do justice to Elinor's feelings should not be duplicated by the reader. Unfortunately, the "romantic" presuppositions about emotion and its expression which permit Marianne to minimize Elinor's feelings are still powerful enough to have encouraged many modern critics to be as unjust to Elinor as Marianne is. Their injustice fully attests the unruliness of judgment and sympathy, acknowledged and exposed by Austen in Sense and Sensibility even as she attempts to correct it in her readers.

As responses to literature and to life, then, judgment and sympathy are not merely more significant than the suspense and distress examined in Northanger Abbey; they are immeasurably more complex and intractable. Recognizing this, Austen never abandons her intention to exercise and educate the judgments and sympathies of her readers, and in the novels which follow Sense and Sensibility, she continues to refine and to extend her techniques for doing so. Pride and Prejudice therefore occupies an especially complex and challenging place in her development. It is both a completely successful and even triumphant achievement in itself, and a novel of transition between the concerns, themes, and techniques of Austen's own early novels and the more complex and subtle ones of Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion. Of all Austen's novels, Pride and Prejudice includes the most embedded and interesting links to the fiction of her predecessors, specifically to Fanny Burney's Cecilia and Samuel Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison, and therefore invites study in relation to these novels as well as in relation to her own earlier novels themselves.

Austen's admiration for Cecilia and particularly for Grandison is, as Chapter III will show, well documented but largely unaccountable to most critics, who content themselves with a few remarks in passing. A close study of both novels reveals reasons for Austen's interest in them, and uncovers connections to Pride and Prejudice which clarify Austen's achievement in that novel and which help to define the

influence of Burney and Richardson upon her work. Pride and Prejudice assimilates the design of Cecilia (an attempt to examine, in a comic, non-epistolary narrative, "how differently pride . . . operates upon different minds")³³ and the central concern of Grandison (an attempt to manipulate and educate the reader's first impressions of character) to the theme first sounded in Sense and Sensibility: the attempt to educate judgment and sympathy. The intentions of Pride and Prejudice are, then, far more complex than those of any previous Austen novel, and its techniques necessarily reflect this greater complexity. In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen exploits even more fully the technique of contrast which sufficed for the themes of Sense and Sensibility, and she adopts or develops in addition certain other techniques visible in Cecilia and Grandison.

One such technique deserves special consideration. Both Cecilia and Grandison show traces of an overall structural principle which I propose to call "linear irony": the action is organized so as to reverse or undercut, systematically, the main characters' expectations or judgments and the reader's as well.³⁴ In Cecilia, linear irony is visible in its most simple and even primitive forms. Cecilia Beverley's confidence in her own rationality is subverted by the action of the novel, particularly at the end, when (to borrow the words of that eminent critic Mr. Puff) she runs "stark mad in white linen," like Clarissa and other heroines.³⁵ Here, linear irony is

rather crudely used, as it generally is when Burney attempts to undercut her readers' conventional expectations.

Traces of linear irony are visible also in the treatment of Harriet Byron, the heroine of Sir Charles Grandison. She comfortably rejects all her suitors and then falls in love with Sir Charles, who cannot address her because he is entangled with another lady. Hints of an ironic structure in Grandison are, however, less interesting to Austen than are Richardson's attempts to manipulate his readers' impressions of his characters to didactic ends. He intends to make his readers think "now one way, now another"³⁶ of all the characters except Sir Charles, and he succeeds to some extent in obtaining these responses. From his partial success Austen may have learned to consider such manipulation a possible and a significant goal of fiction. She certainly considers it an opportunity not to be missed. Equally surely, she shares Richardson's very keen awareness that vanity underlies first impressions and resists any change in them. Richardson writes to a correspondent:

We often cheat ourselves on the Entrance into a Character, by setting it down in our minds for such or such and when it rises or sinks upon us, are hardly able to reconcile it to our first hasty Impressions. And who is it that is not fond of justifying his first impressions, in compliment to himself?

These statements provide almost a formula for the process Jane Austen intends to elicit and to correct in the readers of Pride and Prejudice, at the same time that she presents and corrects it in Elizabeth Bennet. Linear irony is one of her

methods for doing so, a method neither Richardson nor Burney fully exploits.

The importance of linear irony to the structure of Pride and Prejudice cannot be exaggerated. The reversal in Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy which provides the novel's obvious and overall structure also provides details in structure, for Elizabeth's judgments are reversed or undercut throughout. These lesser mistakes and reversals are not pointed to as clearly as is the gradual re-estimation of Darcy. The reader is required to perceive them himself, by making appropriate connections between anticipations or judgments and the events which subsequently contradict them. Wickham's declaration to Elizabeth that his respect for Darcy's father prevents him from exposing Darcy's real character is a good example. When Wickham later publicly defames Darcy, the reader is free to allow this contradiction to alter his opinion of both gentlemen, or he can take Wickham's "general unreserve" in stride, as Elizabeth does (PP, p. 138). Elizabeth's wit and charm are so disarming, however, that the reader is likely to acquiesce in her mistaken judgment, although certainly he is not forced to do so. In this way, the technique of linear irony organizes the action of Pride and Prejudice so as to engage, test, and chasten the reader's judgment without actually misleading him.

To define the influence of Burney and Richardson upon Austen may seem at first to require a study of more than the

structural and thematic parallels between their novels. All three write social comedies, and it is often supposed that Austen's comedy of manners is anticipated by Burney and Richardson. Upon examination, however, Austen's use of the comedy of manners in Pride and Prejudice, the first of her novels to employ this convention fully, differs significantly even from that of Richardson in Grandison. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen finds that wit and dialogue can be additional means to control her readers' responses to the characters, especially to Elizabeth, Mr. Bennet, Wickham, and Darcy. Admittedly, like Austen in her treatment of Mr. Bennet, Richardson can make his characters' wit attract the reader and repel him alternately, so that wit is one of his devices for manipulating his readers' impressions of such characters as Charlotte Grandison or Lovelace. Nevertheless, Richardson does not really anticipate in Grandison the sense of play and sense of structure which permit the wit and dialogue of Pride and Prejudice to serve the themes so brilliantly. Similarly, neither Richardson nor Austen herself in Sense and Sensibility anticipates one of the most important discoveries of Pride and Prejudice, one which Austen never loses sight of afterward: the discovery that the characters themselves can debate as well as dramatize the central issues, to excellent effect. The central issue of Pride and Prejudice is the process of judging and evaluating character, and the characters talk about this process while it is actually occurring: they are

judging and evaluating other characters while being themselves judged and evaluated by those others and by the reader. This device can create especially complex and comic effects, as when Elizabeth, Bingley, and Darcy discuss each other's characters at Netherfield.

Pride and Prejudice is both a transitional novel and a triumphant one. It develops and masters new techniques in structure (linear irony) and in the comedy of manners (wit and dialogue)³⁸ to embody its themes. These techniques allow Austen a treatment of Elizabeth Bennet and of the reader which exposes the fallibility of judgment and humiliates pride in it while insisting that it be exercised nonetheless. Thus the wit and dialogue of the characters in Pride and Prejudice create a comedy of manners which encourages readers to form confident first impressions of character (without dictating them) and to assent to Elizabeth's judgments (without insisting on them). Subsequently, the structures which contain the comedy of manners--Austen's technique of contrast and her technique of linear irony--undermine those impressions and judgments which the comedy has invited. The reader's judgment is as chastened at the end as Elizabeth's.

This subversive treatment of judgment is not cynical, however. Elizabeth's pride of judgment is humiliated, as is the reader's, but judgment is educated and refined in the process. And however serious the issues, the tone is genial. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen succeeds brilliantly where her

contemporaries or predecessors succeed partially or fail miserably in delighting and instructing the reader. The eighteenth-century themes and techniques of Pride and Prejudice accomplish their eighteenth-century didactic end, moral and emotional instruction, at the same time that they create a degree of intimacy with the characters and an absorption in the novel's world surpassed only by the reader's response to the novels which follow it, Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion. The methods of Pride and Prejudice are essentially those of the later novels. Although Austen refines these methods so as to create more powerful and profound effects, once the themes, techniques, and intentions of Pride and Prejudice are understood, those of the later novels become accessible.

This account of Jane Austen's early novels as intending to manipulate and educate her readers' responses, and as developing increasingly sophisticated means to do so, runs counter to some modern assumptions about literature. The classical dictum, still operative in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction, that literature should delight and instruct, has since been largely abandoned or qualified beyond recognition, and few words used in criticism carry more negative connotations than "didactic." Perhaps for this reason, although Austen's powers to delight are almost universally acknowledged, her successfully didactic methods

and intentions are now seldom claimed. Sometimes they are even resented when discovered. A hostility to these intentions, resulting in obliviousness, is perfectly illustrated when Andrew Wright asks: if Marianne Dashwood "is meant merely to exemplify an unlaudable predisposition to 'enthusiasm', why is she so lovable? Why, indeed, is she not portrayed as an Isabella Thorpe?"³⁹ The recalcitrance of her critics fully attests that Austen is dealing with responses to literature and to life which require some refinement. That her methods can baffle even trained, well-disposed, and sensitive readers of her fiction so that they misjudge her characters and mistake her intentions because of their own prejudices (in Wright's case, an unmodulated bias in favor of irony) is an absurdity that Jane Austen's novels were designed to anticipate and to combat, but which she would nevertheless have enjoyed.

¹ "Jane Austen at Sixty," Nation, 15 December 1923, p. 433; rpt. in Ian Watt, ed., Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1963), p. 15. (Hereafter cited as Critical Essays.)

² I am indebted to B. C. Southam's "Introduction" to Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage (London, 1968; hereafter cited as Critical Heritage) for this useful distinction between 19th- and 20th-century Austen criticism (p. 32), and for his discussion of 19th-century studies of Austen in general. It should be noted that although studies of Austen's artistic development properly belong to the 20th century, they began, according to Southam, with Richard Simpson's anonymously published review (North British Review, 52 [1870]; rpt. in Critical Heritage). Simpson detects "a decided growth" in Austen's novels, for although she "goes over the same ground," she attempts "the same ends by means less artificial, and of more innate origin" (p. 257).

Simpson's study of Austen's artistic development is slightly perplexed by the difficult question of when her early novels were actually written. He evidently considers Pride and Prejudice Austen's first novel, and Sense and Sensibility her second (p. 254). In my own study, I accept a dating based largely on the novels' order of publication.

Like most readers, I consider that Northanger Abbey (completed 1803) represents Austen's earliest work, Sense and Sensibility (publ. 1811) her first mature novel, and Pride and Prejudice (1813) her latest and finest early work. I see a complex but coherent artistic development between these novels as we have them, that is, presumably revised just before publication (except for Northanger Abbey, which was published posthumously), although the earlier versions of all three novels were written in an entirely different order, according to Cassandra Austen's memorandum:

First Impressions begun in Oct 1796
 Finished in Augt 1797. Published
 afterwards, with alterations & contractions
 under the Title of Pride & Prejudice.
Sense & Sensibility begun Nov. 1797
 I am sure that something of the
 same story & characters had been
 written earlier & called Elinor & Marianne
North-hanger Abbey was written
 about the years 98 & 99

(The memorandum is printed by B. C. Southam, Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts [Oxford, 1964], p. 53.)

³ An example of each view will suffice. Walter Scott's review of Emma (dated October 1815; published anonymously, Quarterly Review, 14 [1816]; rpt. in Critical Heritage) places it among those recent realistic novels which attempt: the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.

Scott praises the "spirit and originality" Austen can give

to her "sketches" of "common incidents" (Critical Heritage, p. 63). An anonymous reviewer also notes the realism of Emma but is more attracted to "the entertainment" Austen's novels afford, and concludes that Emma "is amusing, if not instructive; and has no tendency to deteriorate the heart" (Gentleman's Magazine, 86 [1816]; rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 72).

In contrast, Richard Whately sees Austen as both humorist and didact; he praises her for "combining, in an eminent degree, instruction with amusement" (Quarterly Review, 24 [1821]; rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 105). Julia Kavanagh is struck with Austen's irony as a means of controlling the reader's response to character. "She seldom or never draws a character we can hate; she is too calm, too dispassionate, too self-possessed to be bitter or eloquent. Delicate irony is her keenest weapon" ("Miss Austen's Six Novels," in English Women of Letters [1862]; rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 181).

The finest of Austen's 19th-century critics, Richard Simpson, offers the best account of her success as an ironist, moralist, and social critic. His essay also illustrates the readiness of some 19th-century critics to speak of moral and didactic intentions indiscriminately. (Others use "didactic" in pejorative contexts, as do 20th-century critics. Whately speaks of Maria Edgeworth as "somewhat too avowedly didactic," Critical Heritage, p. 93). Simpson argues that in Austen,

"the critical faculty was . . . the ground and support of the artistic faculty" (Critical Heritage, p. 243). She "began, as Shakespeare began, with being an ironical censurer of her contemporaries," that is, as a critic of literary practice (p. 242). She is a critic of society, for Simpson, in that "man is only known to her in the process of his formation by social influences"; she views man "only as completed in society" and her consciousness of man as a "social being" inclines her "to compound her characters," that is, to discriminate among them perfectly while showing in them "no perfect virtue, no perfect vice" (p. 249). Simpson's argument is difficult to follow here, for he later declares that nothing in her novels proves that "she had any conception of society itself, but only of the coterie of three or four families mixing together, with differences of intellect, wealth, or character, but without any grave social inequalities" (p. 250). That is, he sees her as critical of a particular society through portraits of individuals, but uncritical of society as a whole, indeed unconscious of it.

Simpson's other positions on Austen are easier to document. He speaks of her characteristic irony (p. 242), of the "didactic purpose and even nomenclature of her novels" (p. 244), and later of "moral purpose," meaning the same (p. 254). Again, 19th-century critics do not always feel the need to distinguish between moral and didactic purposes, as 20th-century critics do. Simpson's insistence on Austen's

ability to discriminate among characters morally "beyond the possibility of confusion" (p. 249) establishes his claim to have seen Austen as a moralist in the manner of a 20th-century critic.

⁴ Southam concludes that 19th-century quotations and documents show that Austen's contemporaries failed "to identify the force and point of her satire" (Critical Heritage, p. 18), thereby lending support to D. W. Harding's famous reading of Austen's works ("Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," Scrutiny, 8 [1940]; rpt. in Critical Essays, pp. 166-79).

⁵ The phrase and the notion are Mark Schorer's in "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse" (Literary Review [Summer, 1959]; rpt. in David Lodge, ed., Jane Austen: Emma, a Casebook [London, 1968], p. 177; hereafter cited as Casebook). Other critics who view Austen's relation to her world as ambiguous and as thereby dictating her ironic stance are Harding and Marvin Mudrick.

⁶ Alastair M. Duckworth is one critic who notes the contradiction between certain views of Austen as an ironist and moralist, and he challenges the ironic reading (which he calls the "subversive" reading) offered by such critics as Schorer, Harding, and Mudrick. He associates himself with critics like Babb, Litz, Bradbrook, and Moler, who point out Austen's positive values (The Improvement of the Estate

[Baltimore, 1971], p. 9). Duckworth asks "that Jane Austen be read as an author who affirms society," however she may also criticize it (p. 32).

⁷ A. C. Bradley is one of the critics who point to the difference between a humorist with moral concerns, like Austen, and a moralist like Samuel Johnson: "to her much more of the world is amusing, and much more of it is right" ("Jane Austen," E&S, 2 [1911], 19).

⁸ Those who see Austen as a "subversive" critic of her world (Schorer, Harding, Mudrick) belong in this group, as do a few of the critics who explicitly reject this reading of Austen, among them Andrew Wright and Lionel Trilling. The latter also locate Austen's triumph in her irony, but define it differently. For Wright, Austen's irony is "the instrument of a moral vision" valuable for its "moral complexity" (Jane Austen's Novels [1953; rev. New York, 1961], pp. 13 and 15). That is, Wright values irony which embodies "unresolvable conflicts" (p. 30), and he succeeds in detecting this sort of irony throughout Austen's work. Although Trilling's essay on Mansfield Park refutes the criticisms which that novel has received for its negative treatment of the witty and ironic Crawfords (criticisms which evidently originate in the critics' own high appreciation of irony), he does so by claiming for the novel a higher kind of irony: "an irony directed against irony itself" ("Mansfield Park," The Opposing

Self [New York, 1955]; rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 135).

A number of other studies of Austen locate the triumph of her novels somewhat too exclusively in irony. Pride and Prejudice especially invites such readings. See Reuben Brower's essay "Light and Bright and Sparkling: Irony and Fiction in Pride and Prejudice" from The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading (London, 1951), rpt. in Critical Essays, and Dorothy Van Ghent's essay on Pride and Prejudice in The English Novel: Form and Function (1953; rpt. New York, 1961).

⁹ These two approaches, which I have called the linguistic and the historical, are not exhaustive. A few studies have been published within the last fifteen years which do not fit either category. Two critics focus on "critical problems" raised within Austen's novels. For Joseph Wiesenfarth, F. S. C., problems "arise from the tension that exists between the demands of structural patterns and the demands of characters to be persons"; lacking a specific thesis, he attacks these problems by assuming that "every separate detail of the structure as well as the structure as a whole is necessarily meaningful" (The Errand of Form [New York, 1967], p. viii). Darrel Mansell, on the other hand, has a thesis which he applies to all the novels. Isolating nearly the same problems as Wiesenfarth does, Mansell finds that they arise because Austen's "determination to follow an intellectual plan," that is, to outline and to further each

heroine's "psychological progress toward a goal," outweighs her interest in realism (The Novels of Jane Austen [London, 1973], pp. x and xi).

Jane Nardin examines the relation between manners and morals in the novels. Her thesis is that Austen is "experimenting" in all the novels with various answers to a central question: how close is "true propriety" or manners backed by "solid moral considerations" to conventional propriety or socially acceptable manners? (Those Elegant Decorums [Albany, N. Y., 1973], pp. 16 and 15). Yasmine Geoneratne examines the six novels as individual works of art rather than as stages in an artistic development (Jane Austen [Cambridge, 1970], p. 14). Robert Liddell's study is similar, focusing on various topics within each novel (The Novels of Jane Austen [London, 1963]). W. A. Craik emphasizes Austen's moral seriousness and closely examines the parallels and contrasts among characters which give structure to the novels; to this extent, her approach is like my own (Jane Austen: The Six Novels [London, 1965]).

A few critics have provided extended studies of individual works. Avrom Fleishman's A Reading of Mansfield Park (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1967) draws upon several critical approaches in an attempt to provide a more complete reading of the novel. J. F. Burrows offers a close reading of Emma in Jane Austen's Emma (Sydney: Sydney Univ. Press, 1968), as does Frank W. Bradbrook, Jane Austen:

Emma (London: Edward Arnold, 1961).

¹⁰ Most recent linguistic studies acknowledge a debt to Lascelles' chapter on "Style" in Jane Austen and her Art (1939; rpt. London, 1963) and to R. W. Chapman's appendices to his editions of the novels. Bradbrook's essay, "Style and Judgment in Jane Austen's Novels" (Cambridge Journal, 4 [1951], 515-37), and Donald F. Stone's "Sense and Semantics in Jane Austen" (NCF, 25 [1970], 31-50), among others, elaborate Lascelles' observation that abusers of language in Austen's novels rank low on the moral scale. A number of critics find Austen's values embodied in her vocabulary. Schorer's articles on Austen note two orders of value, moral and economic, which her vocabulary reflects and which her buried metaphors and her characters are, in his judgment, "busily equating" ("Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy,'" KR, 11 [1949], 543; see also a later version, "Fiction and the 'Analogical Matrix,'" Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, ed. John W. Aldridge [New York, 1952], and "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse," rpt. in Casebook). Van Ghent adopts and extends Schorer's view in the essay on Pride and Prejudice cited previously. Norman Page in The Language of Jane Austen (Oxford, 1972), David Lodge in Language of Fiction (London, 1966), Stuart N. Tave in Some Words of Jane Austen (Chicago, 1973), and Lloyd W. Brown in Bits of Ivory (Baton Rouge, 1973) all provide studies of the ways in which Austen communicates her values through her precise use

of the "language of moral and ethical judgement" (Page, p. 195).

Howard S. Babb's focus is slightly different. He analyzes style and dialogue in the novels to show how expressive they are, both of values and especially of feeling (Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue [1962; rpt. Hamden, Conn., 1967]). Brewer's close study of dialogue in Pride and Prejudice ("Light and Bright," rpt. in Critical Essays) has a similar emphasis. Some other studies of style point out that, contrary to received opinion, Austen uses metaphors and even symbols as well as setting to embody her themes. See Charles Murrah, "The Background of Mansfield Park," in Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann Jr., eds., From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), Thomas R. Edwards, "The Difficult Beauty of Mansfield Park," NCF, 20 (1965), 51-67, Bradbrook, "Style and Judgment," and Brown, "Imagery" and "Symbolism," chapters in Bits of Ivory.

Finally, two recent studies of Austen's language deserve mention. Karl Kroeber's Styles in Fictional Structure (Princeton, 1971) compares and contrasts the styles of Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot, by tabulating various stylistic features, such as number of characters per novel, use of particular abstract nouns, descriptive adjectives, and the like. His findings generally

support these of more conventional criticism: e.g., he thinks that Austen becomes more and more interested in representing "the personal side of the personal-social interplay which is her constant subject matter" (p. 77). K. C. Phillips' Jane Austen's English (London, 1970) amplifies Chapman's work, elucidating idiosyncrasies and archaisms in Austen's style and vocabulary.

¹¹ Page's argument is representative: "the 'triumph' of the novels is to a large extent a triumph of style, and the fact that they consistently transcend the level of cultivated gossip or conventional story-telling is to be explained partly in terms of certain qualities of language" (Language of Jane Austen, p. 9).

¹² Two recent full-length studies which investigate the connections between 18th-century moral philosophy and Austen's moral vocabulary and values have been cited previously: Duckworth's Improvement of the Estate (1971) and Brown's Bits of Ivory (1973).

¹³ Lascelles' views on Austen's relations to her predecessors are contained in her second chapter, "Reading and Response," and do not readily lend themselves to summary. She does consider that Austen's burlesque rejection in her juvenilia of the "false vision of life" created by popular fiction is central to her work (Jane Austen and her Art, p. 49). Austen rejects the "world of illusion" (p. 49) created

by popular novels not merely because it is untrue to life but because "to her the actual world appears the prettier and pleasanter place" (p. 71). Lascelles also insists that attempts to find sources for Austen's narrative material in her predecessors' novels are critically useless. "Her real debts acknowledge themselves in her style, both in the narrow sense, her management of words, and in the wider, management of her narrative material" (p. 42); she treats these in Chapter III, "Style."

R. Brimley Johnson's theory of Austen's relations to her predecessors anticipates Lascelles' in time but not in substance. His theories are sketchily presented, and unlike Lascelles he looks for sources. Noting that "Fanny Burney had made books from life; Jane Austen made life from books: achieving greater realism by methods less realistic" (Jane Austen [1927; rpt. Folcroft Library Editions, 1972], p. 47), Johnson rather baldly concludes:

The first three novels, all her work at Steventon, were more or less deliberate adaptations of Camilla, Cecilia, and Evelina; certainly based on the characters and plots of these novels, and inspired by her enthusiasm for them. (p. 135)

He rightly considers the later novels "less book-built, more humane, and--in one view--more original or independent" (p. 117), but does not describe their maturity except by adducing "development in technique, more practised construction, and the greater intensity of her affections" (p. 139).

¹⁴ The Great Tradition (1948; rpt. New York, 1963), p. 5.

The best investigation of Austen's indebtedness to tradition, after Lascelles', is A. Walton Litz's Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development (New York, 1965). Another useful work is Kenneth L. Moler's Jane Austen's Art of Allusion (Lincoln, Neb., 1968). Both Litz and Moler use the work of Austen's predecessors interestingly, as a means to deepen understanding of her achievement.

¹⁵ Q. D. Leavis's "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings," printed in four separate parts in Scrutiny between 1941 and 1944 (rpt. in F. R. Leavis, ed., A Selection from Scrutiny [Cambridge, 1968], II, 1-80), is certainly one of the exceptions to this rule. Her theory is that Austen's novels are palimpsests, rewritten, revised, and reworked throughout her career. I am not convinced by this theory. B. C. Southam offers a cogent reply to it in the "Appendix" to Literary Manuscripts, pp. 136-48. His own study of the manuscripts emphasizes that Austen's work shows "many years of highly conscious experiment," culminating in Sanditon, in which she seeks "to extend her range even further" (p. vi). Southam is best on Sanditon. His study of Austen's juvenilia and their relations to her predecessors' works is less interesting; e.g., he thinks that the "barlesques foreshadowed Jane Austen's development, largely by shewing what she was not going to write" (p. 84). Other students of Austen's relations to her predecessors content themselves with tabulating common characters, sources, motifs, and incidents:

e.g., Bradbrook's Jane Austen and her Predecessors (Cambridge, 1967) and Henrietta Ten Harmsel's Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions (The Hague, 1964).

¹⁶ "Introduction" to Critical Essays, p. 12.

¹⁷ Tave, p. 34. Litz notes as well that the methods of New Criticism have "made the traditional objections to Jane Austen's limited subject-matter seem almost irrelevant" by emphasizing her "control of language and mastery of ironic exposure" (Artistic Development, p. v).

¹⁸ A few examples of these critics' views will suffice; all citations are taken from Critical Heritage. Simpson speaks of the "didactic purpose and even nomenclature of her novels" (p. 244). For him, Jane Austen didactically and habitually exalts "judgment over passion" (p. 245), and he considers that Pride and Prejudice was written from "a polemical bias" against love at first sight (p. 254), while Persuasion retracts "former theories" of love (p. 256). Whately discusses didacticism more thoroughly, echoing the well-known arguments of Henry Fielding in Joseph Andrews (Book I, Ch. 1, opening paragraphs) and Samuel Johnson in Rambler No. 4 (see note 24). Whately praises Austen's talent for making her novels probable, because this allows "instruction in human character and conduct" to be the more efficacious: poetic justice which is brought about by improbable occurrences either encourages readers to become

reckless, calculating on "lucky incidents," or conversely, encourages readers in a skeptical attitude toward the rewards of virtuous conduct, if those rewards are so improbably achieved (pp. 88 and 89). Not surprisingly, he is offended by mixed characters, for they weaken young persons' "abhorrence of profligacy by exhibiting it in combination with the most engaging qualities" (p. 92). He seems to feel that a novel, like an essay, teaches "moral lessons" (p. 95), but these "are conveyed by example instead of precept" (p. 92). Furthermore, any "direct attempt at moral teaching" interferes with the immediate object of a novel, "to please," and this too distinguishes novels from essays (p. 94). Nevertheless, Whately's discussion limits Austen's didactic intentions to supplying "practical good sense and instructive example" (p. 93). George Henry Lewes goes further, and approximates in part my own view, when he observes that we see into her characters' "hearts and hopes, their motives, their struggles within themselves; and a sympathy is induced which, if extended to daily life and the world at large, would make the reader a more amiable person" (unsigned article, "The Novels of Jane Austen," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 86 [1859]; rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 155).

¹⁹ Arnold Kettle's reading of Emma offers one of the finer modern discussions of the novel and of Austen's educative effect on her readers. He considers that Austen herself combines "emotional involvement with objective

judgment" of her characters (An Introduction to the English Novel [1951; rpt. New York, 1960], I, 93), and that in conveying both, Austen effects an "extension of human sympathy and understanding" (I, 94). Like Lewes, he points out that Austen creates intimacy with her characters and with their world. "Intimacy" surely defines the special effect and power of Emma, as I shall suggest in my Conclusion.

Other modern critics who touch on Austen's didactic intentions are F. B. Pinion and John K. Mathison, but both appear to define didacticism more narrowly than even Whately does. For Pinion, "All Jane Austen's novels are didactic by implication, if not almost explicitly at times" (A Jane Austen Companion [London, 1973], p. 127). He seems to mean simply that a didactic work offers precepts on such themes as fortitude, self-control, and so forth. Mathison's view is almost equally simple. He finds that "Austen considers the novel a better teacher than history or essays" because it "cuts through the surface of things to what is" ("Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction," ELH, 24 [1957], 150). Thus, in making the reader witness "the education of a young girl," Austen makes "the reader, as well as Catherine, consider what is important, what trivial, what admirable, and what detestable in life and behavior. In making Catherine become aware of true values, she has helped the reader do the same" (p. 150).

The views of Pinion and Mathison seem to me hardly

distinguishable from those of critics who avoid or deny the term "didactic" and who speak instead of Austen's moral purposes. Laurence Lerner is one. He adduces Austen's "positives" and thinks her one of the novelists who "tell the truth," particularly truths readers will "resist; those it would enlarge their sympathies to accept" (The Truthtellers [New York, 1967], pp. 17, 83, and 87). W. A. Craik similarly emphasizes Austen's moral seriousness, but explicitly denies didacticism. For her, Austen's novels are "so far from being openly didactic" that "her moral purpose may be overlooked" (The Six Novels, p. 2).

²⁰ Language of Fiction, p. 113.

²¹ To apply the terms "judgment" and "sympathy" to Austen's work is not new. They are implicit in Lascelles' discussion of Austen's comic techniques. She finds that Austen's narratives are managed so as to appeal on the one hand to the "critical faculty" and on the other to the "sympathetic imagination" (Jane Austen and her Art, p. 142). Wayne Booth speaks of Austen's control of the reader's "sympathy and judgment" in relation to Emma Woodhouse (The Rhetoric of Fiction [Chicago, 1961], pp. 243-56). Booth's reading of Austen's intentions and methods seems at first very like my own, yet is quite distinct. He considers that the reader will have difficulty in responding to Emma only; I think Austen delights in creating difficulties in response

everywhere, in all the novels, for her method is always to tempt the reader into mistaken sympathies and judgments in order to correct them at last. Booth contends further that the "mystery" in Emma is its "weakest aspect" (p. 255).

W. J. Harvey refutes this claim by noting as I would Austen's very typical success in undercutting the critical judgment. Harvey declares that "Emma is a novel which constantly tempts us into surmise, speculation, judgement; the process of reading runs parallel to the life read about" ("The Plot of Emma," EIC, 17 [1967]; rpt. in Casebook, p. 241). In addition, Booth believes that we react to Emma's faults with the "tolerance" we have "for our own faults" (p. 248). I would say instead that in Emma, Austen creates an intimacy with all the characters which requires the reader to enjoy and often to love them (not just to tolerate them), however irritating or faulty they are, and however frequently they invite harsh judgment. The major difference between my approach and that of Booth, Lascelles, or most other critics remains the same: I consider Austen a didactic novelist, intending to educate the reader's judgments and sympathies.

²² Maria Edgeworth illustrates all these points perfectly in her novel Ormond (1817), for she actually summarizes her young hero's responses in emotion and in conduct to reading Tom Jones and Sir Charles Grandison. The passages in question invite more extensive study than I can give. Nevertheless, a brief review of her notions of how readers respond emotionally

to novels is apposite. It is needless to say that her notion of readers' responses in conduct is wholly orthodox (her hero, Harry Ormond, tries to imitate the conduct he reads of, first Tom Jones's, then Sir Charles's). Edgeworth's account of Harry Ormond's emotional responses to the two novels clearly indicates that she thinks literature obtains its effects on the emotions through a reader's "sympathy."

Tom Jones is attractive to Ormond because "young readers readily assimilate and identify themselves with any character, the leading points of which resemble their own, and in whose general feelings they sympathise" (Harrington, a Tale; and Ormond, a Tale [London, 1817], II, 155; note the "modern" use of "identify"). But what of an unfamiliar or even a distasteful character? "At first he detested Sir Charles Grandison--he was so different from the friends he loved in real life, or the heroes he had admired in books" (II, 173). How can sympathy be obtained for Sir Charles? Here Edgeworth's notions of the process of reading and the possibilities of fiction are most distinct from Austen's. Edgeworth assumes the existence of a stock response, the response of one noble nature to another, and approves it:

all noble natures are [susceptible] of sympathy with elevated sentiments, and with generous character. The character of Sir Charles Grandison, in spite of his ceremonious bowing on the hand, touched the nobler feelings of our young hero's mind, inspired him with virtuous emulation, made him ambitious to be a gentleman in the best and highest sense of the word. (II, 173-74)

For Maria Edgeworth, then, the novelist's task is to

educate the reader's emotions by drawing on a stock of finer feelings present already in nobler natures, though perhaps disused or atrophied. For Jane Austen, educating emotions means refining the unruly or insensitive responses of sensible but erring readers. In the end, Edgeworth depends almost entirely on stock responses if her reader is to be moved or improved; Austen demands always that the reader's stock responses be refined and educated.

²³ The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (1932; rpt. London, 1969), p. 27.

²⁴ Rambler No. 4 (13 March 1750); The Rambler, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven, Conn., 1969), I, 22. (This edition is cited hereafter as Rambler.)

²⁵ Rambler No. 97 (19 February 1751), II, 153. It should be noted that Johnson's qualification, "when the choice is unrestrained," is obscure and can bear other interpretations than my own. Johnson may refer not to choice of theme or of moral purpose but to choice of character. If so, he is distinguishing between the freedom of choice typical in fictional treatments of character and the restraint imposed by the demands of historical accuracy. But if Johnson does mean in Rambler No. 4 to restrict novelists to portraits of "the best examples only" in character, he is able in Rambler No. 97 to acknowledge, in his prefatory remarks to Richardson's essay, Richardson's successful didacticism with

very different characters.

²⁶ Tompkins, p. 70.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁸ Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, ed. and intro. John Carroll (Oxford, 1964), p. 127. (Hereafter cited as Selected Letters; indications of Richardson's verbal changes, noted by Carroll, have been omitted.) Richardson's professed reasons for not reading Tom Jones may of course be at some distance from his real motives; how much did jealousy operate, for instance, rather than virtuous distaste for a mixed character?

Austen's view of the mixed character is, as one might expect, more balanced than Richardson's. An interesting passage from Sanditon testifies to Austen's awareness that, with mixed characters like Lovelace in particular, an author's intentions and his readers' responses can be at variance.

Sir Edward Denham

had read more sentimental Novels than agreed with him. His fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned, & most exceptionable parts of Richardsons [sic]; & 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 and mourned over its Discomfitures with more Tenderness than c^d ever have been

contemplated by the Authors. (MW, p. 404)

Significantly, Austen attributes this misreading to the reader's "perversity of Judgement" owing to "not having by Nature a very strong head" as well as to "exceptionable" parts in novels. She does seem to feel that such misreadings are willful rather than involuntary, as Johnson's formulation would have it: i. e., producing "effects almost without the intervention of the will" (Rambler, I, 22).

²⁹ This resistance to the mixed character of Mrs. Delville is more fully discussed in the section on Cecilia in Chapter III. The relevant passages may be found in Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, 1778-1840, ed. Charlotte Barrett, pref. and notes, Austin Dobson (London, 1904-5), II, 72-73 and 154. (Cited hereafter as Diary and Letters.)

³⁰ Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others, ed. R. W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (1952; rpt. London, 1964), pp. 486-87. (Hereafter cited as Letters.)

³¹ Some readers would disagree. Cavils at Mr. Knightley's perfection are more common in literary conversation than in published criticism, but one early instance is worth citing. Lord Brabourne, Austen's great-nephew, found Mr. Knightley an eminently respectable hero--too respectable, in fact, to be a hero at all. . . . I have never felt satisfied with the marriage, and feel very sure that Emma was not nearly so happy as she pretended. I am certain that he frequently lectured her, was jealous of every agreeable man that

ventured to say a civil word to her, and evinced his intellectual superiority by such a plethora of eminently suitable conversations, as either speedily hurried her to to an untimely grave, or induced her to run away with somebody possessed of an inferior intellect, but more endearing qualities (Letters of Jane Austen, ed. Brabourne [1884], I, 89-90; rpt. in Casebook, pp. 59-60).

I know of no worse misreading of Mr. Knightley's character, excepting always that of an acquaintance--a feminist and an English professor too--who said she would rather be married to Mr. John Knightley of the two, forgetting Mr. John Knightley's choice of (and happiness with) the mindless Isabella as a wife. Chapman's hostility to Mr. Knightley's character is more conventionally expressed. He does declare that "all must agree that he is a perfect English gentleman," but finds him unattractive: "some elderly people may put George Knightley at the head of their list" (Jane Austen: Facts and Problems [1948; rpt. Oxford, 1967], p. 201).

The parallels between Emma and Sir Charles Grandison are worth a passing mention. In both novels, a perfect hero marries a lively, witty, vain, and faulty heroine (Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Byron--although Harriet is rather too saintly in places) instead of a more serious and reserved anti-heroine who suffers in mind and body from an enforced concealment of love (Jane Fairfax, Clementina della Porretta). The parallelism is imperfect, for Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax do not love one another as Sir Charles and Clementina do. Nevertheless, Austen's power to create a character as full of perfection as Sir Charles but unlike him, vivid,

vigorous, charming, and sexually attractive, is unique, and her success becomes most obvious when compared to Richardson's difficulties and failures with Sir Charles; see Chapter III.

³² Lady Louisa Stuart, Selections from her Manuscripts, ed. James Home (New York, 1899), p. 235.

³³ Diary and Letters, II, 154.

³⁴ This structural principle, or linear irony, has been remarked by other readers. Jane Nardin, for example, calls it "delayed rhetorical irony" (Elegant Decorums, p. 6) and connects it to Austen's thematic concern "with deception and the reevaluation of more or less mistaken standards of value" (p. 4). She thinks as I do that Austen intends "to make her readers participate in the processes of discovery experienced by her characters" but feels as I do not that Austen achieves this intention by weaving "a narrative fabric of evasions, half-truths, and downright lies, through which the reader must pick his own way" (pp. 4-5). This technique forces the reader into a "habit of reading with suspended judgment" (p. 7), so that "all Jane Austen's novels are lessons in learning to think for ourselves" (p. 9). My own view is similar, but with a difference in emphasis. I see "lessons" for the reader as more central to Austen's intentions than Nardin does; and I consider that Austen exploits the technique of linear irony in order to engage, test, undercut, and refine the reader's judgment without actually misleading him. Linear

irony depends for its effect on engaged, not suspended, judgment, and all Austen's techniques deliberately make suspension of judgment difficult.

³⁵ The Critic (Act III, Sc. 1) in The Plays and Poems of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, ed. R. Crompton Rhodes (New York, 1929), II, 238.

³⁶ Selected Letters, p. 248.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-88.

³⁸ As I use them, these terms are distinct. Some of the characters' wit in Pride and Prejudice does not really occur in dialogue (which implies exchange or reciprocity), but in isolation. Mr. Bennet's wit is often isolated from dialogue in this sense. See the discussion in Chapter IV, Section 111 (2).

³⁹ Jane Austen's Novels, p. 31.

I: NORTHANGER ABBEY

Jane Austen's earliest novel, Northanger Abbey (1803; published 1818),¹ is by far the most "bookish." Written in response to contemporary fiction, it exhibits the most visibly comic relation to that fiction of all Austen's full-length works. It insists on pointing up, and treating comically, the incongruities between literature and life, and the tendencies of novels to imitate each other rather than life. In this sense, Northanger Abbey is a novel about writing novels, even an "anti-novel," as long as these terms imply no portentousness and allow Austen to delight in, and occasionally to exploit, the conventions she exposes and parodies. Later, in Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, allusions to the conventions of contemporary fiction will be equally pervasive, but less obvious and more fully absorbed. Some conventions, especially structural ones, will simply be appropriated (courtship ending in marriage, two central contrasting female characters). Others, Austen will learn to use as one means to complicate and manipulate her readers' responses to the characters: witness the problems for interpretation caused in Sense and Sensibility by Marianne Dashwood, who is a highly conventional character both in that her tastes, judgments, and behavior are governed by established modes of sensibility, and in that she shares

this quality with many other contemporary heroines. Jane Austen's later novels include, then, some serious uses for literary conventions. In Northanger Abbey, however, comic, flamboyant, and even outrageous allusions to books and their conventions are the rule.²

Several literary references in the first chapter proclaim that the relation between literature and life will be a major concern, and further, that this relation will depend on an inversion: the events, anticipations, responses, and qualities that are ordinary in life become extraordinary in fiction:

No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine. . . . She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dermouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rosebush. Indeed she had no taste for a garden; and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief--at least so it was conjectured from her always preferring those which she was forbidden to take.--Such were her propensities--her abilities were quite as extraordinary. She never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid. (13-14)

This joke on literature and life, once announced, is never allowed to drop, however it is developed or transformed. Each succeeding chapter insists on repeating or extending the joke or (more respectably) theme, and theories which conjecture that the Gothic parody was interpolated at a later date fail to reckon with this insistence.

A theme so clear and so loudly proclaimed ought to make Northanger Abbey the simplest and most lucid of Jane Austen's works--yet critics do disagree, if not about the presence of

the theme, then about its execution. Clearly, difficulties must arise for an author who handles such a theme: an anti-novel must be a novel nonetheless, an anti-heroine a heroine still; and rejecting or ridiculing one set of conventions entails adopting another set. Each of these paradoxes poses a separable critical problem, though all are closely related. The first becomes the problem of whether the Bath sections and the "Gothic" or Abbey sections are unified; the second, whether Catherine's character is interesting or developed enough; the third, whether the melodramatic climax of the plot (General Tilney's expelling Catherine from the Abbey) and its resolution are credible or acceptable. Critics disagree both in their estimations of Jane Austen's success in dealing with each of these problems, and in the importance they attach to each.

1. Critical Problems

A few critics find that Jane Austen has successfully unified the Bath and Abbey sections. Joseph Wiesenfarth locates a "pervasive pattern" through which Catherine learns to "read" fictions, whether created by authors like Mrs. Radcliffe or characters like Isabella and General Tilney.³ A. Walton Litz's view is similar: Catherine must learn to regulate the "sympathetic imagination" so as to avoid "uncritical acceptance of fictions."⁴ Rather more ingeniously, Frank J. Kearful argues that the two strands of "satire" and "novelistic" fiction are

reconciled by the theme: Austen combines literary modes "in such a fashion as to make us aware of the paradoxical nature of all illusion--even those illusions by which we master illusion."⁵ Critics who deny the unity of the novel are in the majority, however; and although they differ slightly in their terms for its parts, they agree that Austen fails to make a whole of them. They find, variously, that Austen does not unify "a novel of manners and a literary response to the Gothic novel,"⁶ "social and moral comment" and "literary burlesque,"⁷ a "realistic novel" and a "Gothic novel."⁸ Alan D. McKillop, among others, thinks Catherine's "active pursuit of Gothic illusions . . . jolts the story rather violently" and produces "crude burlesque."⁹ C. S. Emden's view is the most extreme: he claims that the "laboured descriptions and serious moralizing of the Gothic episode" are so distinct from the "light satire of contemporary manners" in the rest of the novel, that the episode can be excised as a later interpolation, allowing the "youthful jeu d'esprit" to be "recovered as a work of art and appreciated as an organic whole."¹⁰

The credibility and development of Catherine's character are issues very intimately connected with the problem of unity. If Catherine matures at Bath, then how can she be so gullible at Northanger? Does she mature at Bath, or is she intended to be merely functional, serving the themes rather than developing as a character? Critics who see Catherine as inconsistent or undeveloped usually find the Bath and Northanger sections

discontinuous, and the latter dissatisfying. Those who detect an educative or maturing process are generally satisfied with the novel. Thus, Mary Lascelles finds that Catherine is making the "passage from child to woman,"¹¹ and Yasmine Gooneratne that she changes from "immature child to responsible adult."¹² For Norman Sherry, the novel shows an "educative process which is to mature her,"¹³ and for H. S. Babb, it is "a novel about education" in which Austen "dramatizes her theme most richly" through Henry's and Catherine's dialogues, "rendering in them the very process of education."¹⁴ An extreme statement of the opposite position, that Catherine is "purely functional,"¹⁵ so that her character is dictated simply by the requirements of burlesque, is presented in passing by Q. D. Leavis. Although Robert Liddell is prepared merely to contradict this view by claiming that Catherine exhibits "more life and individuality than the stock heroine,"¹⁶ this contradiction is precisely what disturbs other critics. They object, not that Catherine is merely functional, but that her functions are contradictory, and in this they locate the immaturity and failure of the novel. McKillop distinguishes between Catherine's common sense and quixotry, concluding that Austen's "difficulties come from trying to develop both possibilities at the same time."¹⁷ According to Andrew Wright, Catherine's "inadequacies as a heroine . . . exist because Jane Austen tries to do too much with her--to establish her both as a gooselike parody of the sentimental-Gothic heroine, and to

advance claims for her as a human being."¹⁸ Kenneth Moler considers the novel "immature": "Catherine's adventures as a female Quixote mar the credibility of the more realistic 'serious' story of her development into maturity."¹⁹ Stuart Tave agrees: "The small but promising development of the artless Catherine at Bath is then, in the second stage of her career . . . reversed."²⁰ A more precise statement of this position is offered by Marvin Mudrick, who sees "too abrupt a transition" from Catherine's unimaginative "matter-of-factness" at Bath, where she "believes exactly what people say," to an "imaginative credulity" at Northanger.²¹ Because it is precise, his analysis invites objection. Catherine does show a literary imagination at Bath, particularly in her reading of Captain Tilney's behavior. She attributes his late arrival at breakfast to "the inquietude of his mind, on Isabella's account" which has kept him "long sleepless," and his silence to depression ("so much were his spirits affected") (155). Attempts to confirm or deny the coherence of Catherine's character are equally futile. Between Catherine's character at Bath and at Northanger no clear dividing line may be drawn and no consistent development traced. Jane Austen's interests in Catherine, and in the novel, lie elsewhere.

However Catherine's character is assessed, nothing so strenuous is demanded of it as is required of General Tilney's: his character moves the plot, providing the climax and resolution. At least one of Austen's contemporaries balked at this; Maria

Edgeworth wrote to her aunt,

The behavior of the General in "Northanger Abbey," packing off the young lady without a servant or the common civilities which any bear of a man, not to say gentleman, would have shown, is quite outrageously out of drawing and out of nature.²²

Modern critics who discuss the General's character agree, though in different terms. Liddell thinks the General "entirely functional," citing his "unlikely" acceptance of John Thorpe's "unsupported testimony" of Catherine's wealth and his later "unlikelier" belief in her poverty.²³ Mudrick similarly objects that Austen "seems concerned, ultimately, much less to make him consistent than to keep him at his function," as the "tyrannical parent" essential to conventional love plots.²⁴ Most discussions of the General's role in the novel, however, are concerned with the effect of his actions on the theme, not with their (or his) credibility. Irony has, after all, supplanted Edgeworth's "nature" as a literary desideratum, and critics who find in the climax a crowning irony are not lacking. Lionel Trilling's formulation is neat:

We are quick, too quick, to understand that Northanger Abbey invites us into a snug conspiracy to disabuse the little heroine of the errors of her corrupted fancy--Catherine Morland, having become addicted to novels of terror, has accepted their inadmissible premise, she believes that life is violent and unpredictable. And this is exactly what life is shown to be by the events of the story; it is we who must be disabused of our belief that life is sane and orderly.²⁵

Andrew Wright refines this into a moral for the novel:

"Good sense[,] ironically, is limited too," because "we cannot altogether apprehend the real world by good sense alone."²⁶ Litz agrees with Trilling and extends his view:

Catherine's belief in a violent and uncertain life lurking beneath the surface of English society is nearer the truth than the complacent conviction, shared by the readers of Mrs. Radcliffe, that life in the Home Counties is always sane and orderly. . . . Jane Austen's irony is not directed at Catherine's sympathetic imagination, but at her misuse of it; and the novel's deepest criticism is reserved for the average reader's complacent reaction to the exposure of Catherine's "folly."²⁷

Readers who wish to find explicit moral norms within the text, rather than irony, are, on the other hand, disturbed by the climax. W. A. Craik considers that the "moral effect" of Henry Tilney's rebuke to Catherine for her Gothic illusions is "undermined" by the General's subsequent villainy.²⁸ Kenneth Moler also considers Henry's stance a norm which the climax contradicts, and he rejects the ironic interpretation as a possible way out of the difficulty: "There does not seem to be the slightest indication that the general's conduct is designed to undermine the novel's assertion that common sense such as Henry's leads to the maximum possible amount of clear-sightedness."²⁹ Alastair Duckworth concludes instead that the novel dramatizes negative standards, not positive ones: Austen's "ideal moral outlook is not Tilney's rationalism, not Catherine's benevolent ingenuousness, not her undisciplined imagination"; although an ideal is "implied," the characters do not voice or embody it, for "Jane Austen fails to dramatize a moral outlook in the novel's resolution."³⁰

These different problems isolated by the critics, and their different stances, do not preclude agreement on two fundamental issues: approaching Northanger Abbey, and ranking it in relation

to Jane Austen's other works. With few exceptions,³¹ critics assign it the lowest rank, while appreciating its freshness and while finding in it many hints or anticipations of later style, treatment, themes, characters, and dialogue. Certainly these hints can be pointed out when searched for; nevertheless, to approach Northanger Abbey in this way, with expectations and standards created by the other novels, is not entirely revealing or just and inevitably entails critical views as widely diverging as those just cited. The differences between Northanger Abbey and the later novels are far more significant than any similarities or parallels, though these do exist, particularly whenever Austen momentarily suspends her mockery of literary conventions in order to mock the insipid social conventions of Bath: its balls (Catherine's first visit to the Upper Rooms is especially appalling), its Sunday promenades, and above all its conversation, explicitly ridiculed by Henry Tilney:

After chatting some time on such matters as naturally arose from the objects around them, he suddenly addressed her with-- "I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether." (25)

More important, Northanger Abbey is full of jokes about judgments like those central to the later novels: "Catherine was complimented out of further bitterness. Frederick could not be unpardonably guilty, while Henry made himself so agreeable" (219). Finding such likenesses offers no clue as

to what Jane Austen is actually doing, however, and in fact obscures it; the differences between Northanger Abbey and the other novels are far more illuminating and must be explored if her intentions are to be defined. To do this will not reverse the judgment already pronounced. From any approach, Northanger Abbey remains the least satisfying of Austen's novels, and the slightest in emotional and moral content. It is this way, however, with a purpose. Northanger Abbey intentionally differs from the five other novels in almost every possible way.

11. Northanger Abbey and the Later Novels

The major difference has already been suggested and can be expressed readily enough: Northanger Abbey is simply comic and lacks most of the moral concerns and discriminations of the other Austen novels. This difference extends to the character of the hero, Henry Tilney. No other Austen hero is so superior in wit to the heroine, and yet it is difficult to claim that he educates Catherine in anything but a greater consciousness of convention. He does not supply a moral standard which the heroine must learn to accept or move toward, as Emma moves toward Mr. Knightley's. Nor is he in need of any enlightenment or reformation parallel to the heroine's, as Mr. Darcy is. His function instead is to make jokes about literary and social convention. He is alive to all clichés of feeling and language, and his insistence on using words discriminatingly

is relentless but hardly "moral." He teases Catherine about using words like "faithful" (196), "torment" (109), and "nice" (108) inaccurately, but only accuracy is at stake: when Catherine remarks, "'I really thought before, young men despised novels amazingly,'" he replies, "'It is amazingly; it may well suggest amazement if they do--for they read nearly as many as women'" (107). All his corrections are made in the same tone and are thus utterly lacking in the emotional and moral resonance of Mr. Knightley's response to Emma's describing Frank Churchill as amiable; when he rejects that description, he vents his jealousy and at the same time uses the words "amiable" and "aimable" to make a distinction between manners and morals:

"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." (149)

Even if Catherine can be said to learn anything from Henry, it does not amount to a moral growth of any kind; for once, Jane Austen fails to accord a moral dimension to the mastery of social (and in this case, literary) convention.

Other techniques and qualities usually associated with Jane Austen are also conspicuously absent in Northanger Abbey. It has, for instance, fewer major characters than any other Austen novel, with the result that the parallels and contrasts between characters, so extensive and so carefully exploited later, are perfunctory or simply lacking. Similarly, dialogue

in Northanger Abbey does not try for the complex effects achieved later; no speeches convey feelings or motives more complicated than Isabella's, and none are conveyed more subtly.³² When Catherine reveals her infatuation for Henry, she sounds very like Isabella herself, although her transparency springs from artlessness and Isabella's from "shallow artifice" (218). Catherine inquires, "'Was not the young lady he danced with on Monday a Miss Smith?'" and Miss Tilney replies:

"Yes, an acquaintance of Mrs. Hughes."

"I dare say she was very glad to dance. Do you think her pretty?"

"Not very."

"He never comes to the Pump-room, I suppose?" (73)

Much of the dialogue is like this, "broad" (Austen's own term)³³ rather than revealing. Even Henry's irony is often similarly broad, especially juxtaposed with Catherine's literalness; and during one of the few times he is serious, that is, when he first indicates to the reader his own feelings for Catherine, he provides a measure of Jane Austen's unconcern in this novel with subtly revealing dialogue. Catherine has explained her seeming rudeness in driving off when she was engaged to walk with him and with his sister, and although he has become cordial again, for Catherine

yet a something of solicitude remained, from which sprang the following question, thoroughly artless in itself, though rather distressing to the gentleman:--"But, Mr. Tilney, why were you less generous than your sister? If she felt such confidence in my good intentions, and could suppose it to be only a mistake, why should you be so ready to take offence?"

"Me!--I take offence?"

"Nay, I am sure by your look, when you came into the box, you were angry."

"I angry! I could have no right."

"Well, nobody would have thought you had no right who saw your face." He replied by asking her to make room for him, and talking of the play. (94-95)

This exchange falls rather flat, and Henry's distress or embarrassment is conveyed far more by Austen's explicit statement than by his words.

Even the comedy in Northanger Abbey is simple in one sense, that is, lacking in development, by comparison with the later novels. Jane Austen shows no interest in obtaining through careful repetition the cumulative comic effects achieved elsewhere. Mrs. Allen's repeated "wish of a numerous acquaintance in Bath" (25) is, once voiced, merely referred to at the start of two succeeding chapters; it has none of the comic, or even explosive, force of assertive, immutable human idiocy which distinguish Mrs. Bennet's whines over the entail of Longbourn and Mrs. Norris's outbursts of indignation over the large dining table at Mansfield parsonage.

Catherine's character, however, sets Northanger Abbey most completely apart from the other novels' comic techniques and concern with moral judgments. The critical dispute, impossible elsewhere, over whether she matures or not is symptomatic of the futility of approaching her character with expectations created by other Austen heroines. She does not live in the complicated world of moral perception and moral choice that they inhabit. Although she is often required to choose, both the choices and their consequences are usually treated only comically; they are not felt, nor meant to be:

witness the unlucky decision to drive with John Thorpe and consequent failure to walk with the Tilneys. Jane Austen is first rather heavily ironic about Catherine's distress:

And now I may dismiss my heroine to the sleepless couch, which is the true heroine's portion; to a pillow strewed with thorns and wet with tears. And lucky may she think herself, if she get another good night's rest in the course of the next three months. (90)

Austen follows this by conducting Catherine to a play the next evening, where "the comedy so well suspended her care, that no one, observing her during the first four acts, would have supposed she had any wretchedness about her" (92). The grief which follows with the fifth act, of seeing Henry cold to her, is meant to be amusing only: "Catherine was restlessly miserable; she could almost have run round to the box in which he sat, and forced him to hear her explanation" (93). Despite her naïveté and gullibility, Catherine consistently chooses well and behaves well, like Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot. Their good behavior, however, is often accompanied by some considerable cost to themselves. The reader is meant to feel their doubts or anxieties over their own judgments and actions, as well as their sufferings. By comparison, Catherine's good behavior is effortless; her doubts and anxieties are always treated comically and her distress nearly always, until the end when she is expelled from Northanger and some sustained misery is registered.

Catherine's remaining differences from the other heroines could, for the most part, be induced from the one already

mentioned. Just as Jane Austen shows no interest in placing Catherine within a complex world of moral perceptions and judgments, she neglects to provide for her the elaborate, fully imagined and realized social world of other heroines. Catherine is merely sketched in relation to her family, for instance; we know few of her nine brothers and sisters, and four names are not even supplied. Such sketchiness would be unthinkable in any of the other novels, where each of the heroines' homes is present to the imagination without being described in detail, and where the families of each are delineated, occasionally down to remote connections. All members of even Fanny Price's large family have names, and almost all have distinct personalities, although they are themselves anything but central to the action of Mansfield Park. Charlotte Heywood, the heroine of the unfinished novel Sanditon (1817), is the only other central character portrayed as sketchily as Catherine. Sanditon, in fact, can be considered a re-thinking of Northanger Abbey, an attempt to combine the freshness and burlesque energy of the latter with the explorations of emotional and moral responsiveness characteristic of the other novels.

It is mistaken to say that Northanger Abbey is entirely unconcerned with the judgments characters make of each other; rather, the distinct nature of its concern must be registered. Catherine is notorious, certainly, for her hilariously poor judgment of Isabella Thorpe--for taking Isabella at her own

valuation and for believing all her professions of affection. This flagrant error somewhat obscures Catherine's capacity to estimate other characters correctly, even shrewdly. One of the difficulties encountered in claiming that Catherine matures, in fact, is that she is capable from the start of certain discriminations. Thus, when she first meets Henry Tilney, she detects his foible despite being attracted to him, a feat none of Jane Austen's other heroines accomplish: "Catherine feared . . . that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others" (29). Later, when Henry appears, thanks to Catherine's literalness, to have been rude to his sister ("she is by no means a simpleton in general"), "Catherine looked grave" (113). Jane Austen is poking fun at her solemnity, but the indicated readiness to judge is not isolated. Despite her literalness, she does not credit Anne Thorpe's professed happiness at being excluded from the drive to Clifton (115), nor, more important, John Thorpe's affection for her: "She was almost as far from believing as from wishing it to be sincere." Catherine's mixture of naïveté and shrewdness is perfectly illustrated by the rest of the passage:

she had not forgotten that [John Thorpe] could mistake, and his assertion of the offer and of her encouragement convinced her that his mistakes could sometimes be very egregious. In vanity therefore she gained but little, her chief profit was in wonder. That he should think it worth his while to fancy himself in love with her, was a matter of lively astonishment. Isabella talked of his attentions; she had never been sensible of any; but Isabella had said many things which she hoped had been spoken in haste, and would never be said again; and upon

this she was glad to rest altogether for present ease and comfort. (148)

These reflections occur before Catherine leaves Bath, and provide one of several indications that any reading of her development as continuous, like Kenneth Moler's, is untenable, however attractive. He sees Catherine as moving from the "naïve vision of youth" which judges others as if they shared one's own good nature to the "black and white, adolescent 'vision of romance'" which "magnifies [General Tilney's] ill nature and disingenuousness until in her eyes he assumes the stature of a fictional villain." This "oversimplified 'black and white' moral vision" then gives way to "an approximation of the more complex and subtle conception of human nature that is her author's,"³⁴ that is, an understanding of the mixed character. But Catherine's earliest ingenuousness does not desert her even after her Gothic illusions are dispelled and she has learned through James's letter that Isabella is mercenary; she still believes General Tilney is not mercenary simply because he says so and in spite of his children's different opinion: his "generous and disinterested sentiments on the subject of money . . . tempted her to think his disposition in such matters misunderstood by his children" (208).

Jane Austen is simply not interested in showing a consistent or continuous development in Catherine's judgment or in her character. She prefers to call upon Catherine's shrewdness and her naïveté alternately, depending on which

will create the most unexpected or incongruous effect. That is, Catherine is comic throughout; Jane Austen keeps up the joke of a naïve, not unintelligent, good-natured character who cannot detect artifice, who almost always takes everything at face value: irony, insincerity, and even novels. The situation created is conventional, but not often treated principally for comedy; Moler notes that "the naïve young person in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature is often a reproach to the folly and vice of the sophisticated society into which he is introduced."³⁵ Nevertheless, both the theme (naïveté operating in a vulgar or sophisticated circle) and its essentially comic treatment in Northanger Abbey have analogues. The theme is central to Fanny Burney's Evelina (1778), and brilliantly inverted in Henry James's The Europeans (1878), where sophistication is utterly disarmed by being placed in a naïve circle. Like Northanger Abbey, both novels exploit the comic possibilities of the situation in preference to its moral ones, though both authors later reverse themselves in order to emphasize moral implications over comic effects, Fanny Burney rather clumsily in Camilla; or, a Picture of Youth (1796), but James magnificently in What Maisie Knew (1897), where this theme certainly receives its most profound and moving development.

Jane Austen herself loses interest in the theme after Northanger Abbey,³⁶ at least, she never again chooses to construct a novel in which the heroine's judgments are so

naïve, and have so little moral or emotional resonance, whether they are correct or incorrect. Later heroines will pride themselves on their judgments, like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse--and very unlike Catherine--and will suffer some humiliation in consequence; or they will judge correctly but suffer for it in various ways--equally unlike Catherine. These differences between the other novels and Northanger Abbey are, again, characteristic and pervasive, and reflect an enormous distinction in conception, technique, and final effect. In the later novels, each character and each scene must be weighed in relation to the rest; even in the first of them, Sense and Sensibility, every major effect is cumulative, and Emma has an almost impenetrable density. Northanger Abbey, on the other hand, obtains its effects almost entirely by reversing the reader's expectations relentlessly and outrageously, by administering continual rude shocks which, however, are felt only in relation to the ones immediately preceding and following, each shock cancelling the one before instead of adding to it. In other words, Northanger Abbey is one-dimensional, without the flimsiness that implies: immediacy, excitement, and thrust are achieved and do in some degree compensate for losses in sustained or accumulated power.

iii. The Intentions of Northanger Abbey

The question remains, why does Jane Austen choose to write a novel like Northanger Abbey? This question, not surprisingly,

entails a number of others. First, if Catherine and the novel itself can be faulted by so many critics for failing to develop coherently, and for existing merely as vehicles for the author's burlesque intentions, then perhaps these intentions will bear closer examination. That is, what are Jane Austen's designs on her readers? Specifically, does she use burlesque to manipulate her readers in any way, beyond that already mentioned: jolting them, frustrating or confounding their expectations of a novel (which is something she will always do, though less violently). If these further or larger designs exist, how significant or successful can they be if they have remained unobserved by her critics--by her readers, in other words?

In general, critics have not neglected the burlesque elements in Northanger Abbey. They point out the conventions mocked and suggest possible models; they note the degree to which Austen's burlesque is superior to her contemporaries', lighter, more charming, and more amusing; and they note the contributions of burlesque to the theme of the novel and to its statements on art and life. Their study ought to be exhaustive, then, but is not, probably because at the same time the burlesque elements are felt to be excrescences, hiding or obscuring or sometimes quite obliterating what interests the critics more: character development, social comedy, mastery of dialogue. As a result, Jane Austen's interests can be partially overlooked, particularly in the Gothic burlesque.

Certainly both genres burlesqued, the sentimental novel and

its Gothic offshoot, are now felt to be so ridiculous and so remote from life that exploding them seems gratuitous; but the sentimental burlesque is better received and more discussed, no doubt because it allows (or at any rate does not prevent) the social comedy and satire which the "Gothic interlude" at *Northanger* is thought to interrupt. And it is true that if Jane Austen were merely mocking the absurdities of these genres, or pointing out that Gothic and sentimental novels do or do not have any relation to life, then the burlesque elements in *Northanger Abbey* would have received all the attention they could deserve. But Jane Austen does more than this. She explores the emotional basis or appeal of sentimental and Gothic fiction, although not simply "to expose both its basic sentimentality and fundamental unreality," as Litz claims when speaking of the "Radcliffean novel."³⁷ It would be neat and satisfying but equally inaccurate to say instead that she discovers and exploits whatever may be genuine or moving in either genre. She does, but incidentally; such discoveries do not seem to be her main concern. Her real interest is, evidently, more playful: she wants to bring off a tour de force, to expose her readers to everything absurd in a convention or genre and then to make the convention "work" all the same. That is, she explodes a convention and then uses it straight, and in doing so, succeeds in eliciting a response from the reader in spite of himself. In the later novels too she attempts to elicit responses which go against the grain,

but there her purpose is didactic: she is educating the reader to produce somewhat more complex responses than he may be used to or care for. In Northanger Abbey, however, she demonstrates the force of literary convention, its fundamental accommodation and appeal to human emotions--but she also simply shows off her power over her readers.

iv. Manipulation of Sentimental Convention

In dealing with the emotions which underlie sentimental conventions, Austen is on the whole less bold and less successful in her designs on her readers than she is in her treatment of Gothic conventions, perhaps because sentimental conventions may be further removed than Gothic ones from genuine feelings. By far the most characteristic feature, amounting to a convention, of the sentimental novel was "distress." As J. M. S. Tompkins has noted,

"Distress" was a technical term in criticism, and authors set themselves . . . to get the heroine to the point when she finds herself penniless in a hackney-coach in London, with nowhere to drive to, with a rising fever and an injured reputation.³⁸

Falsity and absurdity underlie the convention, for unnatural, strained behavior (often called "delicacy") is invariably required to produce and sustain the "distress," and only Richardson in Clarissa could sufficiently motivate and justify such behavior. Jane Austen very neatly and very consistently burlesques this convention in Northanger Abbey; she treats Catherine's "heroic" distresses comically, so much

so, that Catherine's distress at Northanger comes as a shock, and is meant to.

Jane Austen's methods of preparing this shock are worth examining. From the start, she takes every opportunity to mock and deflate the conventional distresses of novel heroines, beginning with Catherine's "false position" at a ball; she is engaged to dance with John Thorpe, but he doesn't appear:

as the real dignity of her situation could not be known, she was sharing with the scores of other young ladies still sitting down all the discredit of wanting a partner. To be disgraced in the eye of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence, and the misconduct of another the true source of her debasement, is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine's life, and her fortitude under it what particularly dignifies her character. Catherine had fortitude too; she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips. (53)

Here Catherine does play a conventional heroine's part, but the part and its trials and sufferings are deflated and trivialized. The next occasion for distress is somewhat more serious, though equally conventional, and Catherine's role is in this case anti-heroic. When Henry is cold to her at the play, having evidently misjudged her (a situation highly favored by Austen's predecessors, especially Fanny Burney),

Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her; instead of considering her own dignity injured by this ready condemnation--instead of proudly resolving, in conscious innocence, to shew her resentment towards him who could harbour a doubt of it, to leave to him all the trouble of seeking an explanation, and to enlighten him on the past only by avoiding his sight, or flirting with somebody else, she took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause. (93)

And Catherine does explain herself to Henry almost immediately.

Jane Austen has exposed here everything false and absurd

in the sentimental novel's convention of distress by the device already mentioned and most noticed by critics: substituting life for literature, and "natural" for "heroic" responses. Again and again, Austen points the contrast between "natural" and conventional responses, between "common feelings of common life" and "the refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions" of sentimental fiction (19) or between "The anxieties of common life" and the "alarms of romance" (201). But even this obsessive concern cannot quite account for Austen's choosing to duplicate, in the very next chapter (XIII), the incidents which led to Catherine's explanation and self-justification at the play. In Chapter XI, John Thorpe persuades Catherine to drive with him by telling her he saw the Tilneys drive out of town, so that she cannot possibly keep her engagement to walk with them. In Chapter XII, Catherine has the opportunity at the play to explain to Henry her seeming rudeness in not keeping her engagement. In Chapter XIII, Catherine has once more engaged herself to walk with the Tilneys, and refuses a drive to Clifton with her brother and the Thorpes. John Thorpe tries to force her to go by telling the Tilneys that she will walk with them another time, for she has recollected a prior engagement to drive to Clifton. Catherine runs after the Tilneys to explain, and to reconfirm the original plan. The duplication is almost exact, then, and is thus especially puzzling; what can this second incident add to the novel? Conventional heroic delicacy has

already been completely parodied; Catherine's steadiness, her determination and power to do right, and her willingness to explain herself have all been established; and the Thorpes' selfishness and unscrupulousness surely need no further development. The difference between the two incidents, and the reason for the second, seems to lie in tone. The second incident is treated more seriously than the first, though still comically. It lacks the constant broadly ironic reminders of what a heroine's behavior ought to be. Instead, Catherine is briefly allowed to be a heroine. She is under pressure from the Thorpes and from her brother to change her mind and to do something she thinks is wrong. When she resists, they are very angry, she is distressed, and her distress is registered, though with some traces of irony at Catherine's expense in the clichés used ("hearts at war," "heart swelled");

The three others still continued together, walking in a most uncomfortable manner to poor Catherine; some times not a word was said, sometimes she was again attacked with supplications or reproaches, and her arm was still linked within Isabella's, though their hearts were at war. At one moment she was softened, at another irritated; always distressed, but always steady.

"I did not think you had been so obstinate, Catherine," said James; "you were not used to be so hard to persuade; you once were the kindest, best-tempered of my sisters."

"I hope I am not less so now," she replied, very feelingly; "but indeed I cannot go. If I am wrong, I am doing what I believe to be right."

"I suspect," said Isabella, in a low voice, "there is no great struggle."

Catherine's heart swelled; she drew away her arm, and Isabella made no opposition. (99-100)

Catherine's steadiness here helps make the scene more remarkable, for its emotional content is much greater and

more felt than is usual in Northanger Abbey, and yet neither moral growth in Catherine nor a moral choice is at issue.³⁹ Instead, Jane Austen seems, in a rather uncertain way, to be playing with her readers: she treats Catherine's distress and the situation causing it first in a wholly comic and parodic manner, and once she has thus convinced her readers that novelistic distress of the conventional sort has no real foundation in human behavior or emotion, or at all events that such distress will not be found in her novel, she loses no time in making just such distress felt, both by her heroine and by her readers. If this is her design, however, she does not insist on it. As Catherine runs after the Tilneys and finally runs up the stairs in their lodgings, distance is gained in every sense; comedy supplants distress:

Then, opening the first door before her, which happened to be the right, she immediately found herself in the drawing-room with General Tilney, his son and daughter. Her explanation, defective only in being--from her irritation of nerves and shortness of breath--no explanation at all, was instantly given. "I am come in a great hurry--It was all a mistake--I never promised to go--I told them from the first I could not go.--I ran away in a great hurry to explain it.--I did not care what you thought of me.--I would not stay for the servant." (102)

Comedy is re-established so quickly that the shock of Catherine actually being in real distress has scarcely time to be felt; this is not so at the novel's climax (when Catherine is thrown out of Northanger), which is also the climax to Austen's treatment of sentimental convention. This climax is more clearly and intentionally shocking, for Austen has very carefully left the reader wholly unprepared for it.

Not only has she previously done everything to minimize Catherine's distresses and to establish the unlikelihood of her suffering a heroine's trials, but she has also included an early prediction of this particular trial, designed to convince the reader to expect no such thing. When Captain Tilney is introduced, the reader is assured that "He cannot be the instigator of the three villains in horsemen's great coats, by whom she will hereafter be forced into a travelling-chaise and four, which will drive off with incredible speed" (131). The reader is surely left, like Catherine, "undisturbed by presentiments of such an evil" (131), and yet the evil actually and almost literally occurs. Possibly, then, the critical dispute over the credibility or significance of this climax is beside the point. Jane Austen intentionally sacrifices credibility in General Tilney's character in order to make the climax more shocking; the climax is meant to shock, meant to create in the reader those responses of sympathy and concern that the conventional distress of a sentimental heroine was supposed to excite, but with a difference. The self-indulgent tears, the "refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions" (19) of sentimental fiction are neither evoked in the reader nor displayed by the heroine. In fact, Jane Austen carefully points out that Catherine's own responses to this catastrophe are free from self-conscious, sentimental, or Gothic exaggeration and heightening, and no doubt Austen expects her readers to

imitate Catherine in this. Austen does, in any case, take pains to point out the differences in Catherine's responses: for example, having learned that she must leave Northanger in the morning,

Sleep, or repose that deserved the name of sleep, was out of the question. That room, in which her disturbed imagination had tormented her on her first arrival, was again the scene of agitated spirits and unquiet slumbers. Yet how different now the source of her inquietude from what it had been then--how mournfully superior in reality and substance! Her anxiety had foundation in fact, her fears in probability; and with a mind so occupied in the contemplation of actual and natural evil, the solitude of her situation, the darkness of her chamber, the antiquity of the building were felt and considered without the smallest emotion; and though the wind was high, and often produced strange and sudden noises throughout the house, she heard it all as she lay awake, hour after hour, without curiosity or terror. (227)

These points are evidently so important to Austen that she underlines them, noting that during the ride home,

Catherine was too wretched to be fearful. The journey in itself had no terrors for her; and she began it without either dreading its length, or feeling its solitariness. (230)

Jane Austen seems to have set herself the task of ridiculing or debunking at least two sentimental clichés and then using them seriously in the climax. She earlier mocks the particular cliché of the distressed heroine, villain, and post-chaise and four, and here makes it both surprising and effective to some extent. She counts on surprise or shock, in fact, to produce the effect; that is, she relies on a jolt to her reader's expectations as a means to create in him a response to a heroine's distress somewhat less hackneyed, more fresh, than usual. In the same way, she often ridicules the cliché or convention of the heroine who stands on her dignity,

and then at the climax she allows Catherine to do just that with Eleanor:

the appearance of the carriage was the first thing to startle and recall them to the present moment. Catherine's colour rose at the sight of it; and the indignity with which she was treated striking at that instant on her mind with peculiar force, made her for a short time sensible only of resentment. Eleanor seemed now impelled into resolution and speech.

"You must write to me, Catherine," she cried, "you must let me hear from you as soon as possible. Till I know you to be safe at home, I shall not have an hour's comfort. For one letter, at all risks, all hazards, I must entreat. Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe at Fullerton, and have found your family well, and then, till I can ask for your correspondence as I ought to do, I will not expect more. Direct to me at Lord Longtown's, and, I must ask it, under cover to Alice."

"No, Eleanor, if you are not allowed to receive a letter from me, I am sure I had better not write. There can be no doubt of my getting home safe." (228)

Austen is not interested, however, in using Eleanor's and Catherine's friendship to sustain or even to work up the stock sentimental conflict between pride and love. Just as Catherine is not called upon to decide whether she can stay at Northanger after the General's insult, with the result that "neither clemency nor dignity was put to the trial" (227), so Catherine softens to Eleanor immediately:

Eleanor only replied, "I cannot wonder at your feelings. I will not importune you. I will trust to your own kindness of heart when I am at a distance from you." But this, with the look of sorrow accompanying it, was enough to melt Catherine's pride in a moment, and she instantly said, "Oh, Eleanor, I will write to you indeed." (228-29)

Austen's real interest in this conventional scene, climaxing Eleanor's and Catherine's friendship, becomes clear when it is compared with the scenes which begin their friendship. Their introduction to each other comes after the conventions

of first conversations in Bath have been mocked by Henry Tilney and conversation itself has been utterly routed by Isabella Thorpe. Nevertheless, Catherine and Eleanor go "through the first rudiments of an acquaintance, by informing themselves how well the other liked Bath" (56), among other things (something Henry has specifically ridiculed); and at their second meeting,

though in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon. (72)

The start of their friendship shows that even the clichés and conventions of ordinary social life can enjoy some freshness if affectation is absent; similarly, the literary clichés and conventions which inform Catherine's and Eleanor's final scene together can be fresh and effective and moving when genuine, unaffected emotions replace exaggerated or self-conscious ones, in the characters and the readers both.

If this last represents Jane Austen's design in Northanger Abbey, its limitations must be acknowledged. She is not concerned to find or explore more serious, genuine forms of "distress" than conventional Gothic or sentimental ones; she confines herself very strictly to the existing conventions, and while she uses them in multiple ways, she is not attempting to manipulate her readers into any very complex or subtle, or even sustained, responses. The end follows the climax very closely, so that comic distance from

Catherine's distress, from the reader's possible responses, and even from the novelist's task, is soon re-established:

The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity. (250)

v. Manipulation of Gothic Convention

Northanger Abbey turns, then, on manipulating and teasing the reader's judgments of what will happen--will events be like life? like literature?--rather than his judgments of or feelings for characters. While this imposes a severe limitation on the novel, Jane Austen does manage to show, in her treatment of Gothic convention, the power this straightforward concern with plot, with what will happen, can have over the reader. For this reason, her treatment of the Gothic conventions is more skillful and more interesting than her treatment of the convention of distress, though her aims and techniques are nearly identical. In both cases, she starts by debunking the conventions, and then uses them straight; her ridicule of Gothic conventions is, however, more thorough and is more immediately followed by her attempt to produce with them the very curiosity, tension, suspense, and apprehension they aim at, which Henry Tilney has just mocked and Catherine has just repudiated.

Henry's mockery of Gothic conventions takes the form of

a very memorable, sustained parody in which he imagines several Gothic adventures for Catherine at the Abbey. The parody has many functions in Northanger Abbey, the first of which is sheer comedy. Austen takes the opportunity to revel in the clichés of Gothic fiction, not simply its stock situations and stock props, though Henry confutes these brilliantly, but also its stock descriptive phrases. In his opening paragraph, Henry assembles the hackneyed adjectives of Gothic description: the "dimly lighted" hall, the "expiring embers" of a fire, the "ancient housekeeper," "gloomy passages," and "gloomy chamber--too lofty and extensive," the "feeble rays of a single lamp," the "walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life, and the bed, of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funereal appearance" (158). These clichés are relentlessly pursued throughout his narration, reaching a kind of climax in the "violent storm" he evokes for the adventure, complete with "Peals of thunder" which "roll round the neighbouring mountains" and "shake the edifice to its foundation," and with "frightful gusts of wind" which will allow Catherine to see "one part of the hanging more violently agitated than the rest" (159). But although Gothic machinery is concentrated here, it actually spreads itself throughout, from the "broken lute" and "ponderous chest which no efforts can open" to the lamp which "suddenly expires in the socket" producing "total darkness"--and the

end of Henry's story.

More interesting comedy, however, results from the clichés which Henry uses for emotional responses: at first, "'Will not your mind misgive you,'" and "'Will not your heart sink within you?'" and later, "fainting spirits," "increased alarm," "unconquerable horror," "irresistible presentiment." These responses, so typical of Gothic heroines, are cleverly juxtaposed with Catherine's immediate responses to the narrative, suggesting the hackneyed but strong responses of the reader of Gothic fiction: disbelief coupled with imaginative belief. "'Oh! Mr. Tilney, how frightful!--This is just like a book!--But it cannot happen to me. I am sure your housekeeper is not really Dorothy.--Well, what then?'" (159). Austen's effects here are especially complex. She is calling attention to the comic incongruity between the average reader's immediate involvement with the plot, his eagerness for what will happen next, and his distance from it, his enjoyment of the luxury of suspense: what Austen herself calls "the luxury of a raised, restless, and frightened imagination" (51). Although she laughs at this combination of distance and involvement, and particularly at involvement with conventions so hackneyed, she will insist, in her next chapters, on her reader's responding in precisely the same way.

Henry's parody foreshadows, in a crude way, just how Austen will bring off this feat, and this constitutes its

second function. His narrative is punctuated by some especially heavy sarcasms at the expense of Gothic convention which are aimed at the reader and, naturally, wholly unperceived by Catherine: "'To raise your spirits, moreover, [the housekeeper] gives you reason to suppose that the part of the abbey you inhabit is undoubtedly haunted"; "'After surmounting your unconquerable horror of the bed"; "'Unable of course to repress your curiosity in so favourable a moment for indulging it"; "'which door, being only secured by massy bars and a padlock, you will, after a few efforts, succeed in opening"; "'you will . . . search into every drawer;-- but for some time without discovering any thing of importance --perhaps nothing but a considerable hoard of diamonds"; and above all,

"you will proceed into this small vaulted room, and through this into several others, without perceiving any thing very remarkable in either. In one perhaps there may be a dagger, in another a few drops of blood, and in a third the remains of some instrument of torture; but there being nothing in all this out of the common way . . . " (160)

These sarcasms, which merely underline Catherine's imperception as well as some of the most flagrant Gothic absurdities, interrupt more effective parody, and would be simply another gauge of the novel's youthfulness, if they did not indicate something else: the extreme care with which Jane Austen has designed her Gothic parody. Henry's rather abrupt alternations between imitative parody and sarcasm prefigure the far more subtle modulations between imitation and irony in the narration of Catherine's

adventures at Northanger; these allow Austen to play endless tricks on her readers. Henry's crudeness, however, lulls the reader into expecting (and sometimes, as many critics attest,⁴⁰ into perceiving) only very crude parody.

A final use for Henry's narrative is to influence Catherine's adventures: many parallels exist between them, and "Henry's words, his description of the ebony cabinet which was to escape her observation at first" (168) most explicitly spur Catherine to her second adventure, and comfort her after it:

Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly! And it was in a great measure his own doing, for had not the cabinet appeared so exactly to agree with his description of her adventures, she should never have felt the smallest curiosity about it. (173)

Robert Liddell is inexact, then, when he points out that "It does not seem to occur to Henry, to Catherine, or to their creator, that he has been partly responsible for Catherine's overheated imagination."⁴¹ The parody does serve to make Catherine's adventures somewhat more credible psychologically, but more important, it underlines the power of the very conventions and devices it ridicules. Catherine assures Henry and herself that

her attention had been fixed [to his narrative] without the smallest apprehension of really meeting with what he related. "Miss Tilney, she was sure, would never put her into such a chamber as he had described!--She was not at all afraid," (160)

and then promptly sees herself in just such a chamber; and the reader, taught by Henry to expect only deflation for the Gothic, finds himself caught up in it despite all the mockery he has

encountered and enjoyed.

Catherine's brief first adventure, the "mysterious chest," reinforces and extends for her and for the reader the effects of Henry's parody. When her "astonished eyes" behold the "white cotton counterpane, properly folded, reposing at one end of the chest in undisputed possession" (164), the reader is lulled once more with fairly simple parody. But even here, something more intricate is happening. The pattern for future adventures is set and extends the one used to deflate sentimental conventions: Austen begins by firmly establishing a comic tone; she then introduces a somewhat more serious interlude in which Gothic devices and effects are carefully imitated; and finally she returns to comedy. Thus Catherine's first thoughts "when her eye suddenly fell on a large, high chest, standing back in a deep recess on one side of the fire-place" are purely comic:

"This is strange indeed! I did not expect such a sight as this!--An immense heavy chest!--What can it hold?--Why should it be placed here?--Pushed back too, as if meant to be out of sight!--I will look into it--cost me what it may, I will look into it--and directly too--by day-light. If I stay till evening my candle may go out." (163)

As the narration continues, however, distinctly Radcliffean description begins to prevail, though here with subtle modulations between imitation ("curiously inlaid," "tarnished from age") and burlesque ("strange violence," "mysterious cypher," "strange events") which establish ironic distance, indicating that the feelings evoked are to be laughed at and that Catherine's imagination is "raised":

She advanced and examined it closely: it was of cedar, curiously inlaid with some darker wood, and raised, about a foot from the ground, on a carved stand of the same. The lock was silver, though tarnished from age; at each end were the imperfect remains of handles also of silver, broken perhaps prematurely by some strange violence; and, on the centre of the lid, was a mysterious cypher, in the same metal. Catherine bent over it intently, but without being able to distinguish any thing with certainty. She could not, in whatever direction she took it, believe the last letter to be a T; and yet that it should be any thing else in that house was a circumstance to raise no common degree of astonishment. If not originally their's, by what strange events could it have fallen into the Tilney family? (163-64)

The extensive visual detail, so unusual in Austen's prose and in fact so consciously excluded from it,⁴² deliberately mirrors (especially in common with fearful conjectures) one of Mrs. Radcliffe's chief devices, and the next passage duplicates another, producing a climax:

Her fearful curiosity was every moment growing greater; and seizing, with trembling hands, the hasp of the lock, she resolved at all hazards to satisfy herself at least as to its contents. With difficulty, for something seemed to resist her efforts, she raised the lid a few inches; but at that moment a sudden knocking at the door of the room made her, starting, quit her hold, and the lid closed with alarming violence. (164)

The trite interruption, and the heightened description which precedes it, actually have some effect on the reader: some apprehension and expectation are created simply because Austen uses these clichés seriously and allows Catherine to register fear. These responses are created only to be dispelled, of course, for immediately after the interruption the clearest possible comic irony reappears. Catherine examines the "object so well calculated to interest and alarm" half dressed, "having slipped one arm into her gown";

and this anti-heroic posture emphasizes the absurdity of her resolution: "so desperate should be the exertion of her strength, that, unless secured by supernatural means, the lid in one moment should be thrown back. With this spirit she sprang forward, and her confidence did not deceive her" (164). The comic anticlimax follows: she discovers the counterpane.

The second adventure, of the "mysterious manuscript," follows hard upon the first but is treated more seriously: its middle section, directly imitating Gothic devices, is more sustained and more effective, and also ends a chapter, so that comedy is not securely regained until the next chapter. This section, too, is highly complex, for within it Austen modulates between close imitation of Gothic conventions and several methods of distancing the reader from them and the expectations they create. Yet so thoroughly does her imitation exploit the conventions that her Gothic effects are actually more powerful than those of her model, Ann Radcliffe, even in her more celebrated passages. Austen's interest in and improvement upon Radcliffe's Gothic effects are, however, easier claimed than demonstrated. One major difficulty lies in isolating passages from Radcliffe's works which can be set fairly against Austen's imitation. All Radcliffe's effects suffer slightly when her scenes are separated from their contexts. Furthermore, no direct evidence exists for Austen's preferences, if any, among her scenes or her works; we do not even know at which "most

interesting part" of The Mysteries of Udolpho Henry Tilney refused to interrupt his reading for five minutes (107).

Still, Austen does imply a kind of fascination with the scenes (usually climactic) in which the Radcliffe heroine discovers something shocking or mysterious, for she imitates these almost exclusively. Unfortunately, her imitation is seldom direct; no clear models for Catherine's adventures at Northanger can be found in Radcliffe. The adventures imagined for Catherine by Henry, however, do have analogues, and R. W. Chapman reprints in the appendices to his edition of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion a passage from The Romance of the Forest (1791) "which bears a closer resemblance to the adventures of Catherine Morland . . . than anything to be found in Udolpho itself" (P, p. 285). Adeline's discovery of a mysterious manuscript in The Romance of the Forest is at two removes from Catherine's discovery of the washing-bills: Catherine's adventures partly imitate events in Henry's parody, and these events burlesque several elements in Adeline's discovery scene. Despite this indirection, some measure of the differences between Austen's effects and Radcliffe's can be approximated by comparing the climactic moments of the scenes: the heroines' discoveries and immediate responses. In The Romance of the Forest, then, Adeline discovers "an old dagger":

with a trembling hand she took it up, and upon a closer view perceived that it was spotted and stained with rust.

Shocked and surprised, she looked round the room for some object that might confirm or destroy the dreadful suspicion which now rushed upon her mind. (P, p. 290)⁴³

"Shocked and surprised," though anticlimactic, is less so than the "curiosity and terror" and "the solemnity of Adeline's feelings" which accompany her discovery of the manuscript itself. Having disturbed a "confused heap" of old, broken furniture, so that it falls toward her,

Adeline started aside and saved herself, and when the noise it made had ceased, she heard a small rustling sound, and as she was about to leave the chamber saw something falling gently among the lumber.

It was a small roll of paper tied with a string and covered with dust. Adeline took it up, and on opening it perceived an hand-writing. She attempted to read it, but the part of the manuscript she looked at was so much obliterated that she found this difficult, though what few words were legible impressed her with curiosity and terror, and induced her to return with it immediately to her chamber.

Having reached her own room, she fastened the private door and let the arras fall over it as before. It was now midnight. The stillness of the hour, interrupted only at intervals by the hollow sighings of the blast, heightened the solemnity of Adeline's feelings.⁴⁴

The parallel passage in Northanger Abbey much more effectively elicits tension and suspense, again, largely because Austen's mastery of descriptive detail and sentence flow, and her power to create intimacy with her heroine, are immeasurably greater than Radcliffe's. At the same time, however, Austen demands that intimacy with Catherine's fears alternate with distance from them. Austen uses Catherine's prosaic and incongruous commentary ("she had 'never from the first had the smallest idea of finding any thing'"), her even more incongruous actions (she "sought some suspension of agony by creeping far underneath the [bed]clothes"), and, above all, a heightened, exaggerated rhetoric ("Darkness impenetrable and immoveable") to qualify the suspense she

raises simply by using Gothic conventions: a discovery, an interruption, darkness, isolation, and fearfulness:

The place in the middle alone remained now unexplored; and though she had "never from the first had the smallest idea of finding any thing in any part of the cabinet, and was not in the least disappointed at her ill success thus far, it would be foolish not to examine it thoroughly while she was about it." It was some time however before she could unfasten the door, the same difficulty occurring in the management of this inner lock as of the outer; but at length it did open; and not vain, as hitherto, was her search; her quick eyes directly fell on a roll of paper pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment, and her feelings at that moment were indescribable. Her heart fluttered, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale. She seized, with an unsteady hand, the precious manuscript, for half a glance sufficed to ascertain written characters; and while she acknowledged with awful sensations this striking exemplification of what Henry had foretold, resolved instantly to peruse every line before she attempted to rest.

The dimness of the light her candle emitted made her turn to it with alarm; but there was no danger of its sudden extinction, it had yet some hours to burn; and that she might not have any greater difficulty in distinguishing the writing than what its ancient date might occasion, she hastily snuffed it. Alas! it was snuffed and extinguished in one. A lamp could not have expired with more awful effect. Catherine, for a few moments, was motionless with horror. It was done completely; not a remnant of light in the wick could give hope to the rekindling breath. Darkness impenetrable and immovable filled the room. A violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. Catherine trembled from head to foot. In the pause which succeeded, a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door struck on her affrighted ear. Human nature could support no more. A cold sweat stood on her forehead, the manuscript fell from her hand, and groping her way to the bed, she jumped hastily in, and sought some suspension of agony by creeping far underneath the clothes. (169-70)

The rest of the passage is even more complex. Examined apart, each sentence is full of irony at Catherine's hackneyed fears and conjectures or at the language which conveys them ("fraught with awful intelligence," "startled ear," "Hollow murmurs," "blood was chilled"). The conclusion, Catherine's

falling asleep, nicely undercuts her expectation that "repose must be absolutely impossible." Yet the passage as a whole makes the reader feel for and with Catherine rather than distant from her. Jane Austen's writing has seldom been more perfectly controlled:

To close her eyes in sleep that night, she felt must be entirely out of the question. With a curiosity so justly awakened, and feelings in every way so agitated, repose must be absolutely impossible. The storm too abroad so dreadful! --She had not been used to feel alarm from wind, but now every blast seemed fraught with awful intelligence. The manuscript so wonderfully found, so wonderfully accomplishing the morning's prediction, how was it to be accounted for?--What could it contain?--to whom could it relate?--by what means could it have been so long concealed?--and how singularly strange that it should fall to her lot to discover it! Till she had made herself mistress of its contents, however, she could have neither repose nor comfort; and with the sun's first rays she was determined to peruse it. But many were the tedious hours which must yet intervene. She shuddered, tossed about in her bed, and envied every quiet sleeper. The storm still raged, and various were the noises, more terrific even than the wind, which struck at intervals on her startled ear. The very curtains of her bed seemed at one moment in motion, and at another the lock of her door was agitated, as if by the attempt of somebody to enter. Hollow murmurs seemed to creep along the gallery, and more than once her blood was chilled by the sound of distant moans. Hour after hour passed away, and the wearied Catherine had heard three proclaimed by all the clocks in the house, before the tempest subsided, or she unknowingly fell fast asleep. (170-71)

The marvellous decrescendo and closure of the last phrase ("she unknowingly fell fast asleep") perfectly effects a return to prose from the previous sentence, which has climaxed the heightened rhetoric of the passage with long vowel sounds and the regular rhythms of poetry: "Hollow murmurs seemed to creep along the gallery, and more than once her blood was chilled by the sound of distant moans." This sentence nearly scans, in fact.

Such writing is not mere burlesque. In one of her letters, Jane Austen describes Eaton Stannard Barrett's The Heroine: or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader (1813) as "a delightful burlesque, particularly on the Radcliffe style"⁴⁵ and this definition is adequate, although Austen's delight is surprising to anyone who has read The Heroine. Barrett's treatment of the Radcliffe heroine's discovery scene suggests what Austen might have done if her interest lay simply in burlesque, and shows how much less effective the Gothic sections in Northanger Abbey would have been in that case:

With a trembling hand I opened a door, and found myself in a circular chamber, which was furnished with musical instruments. Intending to run my fingers over the keys of a piano, I walked towards it, till a low rustling made me pause. But what was my confusion, when I heard the mysterious machine on a sudden begin to sound; not loudly, but (more terrible still!) with a hurried murmur; as if all its chords were agitated at once, by the hand of some invisible spirit.

I did not faint, I did not shriek; but I stood transfixed to the spot. The music ceased. I recovered courage, and advanced. The music began again; and again I paused.

What! should I shrink from lifting the simple lid of a mere piano? What! should I resign the palm of hardihood to Emily, who drew aside the black veil, and discovered the terrific wax-doll underneath it?

Emulation, enthusiasm, curiosity prompted me, and I rushed undaunted to the piano. Louder and more rapid grew the notes --my desperate hand raised the cover, and beneath it, I beheld a sight to me the most hideous and fearful upon earth,--a mouse!

I shrieked, and dropped the candle, which was instantly extinguished. The mouse ran by my feet; I flew towards the door, but missed it, and fell against a table; nor till after I had made a most alarming clamour, could I get out of the room.⁴⁶

Barrett can arrange an anticlimax to mock the absurdity of Gothic devices, but he shows no feeling for the emotional powers of Gothic fiction. Austen evidently has such a feeling. At any rate, she can combine imitation with

mockery or burlesque so as to obtain a Gothic climax rather more powerful than any of Mrs. Radcliffe's and so as to mock it at the same time.

The final Gothic adventure in Northanger Abbey is the lengthiest and most discussed: Catherine's reading of General Tilney as a Radcliffean villain. The same pattern, comic development succeeded by a Gothic climax and a comic anticlimax, is extended to include several successive, increasingly tense climaxes, which occur whenever Catherine's explorations of Mrs. Tilney's room are interrupted. She and Eleanor Tilney are first prevented from approaching the room when the General calls Eleanor "hastily, and, as Catherine thought, rather angrily back, demanding whither she were going?" (185). The second interruption is more alarming, and in fact perfectly imitates Radcliffe:

Again [Eleanor] passed through the folding-doors, again her hand was upon the important lock, and Catherine, hardly able to breathe, was turning to close the former with fearful caution, when the figure, the dreaded figure of the General himself at the further end of the gallery, stood before her! The name of "Eleanor" at the same moment, in his loudest tone, resounded through the building, giving to his daughter the first intimation of his presence, and to Catherine terror upon terror. (191-92)

Catherine reaches the room alone in the final incident, and though her feelings when she discovers merely a handsome, modern apartment are "worked," she quickly resumes her suspicions, and two separate climaxes follow at once: a purely Gothic and surprisingly effective one, in which she is interrupted by the noise of someone's approach and she

listens "With a feeling of terror not very definable" to footsteps coming up the stairs (194). Henry Tilney appears, both are surprised, and the incident results in the final climax to the Gothic section: Henry's oft-quoted rebuke to Catherine's suspicions.⁴⁷

The suspense and apprehension created by these incidents depend partly on the simple device of interruption, but more on Austen's treatment of General Tilney's character. As Mudrick points out, General Tilney arouses the reader's "interest in his nature and his motives." For Mudrick, however, "the suspense aroused by our uncertainty about him" provides "realistic scaffolding" for the Gothic episode which is in turn fatally undermined by the General's inconsistencies as a character.⁴⁸ But realism is hardly Austen's object. She intends the General to be not only mysterious, a quality Mudrick concedes, but also menacing, to the reader as well as to Catherine, although the reader never shares Catherine's delusion that he imprisoned or murdered his wife, and although the reader is also not asked to exercise his moral perceptiveness in detecting the General's villainy. His prosaic faults, gluttony, avarice, and egoism, are quite openly conveyed to the reader over Catherine's head in much the same way as are Isabella Thorpe's. The joke lies in Catherine's imperception. Before this, however, the groundwork is laid for the General's more sinister qualities. At Bath, his children's constraint around him is clearly established, and both Catherine and

the reader are "puzzled" that she finds it "a release to get away from him," despite his civilities and compliments to her (129). At Northanger, the General's presence becomes more and more oppressive. His children's discomfort increases, as do his fulsome compliments, and more conventional hints of Gothic villainy multiply: his explosions of bad temper, his domestic tyranny, and Eleanor's evident melancholy are added to the interruptions of Catherine's explorations already mentioned. Austen intersperses this direct reliance on Gothic conventions with ironic treatment; like the "mysterious chest" and the "mysterious manuscript," the "mysterious tyrant" is debunked as well as exploited. Thus Catherine reflects, "'This lengthened absence, these solitary rambles, did not speak a mind at ease, or a conscience void of reproach'" (182), and at last discerns "the air and attitude of a Montoni!" in the General's "slowly pacing the drawing-room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow" (187). These broadly comic passages distance the reader from the discomfort and even threat conveyed by the General's very real anger and by his mistreatment of Eleanor. A particularly effective instance of the former occurs just after Catherine's adventure with the chest, so that a genuine alarm (however transient) succeeds the false one:

Miss Tilney gently hinted her fear of being late; and in half a minute they ran down stairs together, in an alarm not wholly unfounded, for General Tilney was pacing the drawing-room, his

watch in his hand, and having, on the very instant of their entering, pulled the bell with violence, ordered "Dinner to be on table directly!" (165)

The General's peremptoriness and injustice to Eleanor are even more unpleasant. Jane Austen makes Eleanor Tilney into something of a Gothic heroine at Northanger; like conventional Radcliffe heroines, Eleanor is subject to a tyrant's whims and sometimes is melancholy, yet she supports her lot with fortitude and (here departing from the conventions), with cheerfulness. Austen is careful to imply rather than proclaim that Eleanor is a Gothic heroine, for the corollary, that the General is truly a Gothic villain, would not serve her purposes. She wants the General to be felt by the reader as menacing and repellent, but only Catherine is to label him a Montoni. The reader is meant to be puzzled and curious about the General's behavior, and is not meant to explain it to himself by deducing the General's mistaken notion of Catherine's wealth. Even though Austen provides hints of this, they are not enough, unlike her indications of Wickham's or Frank Churchill's characters in the later novels. Austen is thus free to shock the reader with the General's expulsion of Catherine and to present her final joke on readers and novels alike: in a denouement equally typical of Gothic and sentimental novels, Eleanor is revealed as a heroine indeed, in love with and at last united to a poor suitor who unexpectedly acquires wealth and a title, and hence a wife. This circumstance softens the

General, and he sanctions Henry's marriage to Catherine at last.⁴⁹

In Northanger Abbey, Jane Austen both exploits and mocks the conventions of the contemporary novel. She delights in her power to debunk these conventions and then make them work. She is not, then, principally concerned to defend or to condemn contemporary fiction. Nor is she, as Tave has suggested, "engaged in an adventurous attempt to change the expectations of readers" so as to create a new kind of fiction or to promote "the heroine to a new dignity."⁵⁰ Instead, Austen examines the conventions of contemporary fiction in order to expose and delight in both their absurdity and their power to engross the imagination, to create a response. She is not yet interested in harnessing these conventions to a higher use or to more complex designs. Or perhaps more correctly, she is not yet mature enough as an artist to use conventions without self-consciousness, without calling attention to their presence. At the same time, this interest in convention offers her a good start as a novelist--a far more promising one, in general, than that exclusive interest in oneself which produces so many autobiographical first novels. Those writers whose early works show, like Austen's, a playful treatment of convention, an attraction to artifice, and an amused preoccupation with the relation between life and literature, are among the greatest; these concerns

visible too in the early work of Chaucer (The Book of the Duchess) and Shakespeare (Love's Labour's Lost). Jane Austen can be said, like them, to absorb convention into her comedy and at last to transcend it.

This process is traceable also in the work of certain other novelists, whose development, while distinct from Austen's, is comparable to hers. Henry James in Watch and Ward (published serially 1871; separately 1878) is interested in how much the relations and perceptions of life are influenced by the images and plots of literature. The characters in Watch and Ward have literary preconceptions and expectations; their imaginations are consciously bookish even when they see themselves as anti-heroic. The novel, like Northanger Abbey, ends like a novel and says so; all the conventions are self-consciously exploited. E. M. Forster is as fond of literary jokes as Austen: witness the incident in A Room With a View (1908) in which Miss Lavish makes a cheap novel out of Lucy Honeychurch's adventure in the Piazza. More important, although Forster is always, unlike Austen, more interested in exploring the influence and limits of social rather than literary convention, he began, like her, by writing novels which were partly about writing novels. Lionel Trilling has noted in passing that the themes of Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) and The Ambassadors (1903) are comparable.⁵¹ V. H. Brearley extends the comparison and finds details of character and plot which

show that part of Forster's intention is to rework James's novel and, implicitly, to criticize its limits; similarly, characters, themes, and situations in The Longest Journey (1907) echo or invert, and thereby criticize, those in Samuel Butler's The Way of all Flesh (1903).⁵² A Room With a View is almost uncannily reminiscent of Pride and Prejudice: both are third novels which develop or master the themes, the techniques of contrast, and the comedy introduced by the earlier novels. As a result, both reward study as successful works of art in themselves and as transitional works, providing illuminating links between the simpler and less mature themes and techniques of the early novels and the more subtle and difficult, even transcendent, achievements of the later ones.

Novelists who openly display literary convention and incorporate literary allusion in their work easily obtain one advantage: they force their readers to be conscious of the process of reading. This demand can be intrusive and tedious in tactless, pompous, or careless hands. Yet James, Forster, and Austen avoid exasperating their readers and can instead use this technique to complicate their readers' responses with reminders of alternate representations of life, alternate appeals to the emotions and imagination, alternate sets of expectations.

This technique can have, equally, the great disadvantage of being rather too brilliant and calculated. In Northanger Abbey, manipulation of literary convention becomes a tour de

force which takes the place of everything the next two novels exhibit: fuller relations between the characters; more complex exploration of the themes; and a didactic intention which entails subtle and profound manipulation of judgment and sympathy, responses to literature (and to life) which are far more complex and more significant than those considered in Northanger Abbey, suspense and distress. The more substantial themes and techniques and the more serious didactic intentions of Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice do not, however, preclude examination and ridicule of literary convention. In Sense and Sensibility, for example, the effect of literary conventions and expectations upon emotion and conduct is explored within the character of Marianne Dashwood. The theme is thus assimilated to character; and because Marianne is capable of explaining and defending her feelings and her conduct, many of the novel's themes can be debated by the characters themselves, an advance in technique over Northanger Abbey which Pride and Prejudice and the later novels modify, extend, and complicate. Northanger Abbey, then, is not central to Jane Austen's concerns or achievements; Sense and Sensibility is.

¹ Dating the composition of Northanger Abbey is especially difficult. Cassandra Austen's memorandum says, "North-hanger Abbey was written about the years 98 & 99" (quoted by Southam, Literary Manuscripts, p. 53). Jane Austen sold the manuscript (then titled Susan) to a publisher in 1803, but retained a copy of some kind. Her enquiry in 1809 about reasons for non-publication mentions that she could "command" a copy in four months, in case the publisher's copy has been lost (Letters, p. 263). Henry Austen repurchased the manuscript in 1816; evidently also in 1816 Austen herself wrote a brief "Advertisement" to Northanger Abbey, reprinted in Chapman's edition, in which she declares, "this little work was finished in the year 1803," and apologizes for "those parts of the work which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete" (NA, p. 12). In March 1817 she refers to the heroine as "Catherine" and doubts whether "Miss Catherine . . . will ever come out" (Letters, p. 484). Finally, in 1818, Northanger Abbey was published under its present title. On the whole, it seems safe enough to take Jane Austen's word that the novel was finished in 1803, and to ignore the possibility, despite the change in the heroine's name, of extensive revisions after that time. This permits Northanger Abbey to be thought of as the earliest remaining complete novel, although the lost original versions of Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice preceded it. This chronology, however

incapable of absolute proof, agrees with one's sense of the youthfulness and comparative slightness of the novel.

² Amusingly enough, when Austen describes the heroine's father on the first page as "a very respectable man, though his name was Richard," she may actually be alluding to a passage from the burlesque "History of England," one of her own juvenilia, which blandly, deflatingly describes Richard III as "a very respectable Man" (MW, p. 141).

³ Errand of Form, pp. 3 and 26.

⁴ Artistic Development, p. 67.

⁵ "Satire and the Form of the Novel: The Problem of Aesthetic Unity in Northanger Abbey," ELH, 32 (1965), 514 and 527.

⁶ Duckworth, p. 92.

⁷ Craik, p. 8.

⁸ Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (1952; rpt. Berkeley, 1968), p. 39.

⁹ "Critical Realism in Northanger Abbey," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, ed. Rathburn and Steinmann, rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 60.

¹⁰ "'Northanger Abbey' Re-dated?," N&Q, 195 (1950), 408, 407, and 409.

¹¹ Jane Austen and her Art, p. 64.

¹² Jane Austen, p. 61.

¹³ Jane Austen (London, 1966), p. 51.

¹⁴ Fabric of Dialogue, pp. 86 and 98. These citations are representative, although other critics also see a learning or maturing process in Catherine. Jane Nardin, among others, speaks of "the learning process which the ignorant Catherine must undergo if she is to cope effectively with the rigors of adult life" (Elegant Decorums, p. 62).

¹⁵ "Critical Theory," rpt. in F. R. Leavis, ed., Selection from Scrutiny, II, 10.

¹⁶ Novels of Jane Austen, p. 9.

¹⁷ "Critical Realism," rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 57.

¹⁸ Jane Austen's Novels, p. 102.

¹⁹ Art of Allusion, p. 21.

²⁰ Some Words of Jane Austen, p. 43. Like other critics who see education for Catherine at Bath and regression at Northanger, Tave apologizes for the novel: "Jane Austen's own art is not yet good enough to produce all it seems to promise" (p. 37).

²¹ Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 57.

²² Augustus J. C. Hare, ed., The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth (Boston, 1895), I, 260.

²³ Novels of Jane Austen, p. 10.

²⁴ Irony as Defense and Discovery, pp. 56 and 57.

²⁵ "Mansfield Park," rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 125.

²⁶ Jane Austen's Novels, p. 96.

²⁷ Artistic Development, p. 63.

²⁸ Six Novels, p. 8.

²⁹ Art of Allusion, p. 40.

³⁰ Improvement of the Estate, p. 101.

³¹ One critic finds Sense and Sensibility "grossly clumsy" in relation to Northanger Abbey's "graceful dexterity" and "technical mastery"; she places Northanger Abbey later than Sense and Sensibility and even detects in it "the lustre of a polished jewel" by comparison with Persuasion, which "appears patchy and unequal beside it" (Gooneratne, p. 62).

³² Babb argues, however, that Austen renders in the dialogue "the very process of [Catherine's] education" (Fabric of Dialogue, p. 98) and finds in a close analysis of their second dance together that Henry's words show a "sustained drive throughout the scene to maneuver Catherine into declaring

that she likes him" (p. 106). This dialogue is, however, purely comic. Henry pursues an ironic analogy between dancing and marriage which Catherine takes seriously and which Babb takes even more seriously. I wholly agree with his general thesis that an "analysis of Jane Austen's dialogue reveals a richer substance in the novels, and a far greater range of expressiveness on the part of the characters, than has generally been allowed" (p. 4). In straining to apply this thesis to Northanger Abbey, however, he ignores the novel's tone and ends by distorting it.

³³ Jane Austen uses this term favorably in a letter to her niece Anna, whose manuscript novel she is reading and criticizing. The context is revealing: "I wish you could make Mrs. F. talk more, but she must be difficult to manage & make entertaining, because there is so much good common sence & propriety about her that nothing can be very broad. Her Economy and her Ambition must not be staring" (Letters, p. 402). Austen clearly loves broad dialogue, though she restricts it carefully, and usually finds it inconsistent with sensible characters. Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, in Catherine Morland Austen has created a character whose artlessness and naiveté do allow broad, entertaining dialogue even though Catherine possesses some degree of "common sence & propriety."

³⁴ Art of Allusion, pp. 34, 32, and 37.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁶ One of Austen's juvenilia, "Lady Susan," reverses the theme: a sophisticated woman uses everyone in her circle unscrupulously and, above all, has the talent to overcome almost everyone's prejudices against her. "Lady Susan" was probably composed before Northanger Abbey; it exists only in a fair copy, watermarked 1805, the year in which Maria Edgeworth's Leonora was published. Leonora, a far inferior work, uses a similar situation and is cast also in the epistolary form. As a result of its publication, Austen may have felt renewed interest in "Lady Susan" and so recopied it--or the work may just possibly have been composed then. According to Litz, the usual date given it is 1794-95 (Artistic Development, p. 172).

³⁷ Artistic Development, p. 63.

³⁸ Popular Novel in England, p. 103.

³⁹ Duckworth interprets these two scenes quite differently. He is one of those critics who detect growth in Catherine; he calls it "growth of moral perception" and locates it here (Improvement of the Estate, p. 94). For him, Catherine's driving off with John Thorpe is, "despite extenuating circumstances, morally reprehensible," and he thinks her "deservedly punished" for it by seeing the Tilneys from the carriage as she and Thorpe leave Bath. He finds,

then, that she acts "on a moral basis" by contrast when she rejects the Clifton scheme (pp. 94-95). But Catherine is equally "moral"--acting from the same principles and motives--in both decisions, and is merely duped by Thorpe in the first. To speak of that decision as reprehensible is, at least, an exaggeration, and surely requires an insensitivity to tone.

⁴⁰ Emden's rejection of the "laboured descriptions and serious moralizing" of the Gothic episode is only the most extreme denunciation of Austen's parody ("'Northanger Abbey' Re-dated?," p. 408).

⁴¹ Novels of Jane Austen, p. 7.

⁴² Austen voices this principle in the letter to her niece already cited: "You describe a sweet place, but your descriptions are often more minute than will be liked. You give too many particulars of right hand & left" (Letters, p. 401).

⁴³ This passage is included in the selections printed by Chapman. It may also be found in one of the few available modern reprints of the work, Three Eighteenth Century Romances: The Castle of Otranto; Vathek; The Romance of the Forest, ed. and intro. Harrison R. Steeves (New York, 1931), p. 388. Radcliffe's novel is, most unfortunately, abridged in this edition, but the relevant parts are complete. (This edition is hereafter cited as Romance.)

⁴⁴ Romance, pp. 388-89. This passage is reprinted by Chapman only in part. It should be noted that in citing passages from The Romance of the Forest only, I do Radcliffe seeming injustice, as it is an early work. But even in Udolpho the climactic passages (Emily's discovery of what lies behind the black veil, her visit to the tower with Barnardine and near abduction by him) are not written with anything approaching Austen's skill or effectiveness.

⁴⁵ Letters, p. 377.

⁴⁶ The Heroine, or Adventures of Cherubina, 2nd ed., rev. (London, 1814), II, 137-38. Amazingly enough, the passage cited is one of Barrett's more successful ones.

⁴⁷ Henry Tilney's rebuke to Catherine has been thoroughly examined by critics, particularly by Harding, who uses Henry's reference to "'a neighbourhood of voluntary spies'" (NA, p. 198) as evidence for his notion of Austen's "Regulated Hatred" (rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 167). The discovery scene which precedes Henry's rebuke is less discussed, making Norman Page's analysis of it the more interesting. He thinks that Austen exploits the ambiguity of language in describing Catherine's investigation of Mrs. Tilney's room, so that "the deception and enlightenment of the reader parallel the experience of the heroine" (Language of Jane Austen, p. 18). I agree with his analysis of the language in this scene, although my own interest lies in the larger structures of

incident through which Austen controls her reader's expectations and manipulates his responses.

⁴⁸ Irony as Defense and Discovery, pp. 55 and 56.

⁴⁹ Kearful's account of General Tilney's function in Northanger Abbey is quite different. He considers that Austen's treatment of him breaks the deflating, satiric pattern of Catherine's "Gothic" adventures, while I consider it an extension of those patterns. Further, I believe that the pattern is not merely one of deflation but of imitation as well. Austen imitates Gothic effects and devices, obtains the suspense they aim at, and then deflates them. As I see it, she is playing with literary convention and with her readers' responses. Kearful sees a more profound intention to probe questions of art and life, illusion and disillusion. For him, the first adventure (of the laundry-bills, in his reckoning) is "essentially comic, and for its duration we remain amused spectators" ("Satire and the Form of the Novel," p. 524). But Henry's rebuke to Catherine's suspicions does not directly answer all our questions about General Tilney . . . [and] are we not impelled to respond to each of Henry's unanswered questions, "Yes, it can happen here."? . . . Henry's irony as it were turns against us, making us feel that the "delusion" he makes Catherine reject may not have been so clearly and completely explained away after all. Whereas the first adventure confirmed our suppositions, the second has unexpectedly subverted them (p. 524).

I find this account neat and ingenious, but unconvincing. Austen finds endless means to subvert her readers' presuppositions and to explore the uses and strengths of

Gothic conventions without having to suggest that a Gothic illusion may not really be a delusion.

⁵⁰ Some Words of Jane Austen, pp. 37 and 73.

⁵¹ E. M. Forster (Norfolk, Conn., 1943), pp. 57-58.

⁵² V. H. Brearley is completing a thesis on Forster at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and I am indebted to her for this perception that Forster, like Austen, began by writing novels which drew upon, rewrote, and thus criticized the novels of his contemporaries. It is worth noting as a further likeness that Forster's implicit criticism of James's limits does not diminish his capacity to enjoy James's work. Austen too enjoyed the works whose far more severe limits and even absurdity she exposed so well.

II: SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

In Sense and Sensibility (1811), Jane Austen's most characteristic themes are recognizable as they are not in Northanger Abbey, and she begins to develop methods to embody them which foreshadow the techniques of her later fiction. Sense and Sensibility is, as a result, far more interesting and mature than Northanger Abbey, although both are still youthfully "bookish" works, calling attention to the literary conventions which they exploit and expose. In Northanger Abbey, however, Austen plays with suspense and distress, the two literary responses aimed at and engaged by contemporary novels, and her interest is comic more than didactic: she seems to be frustrating, jolting, and manipulating her readers' conventional expectations and responses largely for fun. Judging and responding to the characters is never problematic, for either they are as transparent as Isabella Thorpe, Captain Tilney, and Catherine herself, or speculation about them is confined to plot: will General Tilney's actions be like life or like literature? In Sense and Sensibility and the later novels, however, Jane Austen elicits and manipulates the responses of judgment and sympathy, with a moral intention: to exercise, to develop, and finally to educate these responses in her readers. As literary responses, judgment and sympathy differ from suspense and distress principally by engaging and

implicating a reader more formidably: exercising judgment and sympathy challenges and tests a reader's perceptions, emotions, intelligence, and moral sense. To elicit these requires a more complex world and subtler discriminations than those of Northanger Abbey, and in Sense and Sensibility Austen learns to obtain these effects almost entirely by constructing elaborate parallels and contrasts between characters. She never abandons these concerns or these techniques, although she subsequently complicates and refines them. Unlike Northanger Abbey, then, Sense and Sensibility resembles Austen's later work in significant ways, and is at the same time simpler and more accessible, offering a helpful approach to the later novels and providing a standard against which her achievement in them can be measured.

1. Critical Views of Sense and Sensibility

Perhaps because prefigurations of the later fiction are so evident and, by contrast, so disappointing, critics have appreciated Sense and Sensibility least of all Austen's novels, and Elinor Dashwood least of the heroines; even Fanny Price and Mansfield Park have received better treatment. Judgments that the novel is "extremely rigid"¹ and that Elinor is "priggish and self-righteous"² are widely accepted. These ideas seem to derive from a critical error and a critical bias respectively. The error is made by critics who interpret "sensibility" as synonymous with feeling and

with qualities even more precious to moderns: openness and spontaneity. These critics overlook Austen's careful definition, that sensibility is not merely a capacity to feel but a set of attitudes toward feeling, which is "valued and cherished," sought and indulged (SS, p. 7). To ignore this distinction is to conclude, despite insistent and continual contradiction by the text, that in proportion as Elinor lacks "sensibility," she lacks feeling, a conclusion which renders her odious. Marvin Mudrick's especially perverse reading is apposite:

Elinor rebukes Marianne by implying that in her still disappointed love for Edward she is as unhappy as Marianne but has kept silent because of "what I owed to my dearest friends" . . . (an implication for which one would be hard put to find evidence in the novel, where Elinor seems amorously moved only by Willoughby).³

It is impossible to decide what is more exasperating in these remarks: the view of Elinor as having strong feelings only for Willoughby, or the twofold denial of Elinor's unhappiness and of her concern to spare her mother and sister the sight of it, an unhappiness and a concern Jane Austen repeatedly emphasizes. Mudrick's misreading of Elinor leads inevitably to his conclusion that Austen has "betrayed" the real heroine, Marianne Dashwood, "the life and center of the novel."⁴ This conclusion is also reached by Robert Garis, who traces Austen's alleged betrayal of Marianne to imaginative failure: an unwillingness to "give herself to the learning experience" of a major character, something she achieves triumphantly elsewhere.⁵ For Mudrick, on the other hand, Austen is guilty of a surrender to "social convention"⁶ by weighting the novel

in favor of Elinor's propriety and restraint. All these objections anticipate those usually made to Mansfield Park, whose affinity to Sense and Sensibility is often felt, and which has been similarly misunderstood and undervalued.

The error of denying, distorting, or minimizing Elinor's feelings has a corollary in the error of critics who detect in any demonstration of feeling on Elinor's part a movement of "sense" toward "sensibility," a movement toward an intended reconciliation of the two. Observing that Elinor is "stirred" by her "suitor" Edward Ferrars, Andrew Wright decides that, already the sensibility of Elinor has been awakened. The elder sister may still be able to give counsels of sense; but she has already tasted the values of sensibility.⁷

At no time, however, is Jane Austen concerned to present "the values of sensibility"; on the contrary, she demonstrates that the doctrines of sensibility betray real feeling, and result in behavior that is totally unfeeling. One of Austen's major interests in the novel is to define feeling and sensitive behavior, and she shows that it includes a capacity to estimate and appreciate others' feelings along with a willingness to act so as to consider those feelings as much as possible. This behavior is what Elinor exhibits and Marianne violates throughout the novel. It is Marianne who must learn to behave feelingly, not Elinor. Elinor's behavior and the feelings which prompt it are, from the beginning, considerate and right.

This would make Sense and Sensibility all the more unpalatable to those critics who dislike it because of their

bias in favor of irony. Their tendency is not merely to place a high value on irony, but to expect and even to demand it in every book by Austen: because Marianne is treated ironically, and because her "sensibility" is shown to need correction, they feel that Elinor's "sense" should be exposed as deficient, or as equally in need of correction and modification. These readers' expectation and desire for such a countermovement is so great that, naturally enough, some have come to detect it in the novel's design. This is evident in Wright's account:

In the final--and most imperfect--volume Elinor and Marianne become increasingly like each other, a process which makes both of them more rounded and complete people.⁸

Ian Watt has made a similar observation:

just as Jane Austen does not intend any flat opposition between sense and sensibility, so she does not intend any diametrical opposition between her heroines either, since one major emphasis in the narrative is on how differences between them are eventually removed.⁹

These critics assume that some middle ground is reached between Elinor and Marianne, which involves the assumption that Elinor needs correction, usually that she is in some way unfeeling at first and learns in the course of the action to taste "the values of sensibility." So pervasive are these assumptions that even a sensitive critic like Joseph Wiesenfarth, who is prepared to say that "Elinor consistently presents an ideal of human action in the world. . . . And Marianne moves toward that ideal," can immediately contradict himself by implying reciprocal movement:

Significantly, at the end of the novel, Marianne's sensibility is strengthened by sense, and Elinor, who had previously been

unable to display her deep feeling, now does so.¹⁰ Kenneth Moler locates an ironic treatment of Elinor which is more ingenious, but finally unconvincing. He finds that two incidents, Elinor's underestimating the seriousness of Marianne's illness and her judging Willoughby inaccurately, "are cleverly designed to help undermine [her] moral position"; thus, "Jane Austen adopts, and expects her reader in the course of the novel to develop, an ironic (though not unsympathetic) attitude toward Elinor's 'sense' as well as toward Marianne's 'sensibility.'" ¹¹

These attempts to find a symmetrical ironic design in Sense and Sensibility are often qualified by some acknowledgment that the design is insufficiently realized. Moler considers Elinor's inaccurate judgment of Willoughby "unskillfully" contrived,¹² and Wright indicates his dissatisfaction with the novel's execution when he judges that the last volume, in which Elinor and Marianne allegedly move toward each other, is the "most imperfect."¹³ Mark Schorer's view makes even greater demands of the text and, consequently, ends with a more thorough (though implicit) rejection of it:

Elinor, and the world of Johnsonian common sense which is hers, is in general exempt from . . . irony although not, finally, quite entirely. At the end, when Marianne at last discovers the merits of the sober, older, and patiently waiting Colonel Brandon, Elinor has had a reversal of feelings about Willoughby, who has made his confession to her, and it is almost as if Jane Austen, with a certain inarticulated wistfulness, suggests that as Sensibility can be too lax, Sense can be too rigid, and that Elinor, as she is joined with her sober lover, Edward Ferrars, has missed

something, while Marianne, chastised as she is, has gained.

Granted, these implications are never fully clarified; had they been, Jane Austen's irony would play over the entire situation and the novel would be a complete comic success.¹⁴

Naturally, so particular a view of the book Jane Austen ought to have written results in a limited appreciation of the one she did write; consequently, the irony with which Elinor's situation is treated is generally overlooked, even by those critics who view her character favorably. This irony is, however, at the center of the novel and forms its emotional and thematic core. For Elinor's continual exertions to control her feelings, to appear cheerful when she is unhappy, and to be considerate of her mother and sister in order that they be "spared much solicitude on her account" (104), lead Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne to assume--along with some of the critics--that in fact she has no feelings. This situation, as it is presented and developed by the novel's action, embodies two central ironic perceptions. First, consideration for others' feelings permits others to be inconsiderate of one's own. Secondly, as Stuart Tave notes, in company with two other very recent critics, excess of sensibility (in Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood) becomes insensibility, that is, insensitivity to and misjudgment of others' feelings.¹⁵ As a result, Elinor is given credit neither for having feelings nor for commanding them. At the same time, however, Jane Austen insists that the consideration and self-command Elinor shows are not any the less required of her for being invariably misunderstood and unrewarded. They

remain, absolutely and imperatively, an obligation.

All these points are made quietly, and with a complete absence of self-pity and even self-righteousness. No plaintive or bitter note is sounded, and yet what is presented is a harsh and uncompromising vision of the emotional tensions and costs of moral behavior. In Sense and Sensibility, "feeling" for others, a quality endowed with both an emotional and a moral dimension, is an obligation which, however necessary it is to the decencies of social life, may easily go unnoticed and unappreciated by those who benefit from it. Moreover, it is often painful in itself, comprising the pain of suppressing one's own feelings and the pain of participating in others' sufferings. This, then, is the clarity, complexity, and austerity of moral vision and emotional awareness that Jane Austen masters in her first published work. It is an impressive achievement, and one which highlights the subtler and more mellow visions of the later novels.

No wonder that this estimate of Sense and Sensibility is unusual. The novel suffers from the highly visible and even obtrusive technique of contrast chosen to embody its themes. The reader's attention is so overwhelmed by the complicated, clever, and insistent symmetries, doublings, parallels, contrasts, and comparisons among characters and actions and even chapters which form the surface of Sense and Sensibility, that he may be driven to conclude that nothing lies beneath and to apply a critical cliché: the greater the technical skill, the

greater the likelihood that it becomes an end in itself, submerging emotional content and thereby rendering an intricate structure lifeless or mechanical. This, like all clichés, contains a seductive portion of truth, and critics who approach Sense and Sensibility through its connections to the characters, motifs, or debates commonly found in eighteenth-century novels are especially tempted by it, probably because their work has entailed reading so many lifeless and mechanical eighteenth-century novels constructed upon similar principles of contrast. Distinctions blur under such strains, and accordingly Henrietta Ten Harmsel finds that Austen is "only partially successful" in attempting to transform the conventional heroine of sensibility, the Richardsonian villain, and the romantic hero . . . because another convention--that of an overemphasized didactic antithesis between sense and sensibility--hampers her expression and "dictates" her conclusions.¹⁶

A. Walton Litz accounts for the novel's failure similarly, although independently:

in Sense and Sensibility we see [Jane Austen] struggling against conventional (and improbable) stereotypes of character and action, searching for a flexible structure which will liberate her art from the tyranny of antithesis and give her complex moral vision adequate expression.¹⁷

Whether Austen's novel succumbs to a "tyranny of antithesis" or whether it succeeds finally in constructing contrasts and antitheses which give expression and life to her perceptions of moral and emotional experience cannot be determined merely by close examination of its structure; but an answer must begin there.

11. The Structure of Sense and Sensibility

The first chapter sets up almost all the contrasts which will be refined and worked out through the novel, and the chapters which immediately follow extend them, partly by dramatization. Self-interest (or selfishness) and coldness are carefully contrasted with warmth and generosity. Mrs. Dashwood, her husband, and her children have lived with and attended their uncle, the owner of Norland, "not merely from interest, but from goodness of heart" (3). The "rather cold hearted, and rather selfish" disposition of John Dashwood opposes "the strong feelings of the rest of the family" (5) and beyond him lies his wife: "Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself;--more narrow-minded and selfish" (5). Similarly, the impulsiveness and "romantic" generosity (6) of Mrs. Dashwood is on the one hand set against Mrs. John Dashwood's rudeness in arriving at Norland immediately after the funeral, "shewing them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she could act when occasion required it" (6), and on the other, against John Dashwood's careful calculation that he can give his sisters three thousand pounds in fulfillment of his promise to his father, because his own greatly increased fortune at his father's death "warmed his heart and made him feel capable of generosity" (5).

Once these broad contrasts are outlined, Jane Austen is

free to initiate subtler ones among the characters whose essential goodness has been established. Having pointed to the unfeeling or calculated behavior of selfish people, Austen hints at a more interesting theme, the unfeeling or thoughtless behavior good people can be guilty of. Mrs. Dashwood, for instance, "would have quitted the house for ever" in disgust with Mrs. John Dashwood's rudeness and would thus have been guilty of parallel, though not comparable, impoliteness, but she is brought "to reflect on the propriety of going" (6). This introduces another important theme, that propriety or politeness remains imperative, however rude one's associates. This theme of unrewarded but nonetheless obligatory consideration for others is sounded in harsher tones at the start of the chapter. The former owner of Norland ties up his property for the benefit of his four-year-old great-nephew, because the child's "attractions . . . outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received from his niece and her daughters" (4).

The most significant contrasts defined by the first chapter, those between Elinor and Marianne and between "sense" and "sensibility," are reserved for its last four paragraphs, which require careful consideration. Although Litz has lamented that "the sensitive discriminations of this passage are never completely embodied in the novel's action and dialogue,"¹⁸ precisely the reverse, I would maintain, is true.

Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and

coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart;--her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever; but eager in every thing; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting; she was every thing but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great.

Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in future. Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still she could struggle, she could exert herself. She could consult with her brother, could receive her sister-in-law on her arrival, and treat her with proper attention; and could strive to rouse her mother to similar exertion, and encourage her to similar forbearance.

Margaret, the other sister, was a good-humoured well-disposed girl; but as she had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne's romance, without having much of her sense, she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life. (6-7)

While this passage does contain antithetical terms, "sense" and "sensibility" are not among them. "Sensibility," the more easily defined of the two, appears only once, in conjunction with "excess," and what constitutes that excess is specified: emotions are "valued and cherished" for their own sake and therefore every attempt is made to sustain and increase them. A distinction is explicitly made between emotions which necessarily but temporarily overwhelm people of strong feelings, and emotions which are deliberately

sought and indulged. As Marianne embodies it, and as the eighteenth century conceived it, sensibility is not merely emotion itself but a set of attitudes toward emotion which forms a theory of its nature and value. This theory is throughout the novel placed in opposition to Elinor's. Unlike Marianne, Elinor sees no special virtue in emotional intensity but values instead kindness, consideration, and courtesy, along with the ability to practice these in spite of what one is feeling; thus she "could struggle" to receive her sister-in-law "with proper attention." Implicit in both Elinor's and Marianne's attitudes is the recognition that very strong feeling caused by a sudden event is temporary: Elinor accepts this transience as a condition of life which makes it easier to live, while Marianne combats it as a condition which threatens her notion of what life should be.

Such oppositions form the contrast and conflict between Elinor and Marianne, but it is important to recognize their underlying similarities: in both, behavior proceeds from principles or judgments, that is, from rational notions about emotional life. Both Elinor and Marianne regulate feeling, although to wholly different ends; both assign feeling to the realm of value, judgment, and sense. "Sense" must be seen, then, as the more inclusive term, neither opposed to nor incompatible with feeling or sensibility but containing them, even if uneasily: in the passage cited, "sense" and its derivative, "sensible," are applied only to Marianne.

The meaning of "sense" and "sensibility" is developed and refined throughout the novel, which gradually unfolds a view of sensibility as a displacement, almost a disease, of sense. Sensibility is not meant to represent a fully developed and independent system of life standing in complete opposition to the life of sense. The title is misleading, insofar as its balanced, antithetic formulation implies that both terms have equal range, that they are opposites, or that some middle ground exists between them. On the contrary, the thrust of the book is toward exposing sensibility, revealing its ominous aspects, and excising it as an undesirable deformation of sense--undesirable because the view of human emotion and value that it contains permits and even encourages insensitivity, imperception, and selfishness. At the same time, the actual opposite of sensibility, not sense but sensitivity--that feeling, unselfish behavior which is most often characteristic of Elinor--is shown in all its difficulties, tensions, and anxieties. The central conflict in the novel does not lie between sense and sensibility but between the sensitive and insensitive behavior that essentially good, sensible people are capable of.

The next three chapters elaborate upon the distinctions drawn in the first by presenting dialogues which illustrate perfectly the speakers' chief concerns. In Chapter II, Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood reconsider what assistance to his sisters will fulfill his promise to his father. Increasingly

selfish and ill-natured arguments are brought forward against any disbursement, and against the promise itself, until the obligation is all but eradicated. Jane Austen accomplishes the whole with notable speed and dexterity, and the passage has been much admired. In the following chapters, Mrs. Dashwood, Marianne, and Elinor discuss Edward Ferrars' character, a subject as important to them all as money is to their nearest relatives. Juxtaposing these dialogues suggests that any faults Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood may subsequently exhibit are to be measured against the monumental selfishness of the John Dashwoods. These chapters also establish that the novel's characteristic medium will be a reflective prose dedicated to making careful distinctions. Normally, even dialogue serves this end: Elinor frequently tries to qualify with her speeches the comprehensive and often indiscriminating judgments typical of Marianne's conversation. Chapter IV opens with Marianne's "'What a pity it is . . . that Edward should have no taste for drawing,'" and Elinor's careful reply:

"why should you think so? He does not draw himself, indeed, but he has great pleasure in seeing the performances of other people, and I assure you he is by no means deficient in natural taste, though he has not had opportunities of improving it. Had he ever been in the way of learning, I think he would have drawn very well. He distrusts his own judgment in such matters so much, that he is always unwilling to give his opinion on any picture; but he has an innate propriety and simplicity of taste, which in general direct him perfectly right." (19)

Such speeches give Elinor a reputation for sententiousness which Marianne deserves at least as much, although this is seldom acknowledged; the phrase, "'that natural taste for

your favourite pursuit which must be so indispensably necessary to your future felicity'" (22) is, after all, Marianne's.

The most important function of the conversations in Chapters III and IV is, however, to introduce some themes central to the novel's development. Among them is the influence of charm and physical attractiveness upon judgment. Marianne points to this motif when she concludes her amusing list of her requirements for a husband with, "'He must have all Edward's virtues, and his person and manners must ornament his goodness with every possible charm'" (18). A character like Edward Ferrars, who lacks "graces of person or address" (15), is particularly liable to disparagement unless some other charm operates; Mrs. Dashwood's appreciation of his merits is "perhaps assisted" by her "persuasion of his regard for Elinor" (16). Marianne's judgment is less pliant: she loves Edward, but

"there is a something wanting--his figure is not striking; it has none of that grace which I should expect in the man who could seriously attach my sister. His eyes want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence. And besides all this, I am afraid, mama, he has no real taste. Music seems scarcely to attract him, and though he admires Elinor's drawings very much, it is not the admiration of a person who can understand their worth. It is evident, in spite of his frequent attention to her while she draws, that in fact he knows nothing of the matter." (17)

Marianne's denial of Edward's taste is reiterated and further explained in the next chapter: Edward's "approbation" of drawing "was very far from that rapturous delight, which, in her opinion, could alone be called taste" (19). This equation

of "rapturous delight" with taste derives from literary convention, and many of Marianne's other ideas about people, emotions, and conduct spring from this same source, notably her opinion that second attachments are "impossible" (56).

These ideas sometimes have an innocuous or merely amusing effect on Marianne's perceptions and conduct, but the consequences become more serious as the plot develops. The novel's overall structure is based as much upon contrast and juxtaposition as are its opening chapters, for the novel depends upon a careful comparison of Elinor's and Marianne's conduct. The plot seems designed to observe even volume divisions in working out this comparison; H. S. Babb's brief outline, while it does not mention these divisions, follows them closely:

The novel's first phase opposes the restrained courtship of Elinor by a despondent Edward Ferrars to Willoughby's ebullient relationship with Marianne, and, more important, contrasts Elinor's relative composure during Edward's long absences with Marianne's distraction at being separated from Willoughby. In the second stage, when both attachments seem impossible because of Edward's engagement to Lucy Steele and Willoughby's sudden marriage, Elinor's stoicism is reckoned against Marianne's wild despair. By the end of the novel, though, these extremes approach each other: the sisters agree in judging Willoughby's character, and Elinor, after suffering through Marianne's illness, Willoughby's self-vindication, and what appears to be Edward's marriage to Lucy, is finally united with Edward, while Marianne subdues herself to the point of accepting the warmhearted Colonel Brandon.¹⁹

With qualifications, this outline is adequate. The account of the third volume, however, assumes, as usual, that the novel reaches or aspires to reach a mean between Elinor and Marianne. Volume I establishes an interesting, elaborate

parallel between Willoughby's and Edward's situations, underscoring the contrast between Elinor's and Marianne's conduct. Both Willoughby and Edward are known to be dependent for sufficient income on the favor of an older female relative, and neither is justified in paying attentions to the Miss Dashwoods, Willoughby because he is "'trying to engage [Marianne's] regard, without a thought of returning it'" (320) and Edward because he is engaged to another woman. More significant, however, is the manner in which the second volume (sandwiched between the revelation to Elinor of Lucy's engagement and its revelation to the world at large), plays off Elinor's relations with Lucy against her relations with Marianne. Lucy's malice causes Elinor less acute suffering than does Marianne's blind, obtrusive misery.

Marianne's misery is obtrusive because her ideas about feeling, rooted in literary convention, encourage a self-indulgent display of her grief which constitutes an imposition on others. These ideas also generate a self-absorption which renders her imperceptive, insensitive, and in the end unjust. The conversations on Edward's taste in Chapters III and IV offer the first hint that Marianne can perceive or attribute feeling only where it is expressed in her terms and according to her conventions. This quality is merely amusing when it makes her oblivious to Edward's taste for drawing or Colonel Brandon's for music:

His pleasure in music, though it amounted not to that extatic delight which alone could sympathize with her

own, was estimable when contrasted against the horrible insensibility of the others; and she was reasonable enough to allow that a man of five and thirty might well have outlived all acuteness of feeling and every exquisite power of enjoyment. She was perfectly disposed to make every allowance for the colonel's advanced state of life which humanity required. (35)

More seriously, Marianne's blindness to others' feelings makes her misjudge Mrs. Jennings, Colonel Brandon, and, above all, Elinor.²⁰

Elinor's feelings and opinions are as strong as Marianne's, but she tries to allow for differences between her opinions and conduct and other people's, an allowance Marianne will not make. Discussing Willoughby's abrupt departure, Elinor remarks,

"In such a case, a plain and open avowal of his difficulties would have been more to his honour I think, as well as more consistent with his general character;--but I will not raise objections against any one's conduct on so illiberal a foundation, as a difference in judgment from myself, or a deviation from what I may think right and consistent." (81)

Elinor is reluctant to judge others' conduct by her own standards exclusively; Marianne is unable to do otherwise.

"She expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself" (202). As the music critic D. F. Tovey observes in a similar context, "It is impossible to frame a more accurate illustration of a person whose point of view is exclusively self-centred."²¹ Elinor would be made only more unhappy by the grief her mother and sisters would feel if they knew of Edward's engagement to Lucy: "their tenderness and sorrow must add to her distress" (141). On the other hand, when Willoughby leaves Allenham, Marianne is shown "indulging"

her feelings and "giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either. Her sensibility was potent enough!" (83).

Least excusable in Marianne's behavior, however, is her injustice to Elinor, her propensity to underestimate and denigrate Elinor's feelings because they are not expressed as her own would be. Many instances of this can be adduced, but one long passage in particular makes perfectly explicit Elinor's feelings upon Edward's departure from Barton and Marianne's insensitivity to them:

[Elinor] did not adopt the method so judiciously employed by Marianne, on a similar occasion, to augment and fix her sorrow, by seeking silence, solitude, and idleness. Their means were as different as their objects, and equally suited to the advancement of each.

Elinor sat down to her drawing-table as soon as he was out of the house, busily employed herself the whole day, neither sought nor avoided the mention of his name, appeared to interest herself almost as much as ever in the general concerns of the family, and if, by this conduct, she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented from unnecessary increase, and her mother and sisters were spared much solicitude on her account.

Such behaviour as this, so exactly the reverse of her own, appeared no more meritorious to Marianne, than her own had seemed faulty to her. The business of self-command she settled very easily;--with strong affections it was impossible, with calm ones it could have no merit. That her sister's affections were calm, she dared not deny, though she blushed to acknowledge it; and of the strength of her own, she gave a very striking proof, by still loving and respecting that sister, in spite of this mortifying conviction.

Without shutting herself up from her family, or leaving the house in determined solitude to avoid them, or lying awake the whole night to indulge meditation, Elinor found every day afforded her leisure enough to think of Edward, and of Edward's behaviour, in every possible variety which the different state of her spirits at different times could produce;--with tenderness, pity, approbation, censure, and doubt. (104-5)

That Marianne is so insensitive to Elinor's feelings, so

incapable of correctly perceiving and estimating them, gives considerable poignance to the novel. This poignance becomes sharper as the strength and complexity of Elinor's feelings are increasingly insisted on and increasingly rendered, as in the last line of this passage, which registers Elinor's "tenderness, pity, approbation, censure, and doubt" in relation to Edward. If anything more were needed to attest the depth of her feelings, Elinor is, after all, able to judge and forgive Edward and Marianne, to love them and feel for their sufferings (for Edward's misery over his engagement), even while their thoughtlessness is causing her severe pain.

Although at the end of Sense and Sensibility both Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood acknowledge that they have been insensitive to Elinor and inconsiderate of her feelings, this does not affect the novel's central perception, embodied in its juxtapositions of obtrusive with unobtrusive unhappiness, and of efforts to indulge and increase feelings with efforts to suppress and control them: the perception that obtrusive, self-indulgent feeling will receive more attention and sympathy than will its opposite. This is one of the central observations in Sense and Sensibility on the nature of emotional life, but Jane Austen takes care to make certain others. She is, first of all, impatient with the notion that undying, unalterable feeling is possible or admirable in life or in literature, a notion which gives rise to Marianne's doctrine of the impossibility of second attachments and to Elinor's explicit

rebuttal of it:

"And after all, Marianne, after all that is bewitching in the idea of a single and constant attachment, and all that can be said of one's happiness depending entirely on any particular person, it is not meant--it is not fit--it is not possible that it should be so." (263)

One of Austen's letters declares that "it is no creed of mine . . . that such sort of Disappointments [in love] kill anybody."²² Furthermore, she is aware that people who are suffering are as useless and painful to themselves as to others, and she considers that exertion of strength to appear as if one is not suffering is not only possible but imperative: such exertion ensures that pain will neither be unnecessarily increased, nor tainted by affectation.

To exert oneself in this manner is to conform to social convention, fulfilling the tacit obligation not to embarrass or distress others uselessly with one's own misery. Such exertion is neither hypocritical nor heartless, even by modern standards; perhaps Marvin Mudrick, who complains that the novel enjoins "adherence to social forms at whatever personal cost,"²³ would concede that in these circumstances, obligations to others do not conflict with obligations to oneself. His complaint probably derives from other suppressions which seem to be dictated by convention only, such as the suppression of good feeling. When Elinor wishes that Marianne's and Willoughby's attachment "were less openly shewn; and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne" (53), it does seem as if social forms

are being rigidly and repressively enforced. Marianne's reply is especially attractive by comparison; she

abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve; and to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a disgraceful subjection of reason to common-place and mistaken notions. (53)

It is easy to be convinced by this apparent defense of openness and unreserve and to be repelled by Elinor's complaint that Marianne's "'systems have all the unfortunate tendency of setting propriety at nought'" (56). To respond in this way is, however, to overlook Elinor's (and Austen's) real objection to Marianne's conduct: not that it is too "open," but that it is too selfish. In displaying their affection for each other at the expense of "general politeness" (49), Marianne and Willoughby rudely ignore the claims of others. When Mrs. Jennings asks, "'Where is Marianne? Has she run away because we are come?'" (105), Austen registers the unattractiveness of Marianne's habitual rudeness. The alternative modes of social behavior at issue are not, after all, prudent, cautious reserve on the one hand and warm-hearted, spontaneous openness on the other. Reserve, deceit, and even the worst kind of prudence lie behind Willoughby's apparently open affection for Marianne. He is first trifling with her happiness, and then with his own, as his final revelation to Elinor makes clear:

"Even then, however, when fully determined on paying my addresses to her, I allowed myself most improperly to put off, from day to day, the moment of doing it, from an unwillingness to enter into an engagement while my circumstances were so greatly embarrassed. I will not

reason here--nor will I stop for you to expatiate on the absurdity . . . of scrupling to engage my faith where my honour was already bound. The event has proved, that I was a cunning fool, providing with great circumspection for a possible opportunity of making myself contemptible and wretched for ever." (321)

Furthermore, Marianne's and Willoughby's display of feeling is not really spontaneous at all: they are open on principle; their behavior is self-conscious, governed by their own rules or conventions. In other words, "their behaviour, at all times, was an illustration of their opinions" (53). Spontaneity is, by definition, involuntary; and Marianne can voluntarily check "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" when she chooses, that is, when her principles or standards are threatened. She deplores jargon, so she sometimes keeps to herself her feelings about a picturesque scene "'because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning'" (97). When she yields to her grief at leaving Norland or at Willoughby's leaving Allenham, she is guilty of some affectation in working up her feelings. That her displays of feeling are completely self-conscious and even regulated becomes clear when she is compared to a character like Catherine Morland, who is perfectly naive and spontaneous. She does reveal her affection for Henry Tilney openly and unconsciously, and is certainly not censured for it.

In Sense and Sensibility, then, the reader is presented with two modes of regulating feeling. Elinor governs the expression of her feelings according to social conventions,

Marianne according to literary conventions. Jane Austen dramatizes throughout the novel the consequences in conduct and feeling of each mode. She shows that conventional, polite behavior which dictates the suppression of feeling is based on a truer perception of the nature of emotions than are the conventions of sensibility: social conventions permit and assist emotions like grief to become attenuated by natural processes, while the doctrines of sensibility undermine or falsify real feeling by seeking to perpetuate or increase it. In Sense and Sensibility, social conventions are an advantage to the self, assisting and supporting the fulfillment of personality, because at their best they codify careful, responsive, and responsible consideration for the feelings of other people. They do not constitute ends in themselves but rather the readiest and most reliable means to construct and facilitate those habits of consideration which Austen most values and trusts. She is convinced that habits of feeling, of response, and of conduct are more desirable and more solid than impulses, and that they therefore deserve attention whether character is to be formed or judged. These views of social convention and emotional life, however commonplace they may have been to Jane Austen's contemporaries, are unusual now; and certainly this singularity helps to account for the generally unfavorable reception accorded Sense and Sensibility. But Austen's views are not necessarily alienating or wholly foreign. Real feeling, she declares, brings together

private and public experience, or one's relations with oneself and with others. Real feeling goes deeper than manners and morals and conduct; it supplies the foundation upon which they should be constructed. Real feeling defines and fulfills personality; without it, the self is deformed and deadened.

These perceptions, like the others, are embodied in Sense and Sensibility through contrasts among the characters, and lend themselves to this technique quite neatly, indeed, somewhat schematically. To examine social convention in relation to feeling is to examine degrees of good breeding (manners or propriety) in relation to degrees of good nature; and various degrees of sense can be used to complicate the scheme. The single chapter (I, vii) which introduces Sir John and Lady Middleton, Mrs. Jennings, and Colonel Brandon, and those subsequent chapters which make known the Palmers and describe the responses of all these characters to Marianne's suffering, show the qualities of sense and silliness, good and ill nature, and good and ill breeding, in several combinations. Good breeding is consistent with coldness and ill nature in Lady Middleton. Ill breeding is, in Sir John and Mrs. Palmer, consistent with good nature and with varying degrees of silliness; and it is coupled in Mrs. Jennings with good nature and a certain shrewdness. Ill-bred behavior finally shows itself to be compatible with the ill nature and the sense of Mr. Palmer. Only Colonel Brandon is sensible, good-natured, and well-bred. These contrasts suggest that good feelings,

such as those of Mrs. Jennings, Sir John, and Charlotte Palmer, do not necessarily result in truly "feeling" behavior, and that the insensitivity and indifference of a Lady Middleton may more closely approximate "feeling" behavior simply because it is unconcerned, unfeeling, well-bred behavior:

The calm and polite unconcern of Lady Middleton on the occasion was an happy relief to Elinor's spirits, oppressed as they often were by the clamorous kindness of the others. . . .

Every qualification is raised at times, by the circumstances of the moment, to more than its real value; and she was sometimes worried down by officious condolence to rate good-breeding as more indispensable to comfort than good-nature. (215)

Considerate behavior does not entirely depend upon or follow from the wish to be considerate. An ability to determine what will be most acceptable and most helpful to others' feelings is required. This determination is never easy; it challenges even those who are "feeling," sensible, and good-natured, like Colonel Brandon. In undertaking to expose Willoughby to Marianne, Colonel Brandon questions his motives, uncertain whether he is concerned principally to assist Marianne or to forward his own suit by undermining Marianne's esteem for Willoughby. The difficulties and anxieties which inevitably accompany sensitivity to others' feelings and consciousness of one's own are reflected even in the syntax of his speech to Elinor:

"My regard for her, for yourself, for your mother--will you allow me to prove it, by relating some circumstances, which nothing but a very sincere regard--nothing but an earnest desire of being useful----I think I am justified--though

where so many hours have been spent in convincing myself that I am right, is there not some reason to fear I may be wrong?" He stopped. (204)

Colonel Brandon's narrative contains all the stock elements of interpolated histories like that of Caroline Evelyn in Fanny Burney's Evelina. Colonel Brandon recounts his love for his cousin, her forced marriage to his brother, her subsequent seduction and desertion, the birth of her illegitimate child, her squalid and penitent deathbed on which she confides her child Eliza to his care, and finally, Eliza's parallel fate: she has been seduced and deserted by Willoughby. This history is usually dismissed as dull and "hackneyed,"²⁴ but it has a significant place in Austen's system of contrasts, and functions quite adequately there. The narrative resolves the contrasts between him and Willoughby which are initiated by one of the most obviously symmetrical of the chapters. In it, Elinor's, Marianne's, and Mrs. Dashwood's estimations of Willoughby are compared with each other and then juxtaposed with an argument between Elinor, Marianne, and Willoughby on Colonel Brandon's character. Implicit in the chapter is the contrast between Colonel Brandon's age, gravity, and reserve, and Willoughby's youth, liveliness, and "ardour of mind" (48). Colonel Brandon's history indicates, however, that he has been a victim of a first attachment. In this and in the mysterious melancholy he exhibits until his revelation, Colonel Brandon and not Willoughby is the conventional romantic hero; Willoughby is simply, sordidly (and conventionally too),

a libertine. Austen amuses herself with this ironic contrast and with a fairly simple ironic consequence: Colonel Brandon's romantic qualities are wholly unattractive to Marianne, even though, as Elinor says, "'her opinions are all romantic'" (56).

At certain points in her narrative, Jane Austen moves beyond her technique of contrast and her visible and consistent patterning of events, in order to assemble characters and to produce scenes and confrontations which prefigure the confrontations found in the later novels and there so justly admired. She does not in Sense and Sensibility completely control or exploit the device, as the dinner at Mrs. John Dashwood's London residence amply illustrates. It does not bear comparison with those scenes at Box Hill, Sotherton, or the White Hart, which convey below the surface of polite or idle talk the cross-currents of passion, misapprehension, vanity, awareness, or ugliness (sometimes approaching evil) which make up emotional life. Although the feelings and designs of the dinner guests are sufficiently at odds with each other to produce considerable pain among them--and in fact some pain is registered--a comic tone is maintained throughout. No sense of the ugliness or stress of conflicting emotions is communicated.

Something of this ugliness appears in the more moving, more successful confrontation managed between Elinor and Lucy Steele, which occurs after Lucy has forced upon Elinor a knowledge of her engagement to Edward. Elinor wishes to

"pump" Lucy, to draw her out, and to probe her feelings for Edward; accordingly, Lucy exposes herself completely. Lucy hopes to torment Elinor with an account of Edward's love, and to tempt her into the false position of advising her, Lucy, to give up Edward. Consequently, Lucy's remarks become increasingly unpleasant and pointed; and Elinor responds with a phrase--"'two people so tenderly attached'" (150)--that constitutes, in context, a sharp dig at Lucy. Elinor's real feelings come out. Emotion cannot always be suppressed even though habit, interest (one's own advantage, in this case the satisfaction of not letting Lucy know her power to hurt), and politeness all dictate it. Jane Austen does not deny to emotion a life of its own: she acknowledges its power and its assertion of independence, at the same time that she indicates that human, civilized behavior depends upon checking, guiding, and harnessing it. The tension between these imperatives animates her novels' most important scenes, gives strength to her themes and vitality to her plots. That a narrow and mean consciousness like Lady Middleton's can to some extent produce the civilized and feeling behavior Austen tries to describe is noted with honesty and with amusement, but her conviction of the value of that behavior remains unshaken.

Observations of this kind are necessary if Sense and Sensibility is to be fairly and accurately evaluated, and if the common charges that it is inflexible and "rigid" are to

be met. These charges, which condemn the novel to narrowness and over-simplicity, proceed from a judgment that its terms are too strictly defined and too consistently adhered to.

Litz's argument is representative:

it must be acknowledged that in Sense and Sensibility [Jane Austen's] increasingly subtle discriminations struggle against the fixities of an antithetical vocabulary. Although admirably suited for the black-and-white world of burlesque, identifying tags such as "Sense" and "Sensibility" are obstacles to the maturing artist. . . . In Sense and Sensibility we often feel that the author is caught in the web of a language which tends to describe "types," not individuals.²⁵

If Litz is right, the novel is not only flatly mechanical, but sterile and unmoving. Both these accusations are false to one's sense of the novel's vitality, that is, its power to portray and to engage human feeling.

The charge of flatness, of static, mechanical movement in the action, is the more formidable because it is closer to the truth. Jane Austen does adhere to the patterns of contrast she sets up, and the patterns are remarkably visible. But if the argument is accepted that her subject is not "sense" versus "sensibility" or "sense" reconciling itself with "sensibility," but rather a study of sensitive behavior--what assists or militates against it and what it costs--then it is clear that her "tags" do not indicate or limit the novel's meaning. In this light, the contrasts and heavy patterning seem to be Jane Austen's delight rather than her burden: it is as if she is both exploring and enjoying in this novel all the possibilities of formal symmetry. Her parallels and contrasts have an exuberant quality in their proclaimed and assertive character.

She calls attention, in short, in this as in her other early works, Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice, to her own technical virtuosity, her own mastery of the principles of structure. Her later novels are more subtly organized; technique is so mastered that the difficulty those novels present lies precisely in isolating technique and detaching it from its material. There, technique approaches invisibility --a condition appropriate enough to the more complex, more delicate, and more penetrating perceptions of those novels. The brilliance and clarity of the early novels, their greater openness and accessibility, derive largely from the exuberance and obtrusiveness of their techniques.

If Jane Austen's technique is acquitted of sterility, it does not necessarily follow that her subject matter deserves equal acquittal: it may be lifeless, even though the devices which shape it are not used lifelessly. Does the creation of Elinor, a character who does not need to correct herself, deprive Sense and Sensibility of all interest, all tension, all development, or, more to the point, of all possibility of evoking emotional response? It is true that Elinor's relation to herself is essentially static; but in her relations to other people she is embattled and tested. This is one source of tension in the novel: Elinor is faced with and must cope with the rudeness and insensitivity of her associates--not only of Lucy (which is minimally disrupting) but of those she loves best, her mother and Marianne--without succumbing

to self-pity or self-righteousness, and without ceasing to be, herself, sensitive to and considerate of them. She does complain, but seldom and quietly: as a result, when Marianne's recovery from illness is assured,

the brilliant cheerfulness of Mrs. Dashwood's looks and spirits proved her to be, as she repeatedly declared herself, one of the happiest women in the world. Elinor could not hear the declaration, nor witness its proofs without sometimes wondering whether her mother ever recollected Edward. (335)

The long speech in which Elinor describes what her feelings have been in response to Edward's engagement, to the malice of Lucy, Mrs. Ferrars, and Mrs. John Dashwood, and to Marianne's unhappiness, in order to correct Marianne's supposition that she has never "felt much," is her most explicit complaint, and is certainly called for by Marianne's injustice, yet it avoids bitterness and blame; its tone is poignant.

"For four months, Marianne, I have had all this hanging on my mind, without being at liberty to speak of it to a single creature; knowing that it would make you and my mother most unhappy whenever it were explained to you, yet unable to prepare you for it in the least.--It was told me,--it was in a manner forced on me by the very person herself, whose prior engagement ruined all my prospects; and told me, as I thought, with triumph.--This person's suspicions, therefore, I have had to oppose, by endeavouring to appear indifferent where I have been most deeply interested;--and it has not been only once;--I have had her hopes and exultation to listen to again and again.--I have known myself to be divided from Edward for ever, without hearing one circumstance that could make me less desire the connection.--Nothing has proved him unworthy; nor has any thing declared him indifferent to me.--I have had to contend against the unkindness of his sister, and the insolence of his mother; and have suffered the punishment of an attachment, without enjoying its advantages.--And all this has been going on at a time, when, as you too well know, it has not been my only unhappiness.--If you can think me capable of ever feeling --surely you may suppose that I have suffered now. The composure of mind with which I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the consolation that I have been

willing to admit, have been the effect of constant and painful exertion;--they did not spring up of themselves;--they did not occur to relieve my spirits at first--No, Marianne.--Then, if I had not been bound to silence, perhaps nothing could have kept me entirely--not even what I owed to my dearest friends--from openly shewing that I was very unhappy." (263-64)

That Elinor has to say such things is painful enough, but worse, she speaks in vain. Marianne does not become less insensitive to her as a result of this speech, and the same must be said of some of the novel's readers. Perhaps Elinor simply does not complain enough. But Jane Austen does in the end sufficiently render the poignance of Elinor's situations--with Edward and Lucy, and with Marianne and her mother. That poignance is the novel's characteristic note, and, rendered quietly and carefully, it is prevented both in Elinor herself and in the novel as a whole from being sentimentalized into self-indulgence or moralized into self-righteousness.

111. Control of Judgment and Sympathy

In depth of emotional content and in complexity of themes and design, Sense and Sensibility clearly represents a considerable advance on Northanger Abbey. Its most significant contribution to the development of Jane Austen's art, however, lies in its treatment of the responses of judgment and sympathy. Jane Austen attempts in Sense and Sensibility to manipulate and finally to educate these responses in her readers. Her interest is, as might be expected, principally engaged by

sympathy, and central to her view of it as an emotional response is its refractoriness: sympathy is either too ready to hand in particular cases, or in others too inert. She intends in her novels to work against this refractoriness, to counteract and correct it somewhat. She entertains no great opinion of its corrigibility, having so keen an awareness of the nature and the limitations of human emotional responsiveness, but she does consider that the response of sympathy can, at least, profit by judicious exercise and above all by becoming aware of itself, and thereby perceiving its own difficult, problematic nature.

In Sense and Sensibility, sympathetic responses are both described in the novel's action and elicited and exercised by it. Elinor's and Marianne's responsiveness to each other and to other characters in the novel is presented, and in turn the reader's responses to them are engaged. Responsiveness to other characters in a Jane Austen novel is expected to issue in, or at least to include, some judgment of them, both by the characters themselves and by the reader. Although Austen never suspends the activity of judgment, she concerns herself with portraying its complicated, inextricable linkage with feeling, particularly with sympathy. "Pure" judgment does not exist: sympathies and biases always and inevitably qualify it, and this renders the educating, the directing, and the enriching of sympathy all the more important. Thus Elinor's judgment

of Edward's behavior is, quite explicitly, more liberal than her judgment of Willoughby's; her love for Edward engages her sympathy and thereby her favorable judgment:

Disappointed, however, and vexed as she was, and sometimes displeased with his uncertain behaviour to herself, she was very well disposed on the whole to regard his actions with all the candid allowances and generous qualifications, which had been rather more painfully extorted from her, for Willoughby's service, by her mother. (101)

When she does feel sympathy for Willoughby after his confession, her response is largely created by qualities which appeal to feelings rather than to judgment:

She felt that his influence over her mind was heightened by circumstances which ought not in reason to have weight; by that person of uncommon attraction, that open, affectionate, and lively manner which it was no merit to possess; and by that still ardent love for Marianne, which it was not even innocent to indulge. But she felt that it was so, long, long before she could feel his influence less. (333)

Attractiveness, energy, and charm inevitably influence judgment by affecting feeling: Jane Austen's very keen awareness of this condition may not be unique, but without it she certainly would not be a novelist, nor be qualified to explore emotional and moral life. This perception of the frequent irrationality, even unjustness, of sympathy, and of its occasionally gratuitous nature, balances a perception of its equally unreasonable and unjust inactivity in good, well-disposed people, exemplified in the lack of sympathy accorded Elinor by her mother and Marianne. That Austen's perceptions are perfectly accurate and perfectly descriptive of the tendencies of emotional responsiveness in general has been amply attested by some of her critics:

they are charmed by Marianne and Willoughby; they are alienated by Elinor. But these tendencies in readers are meant to be, and ought to be, redirected by the text, which succeeds in creating a double consciousness: in the first place, that enthusiasm and sympathy for sheer charm and liveliness often induces blindness to what lies beneath the charm; and, in the second, that the absence of brilliance or flamboyance--in, for instance, Elinor--will often immobilize, or at least discourage, the flow of sympathy. Mansfield Park, which shares some of the themes and concerns of Sense and Sensibility, demands an almost identical consciousness from its readers in relation to Fanny Price and the Crawfords; this is but one of the novel's demands, however, which are far more complex, difficult, and taxing than in any previous work by Austen.

In Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen leaves charm to take care of itself: she is aware that it has the least to fear from injustice and from lack of response. Her method with Elinor is different--and remarkable, considering that her own sympathies are most strongly engaged by her. She refuses to elicit for Elinor any sympathy independent of a cool, clear perception--a judgment--of her position or role in the action. In what she requires of herself as a novelist in this her first conceived and published novel, Jane Austen exhibits a stern control perfectly in accord with the stringency of the vision she unfolds. The injustice which

Elinor encounters is presented calmly and unportentously. It excites no bitterness or indignation, either in Elinor herself or in the author. Generated instead is a sharp, clear, harsh, but also rather amused, awareness that unobtrusive suffering will be met with unjust, unfeeling behavior. Sympathy for Elinor depends upon and derives from this awareness and this judgment: from this rational apprehension of her position. Jane Austen intends to create, and does create in the reader's response to Elinor, an interdependence between sympathy and judgment. These are made, of necessity, to work together. One gives rise to the other, in precisely the way that they operate in Elinor's own consciousness.

In Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen first gives form to her most characteristic theme, the educating of judgment and sympathy. The novel lacks, however, many of the techniques later developed to engage and control these responses. It is not as highly structured as Pride and Prejudice. Austen has not yet fully developed the technique of "linear irony" which she perfects in Pride and Prejudice. This technique complicates all the novels which follow Sense and Sensibility and contributes largely to their denseness and power. In Pride and Prejudice, most of the incidents and dialogue, and all of the wit, are governed by the technique of linear irony; this is not true of the

earlier novel. When incidents involving misjudgments or misapprehensions occur in Sense and Sensibility, the mistakes are in general quickly recognized and registered; or if not, their effect on the action is minimal. Comedy or poignance is the usual result of these misapprehensions. Their effects are immediate rather than cumulative. Elinor's mistaken conviction that Edward's ring contains a lock of her hair is soon enough followed by her discovery that Edward is engaged and the hair is Lucy's. Her mistake is not significant to the scheme; no real consequences follow. In the same way, when Lucy begins to reveal her engagement, Elinor first supposes that Edward's brother Robert must be meant, and her lack of delight "with the idea of such a sister-in-law" (129) is immediately dispelled by Lucy's announcement that she is betrothed to Edward. This incident is neither recalled nor felt at the end when Lucy has married Robert Ferrars and Elinor has married Edward. In Pride and Prejudice, however, Elizabeth's astonishment at Charlotte's willingness to engage herself to Mr. Collins is echoed later by Jane's shocked disbelief at her engagement to Mr. Darcy. This irony at Elizabeth's expense forms part of the overall design, which systematically reverses or undercuts Elizabeth's first impressions and even her more considered judgments. In Pride and Prejudice, every incident involving judgment is cumulative. Austen learns to extract more from her material than she can in Sense and Sensibility, where only the treatment of Elinor

and Marianne approaches a cumulative effect and where many incidents contribute nothing to the rendering of their characters. For instance, no adverse or ironic comment on the characters' failure to detect Willoughby's shallowness, mercenariness, and libertinism is implied at any point, however the failure is regretted; Austen's treatment of Elizabeth Bennet's misjudgments of Wickham and Darcy is altogether different. The reader of Sense and Sensibility is given no opportunity to dissociate himself from Elinor's, Marianne's, and Mrs. Dashwood's favorable judgments of Willoughby, whereas Pride and Prejudice presents a reader with sufficient hints that he ought to judge differently from Elizabeth at certain points, even as Austen cleverly contrives to make it unlikely that he will do so.

The logic of Jane Austen's interest in manipulating responses drives her, in the novels which follow Sense and Sensibility, to greater dramatization and, above all, to more thorough and successful attempts to implicate the reader in the action. Deeper intimacy with her characters is created. We know them more, for Austen's later novels concern themselves more subtly and profoundly with judgment and sympathy. In Pride and Prejudice, problems of judgment are far more complex and pervasive than in Sense and Sensibility, and the characters actually discuss these problems. Mansfield Park, a far more difficult and successful novel than its two predecessors, assimilates their themes while extending and improving on their

techniques. The central character recalls Sense and Sensibility, while the central concern with first impressions, wit, and judgment recalls Pride and Prejudice. Fanny Price combines Marianne's earnestness and her excessive sensibility, minus her pride in it, with Elinor's self-command, judgment, and endurance, and adds an adolescent, anxious self-consciousness foreign to the earlier heroines. In Fanny Price, feeling and judgment interact unceasingly, almost obsessively, and the same is true of the novel itself, which ceaselessly registers the characters' feelings for and judgments of themselves and each other. Judgment of character is, then, more discussed in Mansfield Park and more problematic for both the reader and the characters than it is in Pride and Prejudice. The Crawfords' charm seduces readers almost as readily as it seduces the Bertrams, more insidiously than Wickham's charm blinds Elizabeth Bennet's judgment or Marianne Dashwood's charm has blinded readers of Sense and Sensibility. The reader of Mansfield Park who cannot detect nor assent to the mixture of faults and virtues in Mary and Henry Crawford or, more important, who cannot feel for and with Fanny Price while distancing himself from her excessive, adolescent misery, is wholly unable to produce any of the subtle, powerful, and difficult responses Austen demands in Mansfield Park, which would surely be Austen's finest novel, but for Emma.

Sense and Sensibility addresses itself to the unruliness of sympathy rather than judgment (as in Pride and Prejudice)

or rather than both (as in Mansfield Park). To claim this is to recognize delicate shades of emphasis, for Austen's constant theme is that the operations of the two responses are inextricable, however ludicrous or inappropriate the result. In Sense and Sensibility, however, she interests herself in exploring feeling or sympathy in relation to conduct rather than to judgment, while in Mansfield Park she explores the relations of all three equally. In Sense and Sensibility, then, Jane Austen wishes to define genuinely feeling behavior or conduct and to promote genuine responsiveness, not just to literature but to other people as well. The relations of judgment and sympathy explored in the later novels are, however, by nature far more problematic as well as more profound than the relations between feeling and conduct which Sense and Sensibility examines--although perhaps hardly more important. In any event, the "sympathy" those novels describe and elicit becomes a more judicious, more complex, and consequently, more intimate response, quite different from either the enthusiasm generated by Marianne or the calm, rueful, poignant feeling evoked by Elinor. In Sense and Sensibility, finally, the two responses of judgment and sympathy are presented in simple interaction (in the reader's, and at last in Marianne's, response to Elinor's predicament) or in simple opposition (in the reader's and Elinor's response to Marianne, who elicits affection and adverse judgment simultaneously). The reader, experiencing responses thus

combined and complicated, enriches his emotional and moral consciousness.

- ¹ Babb, p. 51.
- ² Page, p. 95.
- ³ Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 91.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 93.
- ⁵ "Learning Experience and Change," in B. C. Southam, ed., Critical Essays on Jane Austen (London, 1968), p. 61.
- ⁶ Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 91.
- ⁷ Jane Austen's Novels, p. 89.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 91.
- ⁹ "On Sense and Sensibility," intro. to Sense and Sensibility, ed. Watt (New York, 1961); rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 48.
- ¹⁰ Errand of Form, p. 56.
- ¹¹ Art of Allusion, pp. 62 and 44.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 70.
- ¹³ Jane Austen's Novels, p. 91.
- ¹⁴ "Introduction," Sense and Sensibility (New York, 1959), p. 15.

¹⁵ Surprisingly, this view of Sense and Sensibility has been long delayed, although three studies published in 1973 arrived at it independently. Tave's reading of the novel is closest to my own. He points out that Marianne's sensibility "makes her often the opposite of what she thinks she is" (Some Words of Jane Austen, p. 80). She believes that "she has an instrument of superior perceptivity" permitting her to judge better than others, but "she is not in fact a good judge" (p. 82). Further, "Marianne's failing is not that her sensibility is too great. . . . Her excess of false sensibility is a deficiency of real sensibility" (p. 95). Finally, in her sensibility, "The excess, the lack of moderation, the lack of prudence, is a deliberate moral choice, and a choice of weakness" (p. 79). Her conduct is deliberate, not "an innocent indulgence" but rather "following a rigid form," and "it has an effect on others, giving pain" while "the effect on herself is destructive" (p. 81).

Like Tave, Nardin notes that "Marianne believes that her sensibilities give her a moral sense that is a far more infallible guide to truly reasonable and moral social behavior than the commonly accepted rules of propriety can provide" (Elegant Decorums, p. 29). Further, "there is a strong element of unconscious selfishness in Marianne's refusal to consider politeness a duty. In caring so much for her own feelings, she ignores the feelings of others, particularly those of Elinor. And selfishness is by far the

deadliest sin in the world of Sense and Sensibility" (p. 37). Nardin also observes that "One of Jane Austen's basic assumptions in Sense and Sensibility is that individual human judgments are essentially fallible and self-interested" (p. 45), and that "the basic problem in the novel is how people can protect themselves from the consequences of misjudgment, rather than how they can best avoid making mistakes" (p. 39).

In all this, Tave, Nardin, and I essentially agree. Nardin follows "ironic" critics, however, in straining to show that "though Elinor's system [of judgment and of social behavior] is ultimately justified, it is by no means completely superior, point by point, to Marianne's" (p. 30). Neither Tave nor I find this sort of irony in the treatment of Elinor. We agree that Elinor is the central character (Tave, p. 96) and that her "exertions" illustrate Austen's conception of the moral life as "a purposeful and powerful pursuit, a life of activity, of usefulness, of exertion" (p. 98). I differ from both Tave and Nardin in thinking that Austen expects her readers to be charmed at first by Marianne and rather alienated by Elinor, so that these feelings can be gradually and subtly redirected by the text. That is, I see an attempt to educate the reader's judgments and sympathies as central to the novel.

Pinion's recent discussion is less extensive than Nardin's or Tave's, but he does point out that Marianne's

"Self-centredness was not her only fault; she lacked 'candour' and civility" (A Jane Austen Companion, p. 87). Pinion does justice to Elinor's feelings as well. "Jane Austen indicates enough for the intelligent reader to realize that Elinor suffers a great deal" (p. 88). To recognize that Elinor has feelings is, however, far more usual among critics of Sense and Sensibility than is any acknowledgement of Marianne's selfish and unfeeling behavior. Kroeber is one of a number of critics who defend Elinor by pointing out that to Austen, "control of feeling does not mean denial of feeling" (Styles in Fictional Structure, p. 67). Duckworth goes further, for he approves Elinor's moral stance and "moral struggle" (Improvement of the Estate, p. 114), and finds her "characterization . . . more successful than has generally been recognized" (p. 110). Nevertheless, these readers, along with most others, do ignore the irony with which Austen treats Elinor: that her successful and considerate exertions to control her feelings cause Marianne, Mrs. Dashwood, and many critics to ignore her feelings. Even a recent critic who notes Marianne's "self-centredness" can conclude: "Elinor is right, but the better loved heroine is Marianne, because the reader too finds her irresistible" ("Introduction," Sense and Sensibility, ed. and intro. Claire Lamont [London, 1970], pp. xi and xx).

¹⁶ Fictional Conventions, p. 55.

¹⁷ Artistic Development, p. 76.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁹ Fabric of Dialogue, p. 51.

²⁰ Moler is one of the few critics who note Marianne's "moral blindness" (Art of Allusion, p. 44) and her failure "to do justice to Elinor's feelings" (p. 45), but his emphasis is very different from mine or Tave's. He considers that while the reader is in no danger of failing to note Marianne's faults (p. 44), he is unlikely to see Elinor's "moral-emotional blindness" (p. 46). I would disagree, both that the reader obviously notes the importance of Marianne's blindness, and that Elinor is guilty of parallel faults.

²¹ A Musician Talks (London, 1944), I, 44.

²² Letters, p. 411.

²³ Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 86.

²⁴ Litz, p. 82.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 77-78.

III: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ITS PREDECESSORS

Pride and Prejudice occupies a central position among Jane Austen's works. It is the last and most complex of the early novels. It was considerably revised just prior to, or possibly even during, the composition of Mansfield Park, which represents a remarkable advance, yet it incorporates some of her earliest concerns, themes, and techniques. A preliminary approach to these themes and techniques must be made through the fiction of Jane Austen's predecessors. Of all Austen's novels, Pride and Prejudice includes the most embedded, insistent, and interesting links to earlier fiction, and therefore invites examination in relation to its forerunners. Before these relations can be explored, the general problems encountered in any discussion of Jane Austen and her predecessors need study. Too often these discussions merely cite the numerous parallel incidents or plots; Mary Lascelles has once for all defined the uselessness of such efforts:

to find an episode or turn of plot in one of Jane Austen's novels which resembles one in some earlier novel--even though that precursor should be one of her favourites, and prompting be as likely an explanation as coincidence--this tells us very little of what the work of that earlier novelist meant to Jane Austen; for, so long as she remained content to build her plots of these major incidents, she could not but build them of material that had been used already.¹

The difficulty, then, lies in locating parallels which can be explained by "prompting," not "coincidence," parallels which

have consciousness or intention behind them and which, consequently, point to interesting and illuminating relationships between the methods and intentions of Jane Austen's fiction and that of her predecessors. She is known to have liked best among them Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney, and above all, the Samuel Richardson of Sir Charles Grandison (a rather surprising selection to modern taste). Although all these writers are less successful in the attempt than she, all can be observed trying, like her, to deal with the problem of the reader's response to fiction, trying to find literary means to elicit and control this response for didactic purposes. The important question is how and why these generally unrealized attempts and purposes of earlier authors become moving and compelling in Austen's works. An answer can be approached by studying the two novels which have a special relation to Pride and Prejudice and which anticipate and to some extent share its purposes: Fanny Burney's Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress (1782) and Sir Charles Grandison (1753-54).

1. Cecilia

That Fanny Burney's intentions or achievements share anything with Jane Austen's has usually been denied, although the relation between them is frequently discussed. In particular, the relation between Cecilia and Pride and Prejudice has been explored by several critics, since what

is usually taken as the moral of Cecilia may have supplied the title, Pride and Prejudice. A minor character in Cecilia moralizes on the action in the last chapter, called "A Termination":

"The whole of this unfortunate business," said Dr. Lyster, "has been the result of PRIDE and PREJUDICE. . . . Yet this, however, remember; if to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you owe your miseries, so wonderfully is good and evil balanced, that to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you will also owe their termination. . . . Thus the same passions, taking but different directions, do mischief and cure it alternately."

"Such, my good young friends, is the MORAL of your calamities."²

R. W. Chapman's suggestion that "it is permissible to guess that First Impressions owed more to Cecilia than the alteration of its title"³ is an early and cautious attempt to begin defining the relationship between them, but it raises problems. For one thing, other possible sources for the title exist-- "the phrase must be regarded as a commonplace."⁴ Nevertheless, enough resemblances (either parallel or contrasting) to the incidents and characters of Cecilia can be pointed out that some relation clearly is present and meant to be noted.

At first sight, the plot of Cecilia suggests only differences from Pride and Prejudice. Cecilia Beverley, beautiful, intelligent, prudent, and an heiress of £3000 a year, will lose this fortune unless the man she marries takes her name. She has three guardians, the profligate and spendthrift Harrel, the miser Briggs, and the proud and prejudiced elder Mr. Delvile. At the start of the novel, her uncle has died, and she moves to London to reside with

Mr. Harrel and his wife, her weak and silly school friend. During her residence there, which occupies the first half of the novel, she is introduced to society, and her financial generosity is tested by worthy and unworthy suppliants; the unworthy among them overcome her prudence in part. She meets her third guardian's wife and son, Mrs. Delville and Mortimer Delville, and she falls in love with Mortimer. Both Mrs. Delville and her son think Cecilia engaged to someone else and consequently think themselves safe, since both reject the idea of Delville's losing his name. All three are seen estimating, and misinterpreting, each other. The second half of the novel begins, symmetrically enough, with Cecilia's taking up residence for a time at Delville Castle, because her former guardian, Harrel, having wasted his own and a portion of Cecilia's fortune, has committed suicide. In this half of the novel, Cecilia's emotional generosity and honor are tried; from here on, pride and prejudice are shown to conflict with the love Mrs. Delville, Delville, and Cecilia feel for each other. Delville at last reveals his love to Cecilia by various means and Cecilia reveals hers subsequently, and fortuitously, to him; a clandestine marriage is attempted and thwarted (in a typically Burneyan combination) by coincidence, by the plots of Mr. Menckton, who wants to marry Cecilia, and by Cecilia's own misgivings and guilt and pride. At last the climactic scene occurs: Mrs. Delville, a character in whom Fanny Burney intended to blend "noble and rare qualities with striking and incurable defects,"⁵

tries to prevent the marriage (which outrages her family pride) by working on the pride of both Cecilia and her son. She succeeds, but is brought some months later to sanction a private marriage between them, as a result of the willingness of all three to renounce Cecilia's fortune in order to preserve the Delville name. The marriage takes place secretly and is followed by an immediate separation. Mortimer Delville and Mrs. Delville go to the Continent, she to restore her health and Delville to await the consequences of his duel with Mr. Monckton, whose intrigues and calumnies against Cecilia have been revealed at last. This separation leaves Cecilia prey to the distresses experienced by every eighteenth-century heroine after Clarissa, and she suffers in rapid succession the loss of her home, her money, her health, and her reason, all as a result of her false position: her clandestine and unacknowledged marriage. At last, a final reunion with Delville takes place, and health and reason and even fortune are restored. Although Cecilia's original fortune is irrevocably lost, Fanny Burney cannot resist bequeathing her, almost immediately, another fortune in her own right from Mrs. Delville's sister.

(1) Critical Opinions

Perhaps because of the fairly great surface differences between the novels, most critics restrict themselves to finding rather narrow resemblances. Chapman notes that Delville's

letter to Cecilia "explaining his family's opposition to the match and his own scruples, and the lady's reception of it"⁶ foreshadow Darcy's letter and Elizabeth's reaction; he also notes that "the resemblance of Pemberley to Pemberton, the family name, in Cecilia, of the Duke of Derwent [related to the Delviles], may be something more than accident."⁷ There is general agreement that Mrs. Bennet's vulgarity, which embarrasses Elizabeth again and again, is comparable to Mrs. Belfield's vulgarity, which frequently embarrasses both her daughter Henrietta and Cecilia herself.⁸ Subjects of conversation or pieces of wit in Cecilia reappear in Pride and Prejudice, as Frank Bradbrook notes:

Thus, Mr Meadows in Cecilia expresses his opinion of dancing: 'What, dancing? Oh, dreadful! how it was ever adopted in a civilised country, I cannot find out; it is certainly a Barbarian exercise, and of savage origin.' In Pride and Prejudice, Sir William Lucas having remarked that dancing is one of the first refinements of polished society, Darcy retorts: 'It has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished society of the world.--Every savage can dance.'⁹

Bradbrook and several other critics go further, finding in Jane Austen's characters some intended resemblance to the characters in Cecilia or to Fanny Burney's characters in general. The critics, however, do not always agree on the tenor of these resemblances. For example, Darcy is said by Kenneth Moler to be a burlesque of the Burneyan "patrician hero," particularly Lord Orville of Evelina, but of Delville as well, since "all of Fanny Burney's heroes resemble Richardson's patrician hero [Sir Charles Grandison] somewhat."¹¹ On the other hand, to Q. D. Leavis, "Darcy is only Delville,"¹² and R. Brimley Johnson

points out similarities too.¹³ Cecilia herself is thought by all to be a faultless heroine, except for her "morbid delicacy,"¹⁴ noted by Leavis, who assumes that it is no fault to Fanny Burney; as a result, she and other critics point out only differences between Cecilia and Elizabeth. These differences are emphasized and underscored for most critics, and again particularly for Leavis, by the contrast between the central scene of Cecilia, in which her lover's mother appeals to Cecilia to renounce him for the sake of his family pride and in which Cecilia finally yields, and the very different scene in Pride and Prejudice between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

Drawing these parallels and contrasts, however, does not seem to lead critics to very interesting conclusions about the relationship of Jane Austen to Fanny Burney. B. C. Southam concludes that in introducing a "wide range of character types" she follows Burney's example.¹⁵ Bradbrook notes Jane Austen's skill "in transforming the material that Fanny Burney supplied" but emphasizes Burney's limits when he states that Austen "accepts Fanny Burney's conception of the hero, but her heroines are much less conventional" and that Burney cannot "show a character developing or changing or being transformed in the consciousness of another person"¹⁶ while Austen can.

Only Leavis attempts a theory of the relationship between the novels, and it is predictably elaborate: Pride

and Prejudice began as an "anti-Cecilia," a Cecilia made realistic, and was later expanded to an examination of marriage, "the marriage of love in the face of family disapprobation" and its "obverse," "the marriage of convenience that is approved by worldly wisdom."¹⁷ She does not observe that these two forms of marriage are discussed in Cecilia (though not as insistently as in Pride and Prejudice), but she appears to accept them as central to Fanny Burney's novel, for she concludes with this puzzling account of Pride and Prejudice in relation to Cecilia:

It is the central idea of Cecilia given an elaborate orchestration, as it were, sometimes guyed (when Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley stand for the dignified opposition of Delville's family to his attachment), more often used as an opportunity for self-exploration on the author's part (Elizabeth's outbreak about Charlotte's marriage and her discussion of 'candour' with her sister are spots where the crust of objective comedy visibly cracks).¹⁸

This attempt to connect the themes of the novels is unsatisfactory because the two forms of marriage Leavis mentions, however important they are to the talk and action of Pride and Prejudice, do not constitute the "central idea" of Cecilia.

In making this attempt, Leavis is at least dealing with an interesting question which is seldom raised--and even when raised, too often easily dismissed, as in this forthright and simple treatment by C. L. Thomson:

The resemblance in theme is obvious, for though in Cecilia the pride and prejudice are all on one side, the heroes wrestle with their affections from similar motives, and Delville, like Darcy, avoids his mistress because he hopes to subdue his passion by absence.¹⁹

To imply in this way that both novels use the same theme, "pride and prejudice," and differ only in Austen's less one-sided application, is to oversimplify both. "Pride and prejudice" describes neither's theme adequately. More important, even though the phrase may be an eighteenth-century commonplace, neither novel uses it in the same way, and in this sense, the phrase actually serves to define what the two novels do not share in theme. For although Fanny Burney does allow one character to speak of "pride and prejudice" as the motive of the action, and although she does refer to prejudice at intervals in Cecilia, she is primarily interested in exploring the effects of pride; "pride and prejudice" is a misleading tag. Prejudice is used in a very narrow sense--prejudice in favor of one's own name, or class--as an adjunct to pride; little attempt is made to distinguish it from pride.

(2) The Theme of Pride

Attempts to define what the novels do share in theme must probe the terms "pride and prejudice" more deeply, and finally go beyond them. Prejudice in its wider sense, implying the general problem of judgment, is present in Cecilia but not under that name. Fanny Burney is interested in misjudgment, and even in linking it to pride, but it is presented as only one of the unfortunate effects of pride. Thus, the pride of the Delvilles can offend Cecilia's own

pride and cause her to react coldly and distantly, so that misunderstandings follow; and pride is involved in Cecilia's and Delville's eagerness to misinterpret and think the worst of each other; but these misjudgments result less from pride than from the irritations and anxieties of love which is unacknowledged at first even to themselves and later thwarted. Burney makes no real attempt, then, to connect the operations of judgment with the operations of pride. Pride is her central theme and she explores it in a fine eighteenth-century manner, combining it schematically with different qualities in her characters. Mr. Belfield, for example, unites pride with imprudence and Mr. Monckton, his opposite number, unites pride and the reverse, overcalculation. They are each, of course, brought to most exemplary ruin, although Belfield, the less guilty, is rescued at the end. Fanny Burney records in her diary a conversation in which she summarizes her intentions:

"I merely meant to show how differently pride, like every other quality, operates upon different minds, and that, though it is so odious when joined with meanness and incapacity, as in Mr. Delville, it destroys neither respect nor affection when joined with real dignity and generosity of mind, as in Mrs. Delville."²⁰

This schematic exploration of pride should be kept in mind. Jane Austen does echo it in parts of Pride and Prejudice, but this echo only underscores its subordinate position in her novel. Austen is not exploring "pride" centrally, nor even "prejudice" centrally. The phrase is not a tag for her, but a challenge, and she explores the interaction of the two qualities. She is particularly interested in "prejudice" as

"pride of judgment"²¹ or the tendency to leap to conclusions and then stick to them.

Her interest in this subject is announced by the original title, First Impressions; and here some serious difficulties arise in dealing with Pride and Prejudice itself, and with its relation to Cecilia. Does the change in title reflect a revision in theme, or a less sweeping revision, or is it completely unrelated to either and prompted instead by the publication of Mrs. Holford's First Impressions in 1801, as B. C. Southam conjectures?²² Were the resemblances to Cecilia part of the original intention of Pride and Prejudice and present in the first draft, even though it was called First Impressions, or were they introduced later? These questions are probably unanswerable, since not enough actual information exists about the revisions of Pride and Prejudice, but they deserve consideration in a modified form: ignoring the problem of when the revisions occurred, how well does Jane Austen succeed in combining an exploration of the workings of pride (a theme in Cecilia) with an exploration of the workings of first impressions, or prejudice, or judgment (a constant theme in Austen's work and in Sir Charles Grandison)? Or, how well unified is the novel?

This question is seldom asked, since most critics praise the unity of Pride and Prejudice and start by defining Austen's success in precisely the terms given, as success in combining "pride and prejudice" in both her main characters. Litz's

analysis is representative:

one cannot equate Darcy with Pride, or Elizabeth with Prejudice; Darcy's pride of place is founded on social prejudice, while Elizabeth's initial prejudice against him is rooted in pride of her own quick perceptions. In this we have a clear indication of the novel's distance from Cecilia.²³

It is a mistake, however, to be so impressed by Darcy and Elizabeth that elements in Jane Austen's treatment of other characters or of scenes--elements more strictly schematic and very reminiscent of Cecilia--are overlooked. These elements are particularly visible in the first five or six chapters of Pride and Prejudice, and it is worthwhile to examine these chapters closely before attempting any wider comparison of the themes, purposes, and methods of the two novels.

There is a surprising delay in presenting the themes implied by the title; only in Persuasion does Jane Austen similarly delay the presentation of her themes, and she may not have considered Persuasion completely finished.²⁴ The delay in Pride and Prejudice becomes evident, however, by comparison with Sense and Sensibility, whose first chapter clearly and loudly announces the theme by introducing and describing the characters of Elinor and Marianne. The initial chapters of Pride and Prejudice are remarkably indirect. Its first four chapters deal with the problem of "first impressions." Chapters I and II are well known for their entertaining exchanges exposing Mrs. Bennet's foolishness and Mr. Bennet's wit, but these characters expose themselves

by dwelling not simply on the subject of marriage but also on the conventions which control social introductions. This subject is kept in view for some time. Mr. Bennet takes an anti-conventional stance in the first chapter; when his wife insists that "'Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him, if you do not,'" he replies, making fun of her confusing an introduction with a marriage:

"You are over scrupulous surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying which ever he chuses of the girls." (4)

In the next chapter he reverses himself by mock approval of the conventions ("Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you there"), and he plays on the discrepancy between knowing someone socially and knowing him indeed, by deliberately misinterpreting his wife's "'I am not acquainted with him myself':

"I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight." (7)

All this is entertaining and reveals Mr. and Mrs. Bennet for us, but it all seems to belong in a book called First Impressions rather than Pride and Prejudice. The incidents of the next two chapters continue this emphasis on introductions: reports about Bingley are received from the Lucases, a glimpse of his "from an upper window" is obtained when he returns Mr. Bennet's call, Mrs. Bennet's further conjectures are supplied ("She could not imagine

what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be" [10]), and all climaxes in the "introduction," to the Bennets and to the reader, of both Bingley and Darcy--to be succeeded by accounts of public opinion of them, of Darcy's refusal to be introduced to Elizabeth, of the Bennets' views on them, and finally of their own views on the Bennets.

The subject of pride is not completely submerged in this exposition, but each time, Darcy's pride seems described only to be linked to its various effects on people's judgments of him, a "first impressions" emphasis:

he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend. (10)

[Darcy] was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence. (16)

Even the most shocking demonstration of his pride, his insulting refusal to dance with Elizabeth, provides opportunities for judgments of various kinds: "Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him" (12) and Mrs. Bennet, typically, finds him "'a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring him! He walked here, and he walked there, fancying

himself so very great!" (13).

The fullest discussion of the incident comes in Chapter V, where for the first time "pride" as a theme receives consideration. The chapter begins with a description of the caricature Sir William Lucas, who combines pride and affability just as Darcy combines pride and incivility, or as Mr. Collins later will combine pride and servility; and in the very next chapter Sir William and Darcy are made to confront each other on the subject of dancing, so that the opposition between them becomes unmistakable and comic as well. Sir William reminds us of a novel like Cecilia, in which the characters very schematically combine different traits with pride, and the fifth chapter as a whole reminds us of the moral debates inserted in eighteenth-century novels. A good example of these debates is supplied by the second chapter of Cecilia, titled "An Argument." Genius and its obligation either to comply with or to defy convention is discussed by the two opposed characters Belfield and Monckton. In Pride and Prejudice, the "debate" is treated humorously, and we hear the vulgar voice of Mrs. Bennet, the candid voice of Jane, the worldly and practical voice of Charlotte, the moralizing voice of Mary, and the ironic voice of Elizabeth discoursing on the subject of pride, a discourse that descends abruptly to an idiotic argument between Mrs. Bennet and a "young Lucas." This serves equally to undercut literary debates of this sort and to round off the chapter. Thus, although "pride"

has now been brought forward, it has been treated very cavalierly indeed.

This delay or indirection in presenting the themes announced by the title is paralleled by other assaults on the reader's expectations. Mr. Bingley seems to be the hero until Chapter VI, when Darcy's interest in Elizabeth is discovered; Elizabeth's own importance is not perfectly clear until Chapter IV, after Darcy's insult, when she discusses the ball with Jane; and the "fixed" characters Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, who are presented in the first chapter complete with capsule descriptions, mislead the reader into thinking "character" will be a predictable and reliable quality in the novel, as readily ascertained as in Sense and Sensibility. There are even traces of Austen's earlier burlesque manner.

As if all these elements were not enough for the reader to assimilate, Austen includes in her first few chapters some superficial but still surprising parallels to the opening chapters of Cecilia in addition to the ones mentioned between the debates, and between Burney's schematic use of characters who combine different qualities with pride and Austen's echoes of this device. Comprehensive summaries of character, common in Fanny Burney's novels, are less so in Jane Austen's, but the familiar summary of Mrs. Bennet's character at the end of Chapter I--

Her mind was less difficult to develope. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.

When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news (5)

--is quite like the summary at the start of Chapter II in Cecilia of the character of Lady Margaret Monckton's companion, actually named Miss Bennet:

she was low-born, meanly educated, and narrow-minded; a stranger alike to innate merit or acquired accomplishments, yet skilful in the art of flattery, and an adept in every species of low cunning. [She had] no other view in life than the attainment of affluence without labour. (I, 11; I, 14)

This resemblance is probably coincidental, and if not, is probably intended to mock Burney's inclusion of characters like Miss Bennet who scarcely reappear (this one is finally discovered to be the "mere tool" [X, 1; V, 213] who interrupts Cecilia's marriage) and who are "introduced," as Jane Austen remarks, in a letter criticizing another author's characters, "apparently merely to be delineated."²⁵ A more difficult parallel exists between a passage in Cecilia and the opening lines of Pride and Prejudice, which are certainly among the more famous:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters. (3)

Because Cecilia is an heiress, she takes Mr. Bingley's place in the above formula and is revealed in the first chapter as the intended prey of Mr. Monckton, a major force in the plot, who "had long looked upon her as his future property; as

such . . . he had already appropriated her estate" (I, 1; I, 11).

If these two passages were less prominent, if they did not occur in the first chapters of each novel and if they had less relation to the succeeding action, their similar motif could be dismissed quite easily, since Austen's brilliant style and tone clearly owe nothing to Fanny Burney. As it is, the resemblance is puzzling, and typical of the difficulties presented by the first chapters of Pride and Prejudice. These difficulties stem from an initial lack of overall focus which does not result in shapelessness but does dispel unity. The reader focuses upon a succession of sharp, brilliantly defined scenes, characters, descriptions, or themes, all equally vivid, and can draw any number of parallels between them (not to mention parallels with other works), but not at the same time; and this constitutes the difficulty. Each sharp, vivid focus competes for attention, each is discrete and discontinuous, just as each of the first six chapters is highly structured and sharply defined but is, partly as a result, separable and somewhat isolated from the others. The breaks between the opening chapters are oddly abrupt, and the chapters themselves tend to be very short and clipped, in a manner not elsewhere to be found in the novels. The effect is one of brilliance, immediacy, and vividness, but choppy and lack of direction result as well.

This surprising discontinuity in the first chapters

answers, at least with respect to its opening, the original question, how well unified is the novel? The reasons for asking the question and the importance of the answer need explanation. If the first chapters of Pride and Prejudice contain indications, perhaps overlooked when Austen "lop't and crop't so successfully"²⁶ of directions the novel could have taken (and perhaps did take at one time), then these worked-over chapters offer a basis for measuring her later achievement. Passages like the five-way debate on pride and characters like Sir William would of themselves offer little promise of scenes like those at Netherfield and in Derbyshire between Elizabeth, Darcy, Miss Bingley, and her brother, or of characters like Mr. Collins, who is as much a caricature as Sir William but who is used perfectly and fully. In Pride and Prejudice, then, Jane Austen can be observed in the process of assimilating an earlier achievement like Fanny Burney's, just as in Northanger Abbey she assimilates Ann Radcliffe's, by both borrowing from it and burlesquing it, and then extending and surpassing that original material so perfectly that the process is almost as undetectable as it is inexplicable, even when dealing with these fairly simple achievements, which the later novels transcend in turn. Jane Austen's skill is so great that the exposed scaffolding of these early chapters of Pride and Prejudice, and the hints they contain of a novel somewhat more primitive in intention and execution, are scarcely registered.

(3) Jane Austen's Interest in Cecilia

The reasons for Jane Austen's interest in Cecilia and her esteem for it are demonstrated by the well-known passage from Northanger Abbey:

"It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;" or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (38)

This is an unrecognizable description of Cecilia as it is usually viewed; the question is, can any elements in Cecilia be isolated which would justify Austen's praise and which might have inspired her, other than the fairly superficial and unhelpful ones, like the phrase "pride and prejudice" as a statement of the theme? The phrase should not be dismissed altogether; closer examination than has yet been attempted of Fanny Burney's treatment of "pride" yields surprising results. A more sophisticated and complex exploration of the workings of pride--its effects on other emotions and on judgment--can be found in Cecilia than the crudity of either its style or some of its characters and structures would lead the reader to expect.

Some clear structural parallels exist between the novels--which, however, serve finally to point up differences in technique. Most obviously, Cecilia's visit to Delville Castle early in Book VI, the novel's midpoint, parallels Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley at the start of Volume III. Fanny Burney

takes the usual opportunity to characterize an owner by his property, and the elder Mr. Delville's limitations are underscored by the castle's "evident struggle to support some appearance of its ancient dignity, [which] made the dwelling and all in it's vicinity wear an aspect of constraint and austerity" (VI, 111; III, 240-41). Darcy's virtues are likewise suggested by the "natural beauty . . . so little counteracted by an awkward taste" (245) and the "real elegance" (246) of Pemberley. More important, both sets of lovers are brought together by these visits, and in the encounters which follow, the characters experience difficulty in making out each other's feelings, though each becomes gradually more sure of his own. The feelings of Elizabeth and Darcy are more complex than those of Cecilia and Delville, yet similarities exist in the delineation of emotional tension and in the choice of a character's "home grounds" to bring it out. Austen uses Darcy's inarticulateness and then his civility to show his feeling for Elizabeth; Burney has to invent crises (like a thunderstorm) so that Delville's tenderness can show itself in anxiety. Austen's parallel crisis--Lydia's elopement--shows her skill: the "ambiguity" in Darcy's response is only cleared up later, and the incident permits the fullest possible test of Darcy's generosity and feeling by allowing him to effect Lydia's marriage and then become the "Brother-in-law of Wickham!" Elizabeth herself reflects, "Every kind of pride must revolt from the connection" (326). Typically, Darcy's

response upon hearing of the elopement, "walking up and down the room in earnest meditation; his brow contracted, his air gloomy" (278), is far less melodramatic and contrived, much more natural, than Delville's response to Cecilia's supposed danger from the storm:

"[Your life] is more precious," cried he with vehemence, "than the air I breathe!" and seizing her hand, he drew it under his arm, and, without waiting her consent, almost forced her away with him. (VI, v; III, 268)

Both responses are stilted and conventional by comparison with the gestures Austen later uses to convey feeling, such as Captain Wentworth's silently removing her nephew from Anne Elliot's neck in Persuasion (80) or Mr. Knightley's flush accompanying his answer, made while "hard at work" buttoning his shoes, to Emma's hint that he loves Jane Fairfax (287).

Another parallelism in structure is provided by a common interest in contriving "linear irony," that is, in systematically organizing the action to undercut the characters' and the readers' expectations. Thus, the overall irenic structure of Cecilia--that the heiress becomes a penniless bride or, more generally, that fortune, beauty, and intelligence united do not guarantee happiness--is intended to violate the contemporary reader's expectations. Similarly, Cecilia's own overconfidence in her ability to predict and control her feelings (such as falling in love) and her later smug certainty that Delville's delay in proposing to her springs merely from his diffidence of success, are very decidedly contradicted by the action. Linear irony is a major structural element in

Pride and Prejudice; the different uses of the device, however, are worth noting. These are epitomized by the difference between the comeuppance arranged for Elizabeth's "pride of judgment" (her judgments are shown to err again and again) and the irony of the rational Cecilia's temporarily losing her reason at the end. Fanny Burney's irony is on the surface, or external, and not motivated by character.

This difference is echoed in each author's use of the basic and familiar courtship pattern to structure her novel. The courtship novel depends on inventing obstacles to marriage, obstacles which are typically "external" in the works of Fanny Burney and the earliest Jane Austen: the opposition of General Tilney in Northanger Abbey, and the need for consent and assistance from Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith in Sense and Sensibility, prevent immediate marriages. Already in Sense and Sensibility, however, the marriages prevented by these outside influences are not the final ones which the entire novel moves toward, but rather those between Edward and Lucy Steele, and Willoughby and Marianne. There is already a transition to emphasis on "internal" obstacles: Edward's foolish engagement to Lucy delays his marriage to Elinor, and Willoughby's seduction of Miss Williams, which angers Mrs. Smith, joins with his mercenariness to preclude his marriage to Marianne. This transition is furthered by Pride and Prejudice (Lady Catherine is an ineffectual remnant of earlier external obstacles) and completed by the later

novels, in which the central couples have been long acquainted and which therefore tend to show love unaware of itself or unacknowledged love becoming aware, as Captain Wentworth's love for Anne, Edmund's for Fanny, and Mr. Knightley's and Emma's for each other.

The "external" obstacles of Fanny Burney do cause internal conflicts, so they are not wholly lacking in thematic interest. Burney likes to arrange and show conflicts between love and other feelings (the conflict between love and "pride and prejudice" is not to be escaped in eighteenth-century literature) and even more conventionally, between love and duty or reason or principle--including the "principle" that a lady must not love someone who does not love her. This rule, alluded to mockingly in Northanger Abbey (29-30) and notoriously formulated by Samuel Richardson in the Rambler is not invariably adhered to even by his heroines: "That a young lady should be in love, and the love of the young gentleman undeclared, is an heterodoxy which prudence, and even policy, must not allow."²⁷ Jane Austen's predecessors were interested in this problem, and Burney's Cecilia and Edgeworth's Belinda, among others, experience conflict from the attempt to control their own feelings until they know their lovers'. This is not utterly barren ground for a novelist; some of Burney's best effects in Cecilia are rooted here, and Austen's treatment of Fanny Price and Anne Elliot shows how she can transform this stock material. In fact,

Austen becomes increasingly brilliant at solving the problem of inventing plausible and interesting obstacles to the immediate union of the lovers that will permit them to interact before they become engaged. On the other hand, Fanny Burney becomes increasingly awkward in dealing with this problem in each successive novel, and even when her schemes emphasize obstacles to union which spring from the characters' emotions, she can only dramatize these schemes by relying on continual misapprehensions (caused by slander, compromising situations, false appearances, and other conventional devices), and on frequent interruptions to conversations at "interesting" moments--devices Austen renounces until she once again transforms them at the end of Persuasion.

The structural parallels between Cecilia and Pride and Prejudice underscore Jane Austen's superior techniques. If these parallels accounted for every link between the novels, Austen's interest in Cecilia would remain inexplicable. But in Fanny Burney's attitude to her heroine Austen found much to interest her and to build on. Cecilia is, first of all, not a faultless heroine; she has limits, and Burney treats them with irony. When Cecilia first discovers and admits that she loves Delville, Burney is not concerned with one form of self-deception which is present, Cecilia's having fooled herself until then about her feelings (a concern of Austen's), but rather with another: her certainty at this point that everything will work out perfectly:

Delighted with so flattering a union of inclination with propriety, she now began to cherish the partiality she at first had repressed, and [thought] the future destination of her life already settled. (IV, 11; II, 144)

Cecilia even hopes that Delville will not immediately declare himself, so that she will have more time to study his character. Fanny Burney directs her irony against Cecilia's complacency--"this happy intellectual arrangement" (IV, 111; II, 146)--and she underlines her point by allowing this complacency to produce some comic misinterpretations of Delville's behavior. When Cecilia requests the elder Delville to reject a suitor that rumor has made her fiancé, and the younger Delville reacts with concern at his "danger" in knowing her free and disengaged, she interprets it favorably as showing a diffidence of success gratifying to her pride and dignity, while instead he is determined against loving her, if possible. Cecilia even goes so far as to congratulate herself on Delville's diffidence, which argues that he is ignorant of her feelings; as a result, she smugly contemplates "the power of mingling dignity with the frankness with which she meant to receive his addresses" (IV, 1x; II, 246). The notion that Cecilia is a paragon and that Burney does not dissociate herself from her, or see her limits, is nonsense, although certainly the irony with which she treats her heroine is clumsy compared to Austen's parallel irony in Pride and Prejudice against Elizabeth's pride of judgment, or her treatment in Emma of a similar situation: Emma's early complacent delusions about Frank Churchill.

Further evidence of Jane Austen's ability to extend and improve upon Burney's achievements (and evidence perhaps of her intention to do so) is supplied by a parallel to the "union of inclination with propriety" that Cecilia perceives; at the end of Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth

began now to comprehend that [Darcy] was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both. . . .

But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. (312)

The gradual, careful advance throughout the novel to Elizabeth's re-estimation of Darcy, and the complex ironic turn at the end (Elizabeth is treating herself ironically by mocking her own presumptuous image of an ideal marriage, and is being treated ironically in that she is once again misjudging and underestimating Darcy)--all this is absent in Burney's novel.

Other elements in the treatment of Cecilia's character besides irony are echoed and then surpassed in Pride and Prejudice. Both Cecilia and Delvile are capable of misjudging each other, and in fact are eager to do so, while persuading themselves that they are being candid. Because each feels a need to suppress his affection for the other (Cecilia, because she does not wish to love unless she is loved in return; Delvile, because he cannot give up his name), each is very ready to think the worst of the other by holding on to certain preconceptions. Delvile, convinced that a woman will always deny an engagement, does not know how to believe Cecilia's

denial of the rumor that Sir Robert Fleyer has any claim on her; he wants at once to believe and disbelieve it. Both Cecilia and Delville see candor in each other's manner and fear insincerity below. This interaction between feeling and judgment is fairly successfully presented in "A Man of the Ton" (IV, vi), a chapter Austen alludes to in Persuasion (189). The interaction is presented, rather than dramatized, and Burney, not the reader, detects self-deception in that "Cecilia could not refuse [to introduce Delville to her guardian, Mr. Harrel], though as the request was likely to occasion more frequent meetings, she persuaded herself she was unwilling to comply" (IV, vi; II, 198). Nevertheless, the situation Burney contrives is likely to have interested Austen, for here two people of equal intelligence and self-possession are judging each other, not fully aware of their own hearts and thinking themselves safe, indifferent, and objective in viewing and judging each other, when they are not. Thus, feeling and judgment are at odds, although it must be noted as a vital difference that the tension between them which Burney makes part of her narrative is not made part of the reader's response to the narrative: the reader forms no misconceptions parallel to the characters' own. It is Austen's triumph to manipulate her narrative so that he does.

The tensions between feeling and judgment which Burney does delineate, and the fluxes in feeling which result, are

similar in many ways to those which Elizabeth and Darcy undergo at the end of Pride and Prejudice. Each is at this point anxious to ascertain the other's feelings and unable to do so, partly because of their own stake in the answer, and because their mutual embarrassment masks their feelings. Thus Elizabeth's views on Darcy's feelings change continually, and all these fluctuations are registered. What differentiates Burney's treatment is that she repeats these effects too much, and this fault undermines her work in general. By the time the chapter "A Man of the Ton" is reached, Cecilia's attitude to Delville has "twice varied": she "first had looked forward to being united with him for ever, and afterwards had determined to avoid with him even a common acquaintance" (IV, vi; II, 196), and these fluctuations recur endlessly. Burney generally repeats her emotional effects so often that they blur; Austen never similarly confuses repetition with depth or intensity.

Treatment of emotional content offers the most important opportunity to define Austen's interest in and debt to Burney. In Cecilia, Austen found an attempt to embody in a non-epistolary novel the themes that concerned her: themes of the conflict between feeling and judgment, and of the costs and fluidity of emotional life. In Burney's novel there is only too much flow and flux, but this may have been as useful to Austen as anything else, by sharpening her sense of what to avoid.

One device Burney continually uses was certainly

attractive to Jane Austen: the device of bringing opposing manners into comic conjunction, a conjunction not usually thought to possess much emotional resonance. Burney likes to juxtapose vulgarity and good breeding or delicacy, and she arranges that Morrice, Hobson, Simkins, Briggs, and of course Mrs. Belfield, will all confront and embarrass Cecilia at various times. Mrs. Belfield (considered to resemble Mrs. Bennet) broadly hints in company that Cecilia loves her son, outrageously and painfully embarrassing both her daughter Henrietta and Cecilia; and Cecilia must forbear "through compassion to the blushing Henrietta . . . repressing this forwardness [of Mrs. Belfield] more seriously" (V, 11; III, 40). In such scenes, Burney gives this comic situation thematic content, by emphasizing that delicacy and consideration have their costs, and that good breeding is frequently, by its nature, helpless against the presumptuousness of bad manners and vulgarity.

The juxtaposition of different manners is an established formula for comedy, and Fanny Burney cannot be credited with its invention. But she does begin to explore its possibilities in narrative fiction, by allowing the comic incongruities which result from these juxtapositions to be felt as something more than comic. She can also, unfortunately, go further and allow the difficulties which arise from her heroine's delicacy to become unconvincing and factitious, as they are in Cecilia's "distress" at the end. Her fate here coincides remarkably

with J. M. S. Tompkins' general description, which does not, however, refer explicitly to Cecilia:

"Distress" was a technical term in criticism, and authors set themselves . . . to get the heroine to the point when she finds herself penniless in a hackney-coach in London, with nowhere to drive to, with a rising fever and an injured reputation.²⁸

In Northanger Abbey, Jane Austen makes fun of the absurdly exaggerated and false delicacy used to spin plots like that of Cecilia when she shows Catherine eager to explain her apparent misbehavior to Henry Tilney because "Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her" (93). "Heroic" delicacy is thoroughly rejected, but Austen does resemble Burney in showing, in their more reasonable and natural forms, the costs and difficulties of delicacy and considerateness. These difficulties underlie the whole of Sense and Sensibility; and the Portsmouth scenes in Mansfield Park, and Mrs. Elton in Emma, exemplify most strikingly Austen's continued interest in, and decided success at, showing vulgarity painfully and comically at odds with good breeding.

Other aspects of Fanny Burney's choice and treatment of emotional content must have interested Jane Austen. Burney shows that pride in combination with other traits results in much complicated and often misplaced or misdirected feeling. When Cecilia fears that Mrs. Delville is about to offer her compassionate assistance in winning Delville, she resolves "rather [to] give up Mortimer and all thoughts of him forever, than submit to receive assistance in persuading him to

the union"; but her fears are wholly groundless, for Mrs. Delvile immediately lets her know that she opposes the marriage (VI, viii; III, 313). In Cecilia's initial resolve, however, pride and delicacy cannot be divided, and Burney explores this conjunction throughout. When Cecilia receives Delvile's letter proposing a clandestine marriage, her responses are similarly complex. Comparison such as Chapman suggests between Cecilia's offended pride at Delvile's confession of his scruples and Elizabeth's responses to Darcy's proposal and letter (PP, p. 409), is not quite accurate, for Cecilia is torn between a clandestine marriage and a separation, not between different views of Delvile's character, and Burney is interested in conveying the emotions which make this moral choice impossible for Cecilia. Thus her love for Delvile is alternately combatted by several manifestations of pride, not just by her resentment at his family pride: she is humiliated by suspecting that he proposes the marriage because he feels bound to do so, knowing her love, and consequently she determines to reject him; she also wants to reject him because she fears facing Mrs. Delvile's contempt, not simply from affection for her, but from vanity of her good opinion; and later, pride will suggest renouncing Delvile before Mrs. Delvile can ask it (VIII, 11; IV, 195). Vacillations over this choice occupy several chapters, during which false feelings like vanity cannot be disentangled from moral obligations like duty and self-respect (proper pride) or better feelings like love,

just as it is impossible to determine whether Cecilia feels that a clandestine marriage is wrong because it is degrading or degrading because it is wrong. The ease with which moral resolves intermingle with and oppose feelings has been established previously at Delville Castle, where the confusion and pain Cecilia and Delville experience arise from their eager and conscientious efforts to forestall the pain of a hopeless attachment; all their self-imposed estrangements, and all their attempts to prevent future suffering, are vain or, worse, only increase suffering.

Fanny Burney is interested in the emotions which make moral action difficult, and in the moral principles which complicate emotions. She shows that reasonable decisions can be made without producing any comfort even in a person who is rational, as exemplified by Cecilia's decision not to go through with the clandestine marriage (VII, vii; IV, 102). Jane Austen is uninterested in the classic "love versus duty" conflict embodied here, however interested she may have been in Burney's portrayal of its emotional costs; the extent of her indifference is most visible in Persuasion, where the "moral choice" between duty and love takes place seven years before the novel opens. In Austen's work the theme of self-knowledge and knowledge of others is substituted, providing all the moral and emotional conflict needed, and providing it more authentically and movingly.

The climactic scene of Cecilia is the most ambitious in

portraying the interaction of feelings and moral obligations and therefore probably interested Jane Austen most completely, although it is vitiated by stilted diction and other legacies from late eighteenth-century drama. In this scene, Mrs. Delvile attempts to persuade Cecilia and her son not to marry, and she does so by appealing to their pride, not simply to "Cecilia's higher nature" as Leavis contends.²⁹ A conflict results among three different forms of pride, and three different sets of obligations. Burney's treatment is effective, for she shows that pride, even when it is admirable (Cecilia's "pride" is really natural dignity), is much stronger than any of their senses of duty. Pride is the strongest pull and motive, and all the appeals to duty succeed in exciting pride. The conflict is emotional, though all three want to treat it as a conflict of principle, requiring moral choice and judgment. Mrs. Delvile in particular unscrupulously and relentlessly uses the most powerful emotional weapons available on both Cecilia and Delvile, playing on them, claiming to appeal to their judgments, but in fact making emotional appeals. For this reason, it is not Cecilia's love for Delvile but rather her relation to Mrs. Delvile that forms the novel's emotional center, both in fact and in intention. Burney indicates this in a letter to Mr. Crisp, answering his objections to the scene:

The conflict scene for Cecilia, between the mother and son, to which you so warmly object, is the very scene for which I wrote the whole book, and so entirely does my plan hang upon it, that I must abide by its reception in the world, or put the whole behind the fire.³⁰

The difficulty for such readers as Mr. Crisp lies in dealing with a "mixed" character like Mrs. Delville; there is evidence in Fanny Burney's Diary and Letters for the refractoriness of her audience, and for their desiring none but simple and straightforward characters, a desire which suggests Jane Austen's own difficulties with and attitudes toward her readers. An acquaintance of Burney's makes this resistance to complexity clear, in an exchange which has already been mentioned:

"But how wonderfully you have contrived," she added, "to make one love Mrs. Delville for her sweetness to Cecilia, notwithstanding all her pride, and always to hope the pride is commanded by the husband."

"No, ma'am," answered I, "I merely meant to show how differently pride, like every other quality, operates upon different minds, and that, though it is so odious when joined with meanness and incapacity, as in Mr. Delville, it destroys neither respect nor affection when joined with real dignity and generosity of mind, as in Mrs. Delville."³¹

This was apparently more than even well-disposed readers could accept; writing again to Mr. Crisp, Burney notes:

The character of Mrs. Delville struck you in so favourable a light, that you sunk, as I remember I privately noticed to myself, when you mentioned her, all the passages to her disadvantage previous to this conflict, else it would have appeared to you less inconsistent, for the way is paved for it in several places. . . . Your anger at Mrs. Delville's violence and obduracy are nothing but what I meant to excite; your thinking it unnatural is all that disturbs me.³²

Fanny Burney is attempting to produce in her readers an emotional response of some complexity: to make Mrs. Delville liked, then to show the ugliness which always was present and which her virtues as well as her pride contribute to. Burney feels that her didactic purposes, to show how pride operates

as a benefit or as a curse in different minds, at different times, will best be served by creating at least one character whose faults, virtues, and pride are thoroughly intermixed, and in doing this (with some success) she does not cater to her audience's demand for simple, unmixed characters. No doubt this was another of the novel's attractions for Jane Austen, notoriously unsympathetic to unmixed, perfect characters ("pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked"),³³ and even more ambitious than Burney in her design to manipulate her readers' conventional responses to character.

In general, the intention and execution of Cecilia have been underrated, so that Austen's interest in it has naturally been thought more limited and restricted than it is. Cecilia is a Flawed novel; nothing has been said of the sentimentalism that Burney continually reasserts--a sentimentalism defined by Alan D. McKillop in another context as "a harmonizing of the true, the good, and the beautiful, which is at the same time a harmonizing of self-love or self-approval with benevolence."³⁴ Burney wants to indicate that exercise of reason and adherence to principle can produce contentment, or "self-complacency" as she calls it; she wants to prove that Mrs. Delville is right when she writes to Cecilia that happiness comes from the ability to command the passions (VIII, viii; IV, 304). Consequently, when Cecilia has decided to forgo the clandestine marriage, Burney wants us to believe that "she

yet found a satisfaction in the sacrifice she had made, that recompensed her for much of her sufferings, and soothed her into something like tranquillity; the true power of virtue she had scarce experienced before" (VII, vii; IV, 104). These assertions of the "true power of virtue" are willed, for at other times Burney can show that Cecilia's attempts to substitute a course of reading or a life of charity and benevolence for the ordinary desires of a young woman are absurd and must fail completely: "To a heart formed for friendship and affection the charms of solitude are very short-lived" (II, iv; I, 222). In any case, a novel demands movement, and Fanny Burney, willing Cecilia's rational contentment, is forced into the ridiculous position of continually asserting it in spite of all untoward circumstances, and then contriving circumstances yet more untoward to shatter her resolutions and contentment, and move the plot.

Nevertheless, Cecilia remains an interesting novel, with a respectable structure, some astute observations of emotional life, and some engaging treatment of character, especially the character of Mrs. Delvile. Burney's achievement with Mrs. Delvile, and her readers' documented unwillingness to accept that achievement, provide one of the more important and illuminating links to Jane Austen's intention and achievements. The reluctance of Burney's readers to accept or respond correctly to a character as moderately complicated as Mrs. Delvile shows the difficulties encountered by those

novelists before Austen who tried, like her, to educate their readers' responses rather than to exploit them; a reader evidently prefers to be exploited. This attempt, however slight, to elicit and control her readers' unruly responses brings Burney closest to Austen. If Fanny Burney's readers, even the particularly sympathetic ones she mentions in her diary, are so intractable and unwieldy, so unwilling to produce moderately complex responses to moderately complex characters, then Jane Austen's far more complex attitudes toward and designs on her audience are the more remarkable and even audacious, and her problems with them the more interesting and formidable.

11. Sir Charles Grandison

Fanny Burney's attempts and achievements are remote from Jane Austen's by comparison with the methods and achievements of Samuel Richardson in Sir Charles Grandison: this novel enjoys a closer relationship to her work, though it is further removed in time than Cecilia. And while we are faced at first with startling similarities of material between Cecilia and Pride and Prejudice, only reaching at the last similarities in treatment, Sir Charles Grandison will confront us most strikingly with parallels in method: in treatment of character and of the reader's response.

Jane Austen has long been known as an admirer of Richardson and especially of Grandison. Henry Austen, her

brother and author of the "Biographical Notice" which prefaced the posthumous publication in late 1817 of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, notes in his own prolix style that "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" (NA, p. 7). Her nephew J. E. Austen-Leigh, writing more than fifty years later, is more circumstantial:

Her knowledge of Richardson's works was such that no one is likely again to acquire, now that the multitude and the merits of our light literature have called off the attention of readers from that great master. Every circumstance narrated in Sir Charles Grandison, all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her; and the wedding days of Lady L. and Lady G. were as well remembered as if they had been living friends.³⁵

The explicit references to Grandison in Northanger Abbey (41) and in Austen's letters and manuscripts supply further proof of her intimacy with and affection for the novel, and all this evidence makes it the more surprising that Grandison has been so generally overlooked in studies of her work. Few modern admirers or even readers of this novel exist, of course, and any other explanation for its neglect, even by students of Richardson,³⁶ may be unnecessary.

Some attempts have been made, nevertheless, to define Austen's debt to Richardson, by such fine critics as Ian Watt and Alan D. McKillop, and both these critics refer specifically

to Grandison. Neither is concerned principally with Austen's work, and as a result their treatments are brief and general. Watt explores the development of narrative in the eighteenth-century novel, so that his interest lies simply in pointing out the fusion, in Austen's novels, of the narrative techniques of Richardson and Fielding. He notes that Austen and Burney "followed Richardson--the Richardson of the less intense domestic conflicts of Sir Charles Grandison--in their minute presentation of daily life," while following Fielding in "adopting a more detached attitude to their narrative material."³⁷ Watt's aside--"the less intense domestic conflicts"--is suggestive; the decreased intensity of the novel, and the resulting diffusion of interest among several characters, are of major importance to Austen, and will need to be explored in connection with her use and transformation of the conventions of the comedy of manners.

McKillop, writing on Grandison in a chapter on Richardson, treats its relation to Austen in much greater detail, as part of an attempt to evaluate the novel:

A discerning reader can still easily understand why Grandison was one of Jane Austen's favorite novels. Richardson handed on to Jane Austen the tradition of a judgment of society by the intelligent feminine mind, secured by an accepted social and moral system. The individual within the system is under close surveillance by the critic, and the questions raised are those of the interplay of personality and convention, the correction of one's judgments of people and situations, the adjustment of "candor" to the facts of life, the reconciliation of spontaneity and good manners, the art of being not too pliable and not too stubborn, the art of saving oneself from one's friends, the art of living with bores, stuffed shirts, and egoists, including members of one's own family. Jane Austen's titles denote these topics without any attempt to be

ornamental or oblique--First Impressions, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Persuasion; her themes represent the exquisite distillation of the social comedy of the Grandison tradition combined with a serious though not tragic treatment of family relationships which derives from Clarissa.³⁸

McKillop's focus on "the interplay of personality and convention" or, as he later puts it, on "the interplay of impulse and interest with code and convention"³⁹ links him with those critics who define Austen's major theme and concern as the interrelation and final reconciliation of the individual with society. Unquestionably, Jane Austen and the Richardson of Sir Charles Grandison share this concern and embody it in social comedy, but the same could be said of Fielding, of Burney, and (with more difficulty) of Smollett as well. While McKillop's perceptive and helpful analysis suggests several important thematic connections between Richardson's novels and Austen's, it is too general to account entirely for Jane Austen's debt to and interest in Richardson, a debt which begins to be evident in Pride and Prejudice, though her later novels acknowledge it also. In any case, McKillop's analysis neither exhausts the connections between Richardson and Austen, nor points out any similarities in technique.

The plot of Grandison is, at first, less suggestive even than the critics in indicating links to Pride and Prejudice. The heroine, Harriet Byron, is a handsome, clever, moderately rich, and slightly vain orphan of twenty, who is surrounded by doting relatives and friends, and pursued by several suitors. She visits London at the start of the novel, meets

the rake Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, rejects his proposals, is abducted by him, and is finally rescued by the perfect hero, Sir Charles Grandison. She becomes intimate with his sisters, Lady L. and Charlotte, and she falls in love with him. His sentiments remain obscure, and eventually his entanglement with an Italian, Lady Clementina della Porretta, is disclosed to Harriet. He considers himself engaged to Clementina and not free to address anyone else, although when he left Italy, more than a year before the novel opens, her family had refused to consent to the marriage because he would not become a Catholic. Lady Clementina herself, unable to reconcile her love for a heretic with her religion, had succumbed to madness. The family at last recalls Sir Charles to Italy, hoping that this will cure her. At this point, an account of Sir Charles's previous relations with Clementina, taken from letters he wrote at the time, interrupts the story and elaborates the bare outline of his disclosure to Harriet. Sir Charles then goes to Italy. Clementina is cured, rejects him at last because he will not convert, and encourages him to marry; he returns to England and is immediately accepted by Harriet. A wedding and some further complications with Clementina follow.

In spite of this evident lack of broad parallels between the novels' plots, upon examination narrower ones can be found. For example, when Sir Hargrave proposes marriage to Harriet, we encounter a spirited woman and a suitor who is incredulous

at being rejected and whose pride is outraged by it. Sir Hargrave boasts of his consequence and assures Harriet that he likes her "friends," that is, her connections. He is consequential, like Darcy--and, like him also, sure of success. Harriet, unlike Elizabeth, offers the conventional thanks for his "good opinion," but when Sir Hargrave asks her to give reasons for rejecting him, she is unconventionally impolite: "You do not, hesitated I--hit my fancy--Pardon me, Sir."⁴⁰ Like Darcy, Sir Hargrave accuses her of pride and thereby exposes his own. A somewhat less obvious parallel between the novels is to be found in the comeuppance Richardson very explicitly contrives for Harriet (the lady who rejects all her suitors finally loves someone out of reach), and the one Austen contrives for Elizabeth's critical judgment (Elizabeth makes nothing but wrong judgments throughout). It is worth remembering, however, that the heroine of Cecilia encounters a similar rebuke for her smug certainty about her marriage with Delvile. Finally, the subjects debated in Grandison reappear in Pride and Prejudice: love at first sight is compared to love founded on esteem or merit; marriages of convenience are compared to love matches; and there is even in both a Charlotte who is the heroine's good friend, who believes in marriages of convenience, who debates their advantages with the heroine, and who marries without affection a man of inferior talents. Many of these debates appear, however, in Cecilia. Resemblances of this sort result from acceptance

of standard novelistic material, though it was probably Richardson who standardized it.

(1) Manipulating First Impressions

The most significant connection between the novels lies in their common concern with the accuracy and persistence of first impressions (or "first Prejudices" as Richardson has called them).⁴¹ In both Pride and Prejudice and Grandison, first impressions are formed, compared, evaluated, and revised, so that the characters' responses to each other are a major part of the action and a clear, well-established thematic concern. Less obviously, however, concern with first impressions is in both novels technical as well as thematic, and here Richardson's attraction and importance for Jane Austen can be located. The difficulties the characters undergo in estimating each other are also experienced, to some extent, by each reader as he is introduced to, responds to, and estimates the characters himself. Both Richardson and Austen are interested in eliciting, controlling, and finally educating these responses and estimations in their readers. The reader is asked to overcome his own first impressions of the characters, to conquer his own prejudices, and to refine his own perceptions, as he reads of characters who succeed or fail in doing precisely these things; and eliciting and controlling this response is a major technical problem for each author. While there are wide differences between Austen's techniques and

solution of the problem, and Richardson's, clearly his intentions and achievements interested her, indicating to her some of the possibilities of the novel.

Richardson's attitude to his readers is more readily explored than Austen's. He has very typically left letters explaining his designs in great detail. His failure to execute these designs completely must be acknowledged: these failures are far easier to note than his successes. Great discrepancies often exist between his avowed intentions and his execution, most notably in Pamela but actually in all his novels, even Clarissa, and in Grandison the discrepancies are glaring. He intends in Grandison to interest the reader in favor of Harriet Byron, a paragon with charm, and then to introduce the pathetic Clementina as a rival, so that the reader, Harriet, and Sir Charles himself are placed in a dilemma, in one of those "delicate Situations"⁴² so dear to the eighteenth-century moral sense. Harriet's attempt to do justice to Clementina's claims and to prefer Clementina's happiness with Sir Charles to her own is thus meant by Richardson to be paralleled by a similar struggle on the reader's part. To Lady Bradshaigh, a favorite correspondent who is reading the novel-in-progress, Richardson exults:

And are you Madam, over Head and Ears in Love, and even with those you once hated? I knew you would--For is not the Witch [Clementina] an Honour to her Sex by her Magnanimity; while Harriet excels in all the gentle, the lenient, let me say, the Characteristic Qualities of an amiable Woman?--In many Instances of this Piece, I have, designedly, play'd the Rogue with my Readers; intending to make them think now one way, now another, of the very same Characters. . . . Did I not

give you Warning how you suffered your Indignation to rise against Clementina? I knew you would admire her, and pity her and Harriet by Turns. My Hero only, I hoped, you would always think of in one Way.⁴³

His intentions are made even more explicit in a subsequent letter:

So far as you had gone Oct. 31 Clementina appears to have the Advantage of Harriet; Why then quarrelled your Ladship with one of your Favourite Hearers, for thinking so? Let me have the Pleasure I hoped for, of turning my Readers Hearts now one way, now another. My Compliments to this good Lady, I pray ye, Madam, who can divest herself of first Prejudices, and, like Sir Charles, prefer according to Merit, as that Merit shines dazlingly forth.⁴⁴

This rivalry between the moral merits of Clementina and Harriet is one of the novel's least successful parts to modern taste. Richardson evidently irritated his eighteenth-century audience by demanding the unfamiliar and unwelcome response of first hating and then loving the heroine's rival and then giving her up; he irritates modern readers by relying on contrived situations and strained or factitious sentiments to elicit this response. Harriet's willingness to renounce her own happiness in favor of Clementina's seems either ridiculous or merely neurotic by modern standards, but certainly not noble; and Clementina's renunciation of temporal bliss with Sir Charles to avoid endangering her eternal bliss is so "elevated," so "exalted," so "soaring," that indeed it rises above emotional conflict and moral choice altogether: who would not prefer eternal to temporal bliss?

As if able to anticipate these criticisms, Richardson tries to disarm them by including similar objections in

the text itself. Mr. Selby's opinion, thought by McKillop to be "one of the subtlest comments in the whole work,"⁴⁵ is that Harriet's

very pretension [of preferring Clementina to herself] is flight and nonsense. But, however, if the girl . . . can parade away her passion for an object so worthy, with all my heart: It will be but just, that the romancing elevations which so often drive headstrong girls into difficulties, should now-and-then help a more discreet one out of them.
(IV, xxxii; II, 412)

Sir Charles himself cavils at Clementina's decision, though loving her: "I thought I wanted somebody to accuse, somebody to blame--Yet how could it be Clementina? But the words Narrow zeal!--Sweet Enthusiast!--as if I would find fault with her religion, involuntarily slipped from me to myself" (V, xxviii; II, 592). Richardson's letters acknowledge, at least in part, that Clementina's renunciation does not lie wholly within the realm of significant moral choices; he writes to Lady Bradshaigh that Clementina's decision is "ow[ing] in a great measure, to her naturally warm imagination--(But O, it was ever [a] beautiful Imagination!) raised by her delirium."⁴⁶ He questions the glory of Clementina's choice further when he writes to Mrs. Chapone, "Clementina's Character is not a quite perfect one, noble as she is. Her Enthusiasm was encreased by her Delirium. That brightened her Faculties, and in some Instances carried her Imagination beyond sound Judgment."⁴⁷ On the whole, however, Richardson does depend on his readers to admire Harriet's and Clementina's renunciations, and whatever his contemporaries may have been capable of, no modern critic can manage it.

At the same time, one or two modern readers are interested enough in the characters of Harriet and Clementina to compare and choose between them--and they actually choose Clementina! E. A. Baker is the most adamant: "What is to be said of Harriet Byron's rival for the hand of Sir Charles Grandison? At all events, she out-rivals the English young lady in the interest that reaches the heart"; Harriet "is of no significance as a person," while Clementina "is so much more impressive than the generality of [Richardson's] characters."⁴⁸ Baker objects to the "self-consciousness" that Harriet must show as a letter writer--a sweeping rejection of Richardson's methods and powers; Clementina, however, writes few letters and not being one of the author's secretaries and not having to wear the livery of self-consciousness, comes to life through inadvertence, and arrests our interest and our ardent sympathy, as it were by accident. She is one of Richardson's tragic characters, and the novel of personality cannot attain its full scope except in tragedy.⁴⁹

Baker's last remark suggests that his appreciation of Clementina is willed--dictated by or at least conforming to a criterion of his own which any admirer of Austen's novels must reject. A less extreme response to Clementina is provided by Jocelyn Harris, who feels that "the romantic expectations that have been aroused for Clementina are . . . badly frustrated"⁵⁰ by the ending, which hints that she will yield to her family's wishes and to Richardson's moral designs by overcoming a first love and marrying the Count of Belvedere. Harris concludes, "such a prospect is not psychologically authentic. Here, most obviously, the vitality of a character

has run away with her moral destiny." The vitality Harris claims for Clementina is surprising, as is the following account of its cause:

when Richardson became more personally involved in her story (Harriet is not nearly so attractive in a purely pathetic sense) he was even tempted to make her the heroine, and it was only by an enormous effort of will against inclination that he disentangled her from Sir Charles.⁵¹

This view of Richardson's imaginative involvement with Clementina probably derives from his own statements, made when he was temporarily "lurched" in the fourth volume, and presumably⁵² after he had sent Sir Charles to Italy and Harriet to Northamptonshire:

Clementina's Fate is not yet come to my Knowledge. I have been hinder'd from enquiring after her; in other words, from pursuing her story. But I think she rises upon me. And as I know not what to offer next; being too irregular a scribbler to be able to write by a plan, I seem to be at a loss, to know what to do with her, or to fetch up Harriet again, and make her the principal Female character.⁵³

Richardson is supplying here an "indirect boast" about his writing rather like Mr. Bingley's, but some aimlessness is clearly felt, and the central question about his involvement with Clementina is formulated rather than answered: does the fate Richardson finally contrives for her represent imaginative power or failure?

One part of the answer is easy: her renunciation is morally uninteresting and thus represents imaginative failure. But is her story emotionally uninteresting as well? T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel find her "convincing . . . as a character in melodrama" whose "scenes do serve to keep the

novel moving," and they conclude, "she is not flat; she is a tour de force, but not a failure."⁵⁴ She is melodramatic; but she does not "move" in any sense. Her madness is in every way theatrical, expressed in the stilted diction and gestures of melodrama. Clarissa's distraction is also highly stylized and melodramatic, but has violence, bitterness, and conflict absent in Clementina's and thus can be convincing and moving. Richardson's determination to preserve Clementina's delicacy (he is less tender of Clarissa's) and to provide purest pathos inhibits him from allowing any similar emotional complexity to appear in her madness. No doubt he had Ophelia in mind to some extent, or at least Hamlet, when drawing both portraits; Clementina, in her best "mad scene," when she exhibits a slight sense of persecution (though directed against her doctors, not against the family who have in fact persecuted her), actually breaks out into a line from the play upon first noticing Sir Charles's presence: "Angels, and ministers of grace, defend us!" The line is not only indented and italicized, but delivered in English as well, requiring an awkward explanation from Sir Charles that "she had taken great notice" of the line "when we read that play together" (III, xxvi; II, 191). The line and its attendant explanation both suggest Richardson's difficulties: his imagination is fettered by dramatic and social decorum, and he is forced to present a delicate Ophelia, an Ophelia stripped of the sexuality, insight, and hostility which give point to

her grief and distraction, and create truer pathos. Richardson is willing to show petulance and hostility in Clementina when she is sane, and any vitality or interest she has arises from her irritable fears and perceptions that Sir Charles fails to respond to her, to meet her feelings, or to love her.

Irritability is always Richardson's forte, but he does not allow Clementina enough of this or any other emotional complexity to save her from being, on the whole, a construct, not a character.

This is even more true of Sir Charles, who is only to be thought of "one way." Richardson's "good man" is intentionally excluded from the novel's concern with manipulating impressions, and any other life he might have had is driven out by his exemplary nature: as many critics have noted, Sir Charles is not a good but a perfect man, and thus he is finally unmanageable. Jane Austen at fifteen proved herself a most astute critic of Sir Charles's absurd perfection when she wrote her hilarious spoof, "Jack and Alice." Its first chapters in particular constitute a sustained and even explicit parody of the novel; one character, "like the great Sir Charles Grandison scorned to deny herself when at Home, as she looked on that fashionable method of shutting out disagreeable Visitors, as little less than downright Bigamy" (MW, p. 15). This joke on the hero's near-bigamous situation is only slightly less penetrating than the sustained burlesque provided in the character of Charles Adams. The youthful Jane Austen

hits off just what is ridiculous in Richardson's treatment of Sir Charles, whose "dazzling" merit too often suggests celestial objects to his admirers, when she introduces Charles Adams as "an amiable, accomplished & bewitching young Man, of so dazzling a Beauty that none but Eagles could look him in the Face" and continues by portraying him at a masquerade:

Of the Males a Mask representing the Sun, was the most universally admired. The Beams that darted from his Eyes were like those of that glorious Luminary tho' infinitely superior. So strong were they that no one dared venture within half a mile of them. . . . The Gentleman at last finding the feirceness of his beams to be very inconvenient to the concourse by obliging them to croud together in one corner of the room, half shut his eyes by which means, the Company discovered him to be Charles Adams in his plain green Coat, without any mask at all. (MW, p. 13)

A last, particularly amusing comment on Sir Charles is supplied when Charles Adams, pursued by several ladies, remarks, "'I expect nothing more in my wife than my wife will find in me--Perfection'" (MW, p. 26).

Richardson indirectly acknowledges the difficulties which Jane Austen mocks so perfectly when he writes that the novel "is said to abound with delicate Situations. I hope it does; for what indelicate ones can a good Man be involved in?--Yet he must have his Trials, his Perplexities--And to have them from good Women, will require some Management."⁵⁵ His management, placing Sir Charles between Harriet and Clementina, is unsatisfactory for many reasons, including the failure of Clementina as a character. But even if she were a success, Richardson would probably still have

been unable to escape McKillop's judgment that

Sir Charles's toplofty embarrassment, with the ideally eligible Harriet in England and the tragic Clementina in Italy, does not command our full interest and sympathy. [The] protracted negotiations . . . do not "engage the heart" like the deadlock in Clarissa or even the predicament of Pamela.⁵⁶

The difficulty in making Sir Charles's feelings "engage the heart" is that they must be as irreproachable as his actions. There can never be any doubt that his feelings, whatever they may be, will be as well-regulated by his honor and judgment as is his conduct. Thus, his Italian sufferings over Clementina, however carefully described, cannot really be taken seriously and can be felt only as "embarrassment," not as conflict: Sir Charles will so soon be feeling the right, the exemplary, thing. It is even harder to take seriously the one fault Richardson deliberately gives him, a naturally choleric disposition: any anger he feels will inevitably be rigidly controlled. During the "protracted negotiations" in Italy, Sir Charles's choler is excited several times, but never enough to check the flow of compassion, love, generosity, and candor. Finally, the endless chorus of adulation for his actions and virtues which is provided by his devoted circle, by every acquaintance, and occasionally by himself, is to a modern reader alienating in the extreme.

Although Richardson has thus guaranteed, unintentionally, that Sir Charles's emotions will be viewed with detachment or at least with unconcern for their consequences, he succeeds in providing another dimension for them which does excite

some interest: mysteriousness. Eaves and Kimpel would probably disagree, as they feel that Richardson cannot make us believe "that Sir Charles was really in love with two women."⁵⁷ Admittedly, his sentiments through most of the novel are obscure and much debated by the other characters--especially by Harriet; and his disclosures only feed the debate, providing more material for interpretation. This need not mean, however, that he has no sentiments. In any case, the characters naturally disagree in their conclusions about his feelings. Sir Charles's family think he feels compassion for Clementina and love for Harriet, and indeed most of the evidence through Volume IV points this way; Harriet, partly as a defense against her own longings, thinks "there is so much tenderness in Sir Charles's woe--It must be Love--But he ought to love Clementina" (III, xxvi; II, 181); and the Porretta family on the whole assume he loves Clementina, though not enough. All this forces the reader's attention to the issue, and to Sir Charles's own accounts of his feelings, which are delayed, and somewhat ambiguous when they do appear. Richardson thus arranges that the characters' attempts to interpret Sir Charles's feelings be paralleled by the reader's similar attempt; here the "first impressions" design is felt in relation to Sir Charles, although in a necessarily modified form, since he is to be thought of "one way." The reader is forced to guess at what Sir Charles feels for Harriet and Clementina at various points, and to this

extent, his imagination is engaged, his judgment is at stake, and he turns "now one way, now another"⁵⁸ in his view of what Sir Charles's feelings are, even though he can be sure of their purity and that their cost to him will in the end be minimal.

An important question remains, however: how much does Sir Charles himself share this perplexity over the state of his own heart? Do his ambiguous accounts of his feelings indicate that his judgment, self-knowledge, and conduct are subject in any way to the errors the other characters show? The novel's ceaseless eulogies of Sir Charles, coupled with repeated proofs that all criticisms of him originate in ignorance or captiousness, suggest that his feelings and motives can be a mystery only to others, never to himself. Yet ambiguities do exist in his accounts, and reveal Richardson's difficulties. For instance, on Sir Charles's return to Italy and being sounded about a marriage to Clementina, he is immediately concerned to be thought neither "cool" nor "interested" in his motives; and, addressing the Marchioness, Clementina's mother, he claims that wishes for the recovery of Clementina and her ailing brother fill his heart "without a view to my own interest" (IV, xl; II, 454-55). Furthermore, he considers himself "bound" by his former proposals for the marriage, and the Porrettas as "free" to reject or accept them. His disclaimers of "interested" motives in his journey to Italy sit oddly with the reflection

which immediately follows:

What a pleasure is it, my dear Dr. Bartlett, to the proud heart of your friend, that I could say this!--Had I sought, in pursuance of my own inclinations, to engage the affections of the admirable Miss Byron, as I might with honour have endeavoured to do, had not the woes of this noble family, and the unhappy state of mind of their Clementina, so deeply affected me; I might have involved myself, and that loveliest of women, in difficulties which would have made such a heart as mine still more unhappy than it is. (IV, xl; II, 455)

His motives are as involved as his syntax. His avowed disinterestedness with regard to Clementina is dubious in the light of his evident interest in Harriet, and for him to continue to parade that disinterestedness, and to receive fulsome praises for it from the Porrettas, leaves the reader in a perplexity about his feelings and motives which is not entirely dispelled by his later explanations. These explanations, made at various points to Clementina's brother Jeronymo, to all the ladies at Selby-house when he is courting Harriet, and to Harriet after she is his wife, cater in part to what each audience wishes to hear, and thus contradict themselves.

What Richardson means by this is extremely hard to determine. In Clarissa, the characters' accounts of actions and the motives behind them are similarly contradictory, but Richardson's intentions and control cannot be doubted: he is dramatizing, as part of his meaning, the opacity of experience and the obliquity of the heart, combined with the mind's incessant, vain attempts to make sense of both: to justify, criticize, evaluate, and organize into some

acceptable pattern the actions and motives which come under its eye. Every Richardsonian character is his own apologist, and Richardson, no mean apologist in his own behalf, draws his power as a novelist partially from this source. His strength lies in his ability to involve himself imaginatively in his characters' attempts at self-justification and, at the same time, to dissociate himself enough to indicate the delusions, vanities, and egoism behind them. Grandison harnesses this strength and this material for its comic and didactic purposes. All the characters are clearly intended to be fallible judges of themselves and others--except Sir Charles. Richardson credits him with complete impartiality and disinterestedness of judgment, and with an ability to put himself in another's place and to do justice to that other's claims at his own expense. Although he is at last unambiguously in love with Clementina, for example, he accepts her rejection:

For, let me say, my Lord, that I could not so much as seem to give way to them [Clementina's arguments against their marriage], had I not been accustomed, when I was to judge of another's actions, to suppose myself that very person: Hence have I often thought myself obliged to give judgment against my own wishes; though, on resuming MYSELF, I have not found reason to disapprove of my first expectation.

(V, xxviii; II, 594)

This impartiality is admirable and is certainly one of the virtues Richardson is trying to exercise in his readers by manipulating their judgments and sympathies as he does. But Richardson's eagerness to display constant disinterestedness in Sir Charles conflicts with his reluctance to offer either Harriet or Clementina the indignity of being loved less than

she loves. These opposite claims force Richardson to place Sir Charles in the incongruous position of claiming to be disinterested in relation to Clementina when he is, at least in part, uninterested, and nowhere in the novel is this incongruity recognized.⁵⁹ Clearly, it is not meant to be felt as incongruous. While the reader is rewarded for attentiveness to similar discrepancies and contradictions in the motives of the other characters, he is discouraged from such scrutiny of Sir Charles.

This means that the sixth volume, containing the courtship of Harriet, is less effective than it might have been, for only Harriet's feelings invite scrutiny. That they do is a welcome change, however, for Harriet has been in decided eclipse since she first learned of Sir Charles's entanglement, two volumes and a half before. Until that disclosure, she is capable of wit, gaiety, detachment, and vanity, and though some of these qualities, especially wit, pale as she falls in love, they are replaced in part by that irritability which Richardson can always summon to complicate his characters and their relationships. Thus Harriet retains interest even after she falls in love: her curiosity, vanity, delicacy, and petulance all interact as she tries to gauge Sir Charles's feelings, and all these qualify the frankness which is her distinguishing characteristic and which becomes more and more compromised by her situation.

Her situation, or "love case," offers Richardson

opportunities to contrive scenes increasingly complicated with embarrassments and reticence, or with cross-currents of feeling and awareness. Through these, as McKillop notes, "Grandison showed the way to the substitution of social embarrassment for tragic conflict, to a light transcription of manners, and to a 'delicacy' which was sometimes silly but at its best penetrating and subtle" and the novel, thereby, "established the tradition in which Jane Austen triumphed."⁶⁰

In one scene, Sir Charles confers with his sisters, Lord L., and Harriet on Charlotte Grandison's love case (her entanglement with Captain Anderson, an unworthy suitor) before Harriet has confessed her love to the sisters but not before they suspect it. Sir Charles moralizes from Charlotte's unfortunate experience:

Let me repeat, that women should be sure of their men, before they embark with them in the voyage of Love. . . . Let me say, That women, who would not be exposed, should not put themselves out of their own power. O Miss Byron! (turning, to my confusion, to me, who was too ready to apply the first part of the caution) be so good as to tell my Emily, that she never love a man, of whose Love she is not well assured: That she never permit a man to know his consequence with her, 'till she is sure he is grateful, just, and generous. (II, xxix; I, 412)

The ironic effect of this passage is not only immediate

(Harriet is not "sure" of her man), but also linear:

Emily, Sir Charles's fourteen-year-old ward, is later discovered to be in love with Sir Charles without knowing it herself. The incident also serves the action, although indirectly:

Charlotte's embarrassment at her exposure in this scene prompts her to tease Harriet into revealing her love in the next. Once

Harriet's love is known to Charlotte and Lord and Lady L., more complex effects are possible. One fine scene collects the same participants and depicts Sir Charles, just prior to his disclosure to Harriet of his own love case, enquiring of his sister Charlotte whether she will encourage Lord G.'s addresses. Charlotte is conventionally coy about her feelings and Sir Charles criticizes her flippancy, comparing her unfavorably with Harriet, whom he commends for her frankness to her suitors about the state of her heart. But Harriet cannot frankly own her love for Sir Charles and finds herself in a false position, becoming increasingly embarrassed by every sentence in Sir Charles's and Charlotte's exchange. Earlier in the same conversation--which has extended over two days--Charlotte has tried to ask Sir Charles, acting in Harriet's interest, if he prefers any woman. He says yes, but refuses to go any further; like Harriet's, his frankness has limits.

Soon after this scene, he does disclose to Harriet his situation with Clementina; most unfortunately, for thereafter Richardson finds it impossible to treat Harriet with irony. Hitherto, he has contrived not merely to embarrass but also to chasten Harriet: in the first place, by allowing her comfortable indifference to her suitors to be succeeded by love for a man who does not court her. Richardson shows his enjoyment of this situation as against the conventional one when he writes to Miss Mulso:

Is not she the aggressor? Can't she let the man alone?
Disliking this man, refusing that, to the number of half a

score, she no sooner sees a man whom every body admires for his goodness, and for his personal graces, but he must be hers the moment she sets her eyes upon him!⁶¹

Similarly, Harriet's preconception (or "prejudice") in favor of being someone's first love, and her idea that only thus can she expect truly gratifying and tender sentiments, is utterly defeated by Sir Charles's situation. In the end, she accepts him in defiance not only of this prejudice but of common decorums as well, and her petulance, fears, and jealousies at finding herself in this position revive interest in her as a character, after her decline (in every sense) while Clementina's story is pursued.

Harriet never admits outright jealousy of Clementina; instead, she constantly deprecates herself and exalts her rival, doubting whether Sir Charles can love her at all after knowing Clementina. She is in these circumstances eager to detect the slightest failure of love in Sir Charles. Any hint that he is secure of her love inflames her by contrast to her own insecurity, and she becomes caustic. All her criticisms of Sir Charles, often noted by critics as refreshing evidence of a "salutary irreverence" toward him⁶² are motivated in this way, including her most famous analysis, made after she has learned of Clementina's renunciation and thus when she can begin to anticipate a union with Sir Charles:

But is not his conduct such, as would make a considerate person, who has any connexions with him, tremble? Since if there be a fault between them, it must be all that person's; and he will not, if it be possible for him to avoid it, be a sharer in it? Do you think, my dear, that had he been the first man, he would have been so complaisant to his Eve as

Milton makes Adam [So contrary to that part of his character, which made him accuse the woman to the Almighty]--To taste the forbidden fruit, because he would not be separated from her, in her punishment, tho' all posterity were to suffer by it?--No; it is my opinion, that your brother would have had gallantry enough to his fallen spouse, to have made him extremely regret her lapse; but that he would have done his own duty, were it but for the sake of posterity, and left it to the Almighty, if such had been his pleasure, to have annihilated his first Eve, and given him a second--But, my dear, do I not write strangely? (V, xxxi; II, 609)

Here is that "impatience or dissatisfaction with his very virtues"⁶³ which McKillop has noted, but it takes the form of an unacknowledged wish that, indeed, his first Eve will be annihilated and that he will be given a second. Whether Harriet's irritation, here and elsewhere, arises from his perfection or from his love for Clementina, it offers the possibility for an interesting courtship; but Sir Charles's perfections preclude this possibility. He cannot be justly doubted, and his patience cannot be exhausted, so that Harriet's doubts and fears and withdrawals, which would be quite justifiable in relation to any other man in similar circumstances, here look like conventional virgin modesty carried to an utterly ridiculous extreme. Richardson's contemporaries found it so. The bluestocking Elizabeth Carter wrote to Catherine Talbot, one of Richardson's consultants on Grandison, that "the courtship between Sir Charles and Miss Byron is very much laughed at, even by those who are best pleased with the book."⁶⁴ Again, Richardson's knowledge of the human heart and his talent for dramatizing its conflicts are undermined by the inhumanly irreproachable heart of Sir Charles.

Charlotte's love case, a conventional one, is more interesting than that of Sir Charles, Clementina, or Harriet: should a woman of "superior talents" make a marriage of convenience with a man inferior to her? Charlotte does marry Lord G., and Richardson engages the reader's interest in the marriage in defiance of his own complaint to one of his correspondents that "you girls generally care not a farthing for the story of an honest couple after the knot is tied."⁶⁵ Richardson manages this by making Charlotte's character the most interesting and appealing one in the novel. He does succeed in making his reader think "now one way, now another" of her, though certainly not always precisely according to his intention:

For Instance--Did you not like Charlotte, at her first Appearance? Did you not afterwards in the Affair of Capt. Anderson despise her? Did you not abhor her for her Insolence to Harriet in her Dressing-Room? and still more for her Behaviour to her Lord (done, perhaps, to make less flippant Wives, tho' flippant enough, tolerable to their Husbands)? I know you did--But take Care, that you are not at last diverted wth. that very Humour, for which now you detest her.⁶⁶

In the first half of the novel, Richardson does elicit from the reader complex and vacillating feelings for Charlotte; in the rest, gratitude for her wit, common sense, and perverseness as a relief from the noble and elevated solemnity of the others outweighs everything else.

Richardson borrows some of Lovelace's qualities for Charlotte, and adapts others. Like Lovelace, she sees herself in dramatic roles, and creates comic confrontations. Accidentally overhearing Lord G. complain of her behavior

to her aunt, she plots to surprise them:

I will lighten upon them with airs imperial. How the poor souls will start at my appearance! How will their consciences fly in their faces! The complainer and adviser both detected in the very fact, as I may say; And yet perhaps you, Harriet, will think them less blameable than their conscience-striker.

Hem!--Three hems in anger!--And now I burst upon them.

O Harriet! what a triumph was mine!

Aunt Nell, who has naturally a good blowzing north-country complexion, turned as pale as ashes. Her chin, nose, and lips, were all in motion. My nimble Lord gave a jump, and three leaps, to the other side of the room. He had not the courage to look directly at me. His face, as sharp as a new moon in a frosty night, and his sides so gaunt--As if he wanted to shrink into himself. They could not in their hearts but accuse themselves of all they had said, as if I had heard every word of it.

While I (what a charming thing is innocence!) half a foot taller than usual, stalked along between them, casting a look of indignation upon aunt Nell; of haughtiness on Lord G. My with-held breath raised my complexion, and swelled my features; and when I got to the door, I pulled it after me with an air, that I hope made them both tremble. (V, ix; II, 499)

This is pure theatre, clearly showing the nature of Charlotte's kinship to Lovelace and how closely the descriptive particulars in Richardson's novels resemble stage directions. Charlotte is a comic not a diabolic character, so that any likenesses between her and Lovelace must not be overstressed. Still, it is amusing to see these likenesses, for instance, in her response to her sister's and Harriet's attempt to persuade her to give her uncle's wedding present of a thousand pounds to her husband:

But see you not that this proposal should come from him, not from me?--And should we not let each other see a little of each other's merits, first?

See, first, the merits of the man you have married, Charlotte!

Yes, Lady L.--But yesterday married, you know. Can there be a greater difference between any two men in the world, than there often is between the same man, a lover, and an husband? --And now, my generous advisers, be pleased to continue silent.

You cannot answer me fairly. And besides, wot ye not the indelicacy of an early present, which you are not obliged to make?

We were both silent, each expecting the other to answer the strange creature.

She laughed at us both. Soft souls, and tender! said she, let me tell you, that there is more indelicacy in delicacy, than you very delicate people are aware of. (IV, xvii; II, 350)

Lady L.'s reply shows that Richardson is conscious of the resemblance: "Had you been a man, you would have been a sad rake." Charlotte's rhetoric ("wot ye not," "Soft souls, and tender") is like Lovelace's, and like him, Charlotte is extremely sensitive to and comfortable with sexual innuendo, using it as a weapon against more conventional characters. In this encounter with her sister and Harriet, Charlotte uses her sexual frankness to attack the conventions which demand that she be a submissive wife. In other instances, her frankness explodes the conventional modesty of other characters, revealing the acute sexual awareness it is based upon. Thus, a character's over-delicacy can be used against him, and Charlotte manages this when she silences her aunt's complaints of her behavior to Lord G.:

You maiden Ladies, tho' you have lived a great while in the world, cannot know what strange creatures these husbands are, and how many causes (that cannot be mentioned by the poor wife to her friends) a woman may have to be displeased with her man, in order to keep the creature in some little decorum--Indeed, madam--~~These~~ I stopt--This excited her prudery; and she made out the rest, and, perhaps, a great deal more than the rest. She looked down, to shew she was sensible, tried for a blush; and, I verily believe, had she been a young woman, would have succeeded. "Why, truly, niece, I believe you are right. These men are odious creatures!"--And then she shuddered. (V, x; II, 500)

Charlotte's wit also links her to Lovelace. Like his,

her wit is sometimes a relief from the earnestness of the other characters, and Richardson can confidently depend on this favorable response. But at other times, Richardson expects her wit to grate or become tiresome as Lovelace's does. It does grate, as must any such unrelenting insistence on one's own will at others' expense. Charlotte's will is expressed in her wit: "I must have my jest, I say" (V, xi; II, 509), and she will not relinquish it despite the combined exhortations and entreaties of her family, Emily, Harriet, and the Selby-house ladies. Or rather, she reforms her behavior ~~time~~ and again, before and after her marriage, but outbreaks of orneriness recur as often as she reforms and are both entertaining and irritating. More important, these outbreaks testify to the vitality and persistence and pressures of her personality, or of any personality; and her marriage finally depends more on Lord G.'s learning to be laughed at by learning to discriminate between jokes and contempt, than on Charlotte's learning to discriminate between jokes and petulance.⁶⁷

It is easy to read Charlotte as despising the feminine role, and as a vindicator of the rights of women, in her objections to pregnancy, to the marriage vow of obedience, and to her position as her husband's chattel. But her criticisms of the position of women are not radical ones, in that at first she simply wants to assume the dominant male role herself: speaking to Harriet before the marriage, she

declares:

All that I am concerned about is for the next week or fortnight. He will be king all that time--Yet perhaps not quite all neither. And I shall be his sovereign ever after, or I am mistaken. What a duce shall a woman marry a man of talents not superior to her own, and forget to reward herself for her condescension? (IV, xi; II, 321)

What she demands in the end is not sovereignty, but an initial or symbolic submission from her husband, after which she is prepared to submit to conventional dependency, though not to give up her jest. She says to her sister and Harriet, to close the question of the wedding present, "when Lord G. sets the example, I shall--consider of it" (IV, xvii; II, 350-51), and sure enough, when he later presents her with five hundred pounds, she gives him both sums, saying "I will apply to you [for money] whenever I have occasion, and receive your favours, as such. I wish not to be independent of you" (V, xi; II, 511). Her reiterated preference for marriages of convenience over love matches is consistent: she has more faith in a relation based on solid, mutual comforts and advantages than on the extravagant expectations of lovers, which are sure to be disappointed. To Charlotte, evidently, passionate love requires that submergence or absorption of her personality which she resists energetically throughout. In ridiculing love matches and preferring her own "prudential" marriage, she vindicates her personality and her own will, rather than "women's rights"; that is, her defense of her marriage and her conduct as a wife comprise an assertion and vindication of her will, her decisions, her heart, herself. By insisting on remaining

herself while making necessary and gradual but still reluctant adjustments to the demands and feelings of others, she becomes a credible, solid, vital, and (on the whole) endearing character. All this must have attracted Austen, and in fact her most endearing quality certainly did: Charlotte is never morbid over her faults. She never lets self-criticism become self-indulgence. "She makes it a rule, she says, to remember nothing that will vex her" (IV, 1; II, 263), and although the carelessness and flippancy which this principle allows can be irritating, its freedom from morbidness, its healthiness and vitality, are refreshing, and anticipate (without the carelessness) Elizabeth Bennet's own "philosophy," as she calls it: "'Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure'" (PP, p. 369).

The desirability of love matches, and the "vincibility" of a first love, are continually debated in Grandison, not just by Charlotte. The novel is, in fact, structured according to parallels and contrasts in the various "love cases" as they unfold, and several characters--Sir Charles, Charlotte, Lucy Selby, Emily, and perhaps Clementina--are made to overcome a first love by the end of the novel. This is not quite the same as being asked to overcome a first impression, however. Although first impressions are frequently registered, their formation and persistence or "vincibility" are not debated at any length in the text. This theme appears only in Richardson's attempt to manipulate the reader's responses to

the characters. Richardson's letters provide statements of this theme and considerable evidence for its importance in his conception of his work. Writing to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson is most explicit about his designs:

Harriet, you say, looks little.--Now, Madam, am I at the Heighth of my Wishes in the Power you have given me over your Prejudices in favour of her.--Take care, that your Convictions have their proper Force; and do not permit your Prejudices to recurr, unless you find a Merit superior to that of Clementina, arise for the now diminished Harriet. Very seldom have I found Ladies, tho' temporarily convinced, act up to their Acknowledgements, against a declared first Opinion.⁶⁸

In this case, Richardson wants the "first Opinion" to recur, and Harriet to supplant Clementina, finally, so he is enjoying in advance, in his last remark, the further power over her prejudices which he promises himself. He is not disappointed, and he later writes complimenting Lady Bradshaigh's head and heart at the expense of the common reader's:

Ye World is not enough used to this way of writing, to the moment. It knows not that in the minutiae lie often the unfoldings of the Story, as well as of the heart; & judges of an action undecided, as if it were absolutely decided. Nor will it easily part wth. its first impressions. How few Lady B's who will read it over once for Amusement, and a second time to examine into the unjustness or justness of its several parts, as they contribute to make one Whole!⁶⁹

And finally:

We often cheat ourselves on the Entrance into a Character, by setting it down in our minds for such or such and when it rises or sinks upon us, are hardly able to reconcile it to our first hasty Impressions. And who is it that is not fond of justifying his first impressions, in compliment to himself?⁷⁰

This is almost a formula for the process Jane Austen intends to elicit and to correct in the readers of Pride and Prejudice, at the same time as she presents and corrects it in Elizabeth.

(2) Jane Austen's Debts to Richardson

Pride and Prejudice embodies Richardson's intention to manipulate and educate the reader's first impressions of character. The question of "first impressions" is actually debated in Pride and Prejudice, unlike Grandison, by the central characters; this is one of the most important differences between the novels, and one which contributes to the superiority of Pride and Prejudice. It is the first of Austen's novels in which the difficulty of judgment and of response is treated by the characters themselves as a central issue. This issue is not, unfortunately, treated by Austen in her correspondence, although her letters are full of jokes about first impressions of new acquaintances. Richardson's correspondence, however suggestive, is limited in its usefulness: statements of his intentions cannot be evidence for his achievements and are not evidence of what Jane Austen learned from Grandison. Yet Richardson does to some extent achieve his intentions in the novel, though not with the brilliance and subtlety that he does in Clarissa, where he exceeds them, and which brought him nothing but trouble--inattention and misjudgment--from his readers. Sir Charles Grandison clearly represents an attempt to combat these tendencies in his readers and to develop their capacities for sensitive and candid judgments. Sir Charles pronounces a kind of moral or motto for the novel when he says, "No one can judge

of another, that cannot be that very other in imagination, when he takes the judgment-seat" (II, xx; I, 365). Richardson is not just testing or gloating over his power when he opposes his readers' attachments to their hasty judgments and first impressions. His purpose is more humane than either his exultations or his oppressive didactic claims might suggest. Grandison turns on the judgments and their reversals which the reader makes of the essentially good people involved in the action. Richardson wants to promote debate, not decisions:

The undecided Events are sufficiently pointed out to the Reader, to whom in this Sort of Writing, something, as I have hinted, should be left to make out or debate upon. The whole Story abounds with Situations and Circumstances debatable. It is not an unartful Management to interest the Readers so much in the Story, as to make them differ in Opinion as to the Capital Articles, and by Leading one, to espouse one, another, another, Opinion, make them all, if not Authors, Carpers.⁷¹

Richardson's attempts to harness his incorrigible readers, and to induce them to give him power over their prejudices, often become harassment. Typically, no record exists of Jane Austen fussing over her readers' responses, however she may hope to direct them, or worse, judging her readers by their responses, as Richardson certainly does:

it is inconceivable how much advantage, in my proud heart, is given me, of peeping into the hearts of my readers, and sometimes into their heads, by their approbation, and disapprobation, of the conduct of the different persons in my Drama.⁷²

"But a great deal in charity to them," he goes on to say, "I attribute to their inattention," resuming his candor although relinquishing none of his demands.

Jane Austen is more detached, and in fact compiled diverse "Opinions" of Mansfield Park and Emma, clearly delighting in their incongruities, idiosyncrasies, and inconsequence. A sample, on Mansfield Park, nicely illustrates these qualities:

Miss Burrell--admired it very much--particularly Mrs Norris & Dr Grant.--

Mrs Bramstone--much pleased with it; particularly with the character of Fanny, as being so very natural. Thought Lady Bertram like herself.--Preferred it to either of the others--but imagined that might be her want of Taste--as she does not understand Wit.--

Mrs Augusta Bramstone--owned that she thought S & S.--and P. & P. downright nonsense, but expected to like M P. better, & having finished the 1st vol.--flattered herself she had got through the worst.

The families at Deane--all pleased with it.--Mrs Anna Harwood delighted with Mrs Norris & the green curtain.

(MW, p. 433)

The "Opinions" show that Austen recognizes and is interested in the problem of readers' responses, however different her own attitude is from Richardson's. As a very careful and enthusiastic student of Grandison, it is reasonable to assume, she came as close to the novel's ideal reader as possible--certainly as close as Richardson deserves and close enough to discern and appreciate his aims and successes, as well as his failures. Possibly she learned from him to consider manipulation of the reader's response as the first goal of fiction and as the major problem it faces. She clearly considers such manipulation an opportunity not to be missed. Her debt to Richardson's intentions in Grandison--to his aim to educate his readers' responses through a series of "love cases" in a comic novel--cannot be defined more

Precisely; she could have found these aims, in this form, nowhere else, and it is immaterial whether she borrowed them consciously or simply found them congenial.

If Richardson's themes and intentions are congenial, however, are his methods and techniques equally so? Both authors required devices to manipulate their readers' judgments and sympathies; both had to find or create novelistic conventions to convey the confusions and obliquities of feeling and of social life. Austen, however, rejects the epistolary form with which Richardson is able to reproduce events not yet clear or patterned, and with which he records flux of feeling, as far as each character understands it. The form demands great attention from readers and taxes their memories "unmercifully," as John Carroll points out.⁷³ Jane Austen finds non-epistolary methods that tax her readers' attention quite as thoroughly; dialogue is one method. Richardson notoriously stretches his form to include long sections of dialogue, often among several characters, and Jane Austen must have learned much from his ability to portray in ordinary polite conversation the contending personalities and some of the conflicting feelings of a small group of characters, although her dialogue is far more economical than Richardson's, as well as more playful and entertaining.

By the time she writes Pride and Prejudice, Austen finds in dialogue a means to register fluxes of feeling, and in the wit and charm of her characters a means to control readers'

responses. In the earlier works, dialogue, where it exists, is either superficially "characteristic" or simply comic, and Austen relies on other devices to direct the reader's response. But in Pride and Prejudice, she exploits the technique of criticizing wit and making it grate, a technique very important in Richardson's novels, not only in the characters of Lovelace and Charlotte, but in Sir Thomas Grandison, Charlotte's witty and rakish father, whose interpolated history takes up much of the second volume. Sir Thomas makes fun of his daughter Caroline's love for Lord L. and misery at being separated from him. He shows an irresponsibly ironic attitude toward his daughters shared by Mr. Bennet, though Sir Thomas's arbitrary tyranny is not. At work in Austen's and Richardson's criticisms of wit is the classical notion that any virtue carried to an extreme becomes a vice. For this reason, Mr. Bennet's is not the only wit criticized in Pride and Prejudice: Elizabeth's wit makes her stupid and imperceptive toward Darcy, as she herself recognizes (225-26). Richardson's attitude toward wit is more ambivalent than Jane Austen's, so his eagerness in Grandison to criticize it is not surprising. What is surprising, considering the sentimentalism he is capable of, is his interest in registering the costs of the very virtues he is most eager to exercise in his readers, frankness and impartiality. Harriet Byron's frankness means that everyone knows of her hopeless love for Sir Charles, with resulting

embarrassment for her, and Sir Charles's fair, impartial judgment encourages other characters to demand unselfishness from him, and to make no allowances for his feelings. This is the price of perfection in a character, and the reader too is disinclined to allow for Sir Charles's feelings. But perhaps because Richardson has the tact for once not to permit either Sir Charles or his circle to dwell on the illness and grief he suffers at Clementina's rejection, there is some slight poignance in his response to the Porrettas' unreasonable request that he help persuade Clementina to marry someone else instead: "Good Heaven! thought I--Do they believe me absolutely divested of human passions?" (V, xxxviii; II, 632-33). In Pride and Prejudice, ironic treatment of frankness and of judgment is both more subtle and more sustained, yet Austen's works do share with Richardson's a concern to render the costs or difficulties inherent in those qualities which obtain their approval.

Other effects and structures in Grandison reappear in Pride and Prejudice, modified to suit a non-epistolary novel. Unorganized experience, which the epistolary form intrinsically registers, is conveyed in Pride and Prejudice by anticlimax: the ebb and flow of expectation and disappointment, especially over the early romances between Jane and Bingley and Elizabeth and Wickham. The technique of violating or playing with the reader's conventional novelistic expectations, a technique based upon an acute awareness and distrust of the stock

responses which these expectations permit when not interfered with, is not an exclusive property of Richardson or Austen. The device is present in Fanny Burney's novels, among others, but in the works of Richardson and Austen it becomes an important means with which to manipulate the reader, forcing him to accept complexity of feeling, not simplicity or a stock response. In this way, the reader is made to accept Elizabeth's reaction to seeing Pemberley for the first time (her very unconventional feeling that "to be mistress of Pemberley might be something" [245]),⁷⁴ and to accept Harriet Byron's partially unrequited love. The advantage of this technique lies in its obviousness: the reader is conscious that he is being challenged, and the author will frequently discuss the difficulty openly. The final technical device which Richardson and Austen share, the use of parallels and contrasts to enlarge the scope of the action and to guide the reader's interpretation of it, is likewise shared by almost all writers of narrative. In Grandison as in Pride and Prejudice and so many other works, characters and marriages are contrasted and used as foils to one another. This time-worn literary device, so essential to Pride and Prejudice, raises problems of a particular sort in evaluating that novel.

¹ Jane Austen and her Art, p. 42.

² Cecilia (London, 1782), X, x; V, 379-80. As no standard edition exists, this 1st edition will be cited throughout. References will be given in the text, and will include book and chapter numbers, followed by the volume and page number of the 1st edition. The most readily available modern edition is Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress, 2 vols., ed. Annie Raine Ellis (London, 1882).

³ "Pride and Prejudice and Cecilia," appendix, PP, p. 408.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Diary and Letters, II, 72.

⁶ "Pride and Prejudice and Cecilia," PP, p. 409.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ C. Linklater Thomson, Jane Austen, A Survey (London, 1929), pp. 104-5.

⁹ Jane Austen and her Predecessors, pp. 98-99.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 94-102.

¹¹ Art of Allusion, pp. 82 and 83.

¹² "Critical Theory," rpt. in F. R. Leavis, ed., A Selection from Scrutiny, II, 10.

¹³ The Women Novelists (1919; rpt. Freeport, N. Y., 1967), p. 119. See also Johnson's later Jane Austen (1927) for a fuller exploration, concluding that Pride and Prejudice is a "more or less deliberate adaptation" of Cecilia (p. 135; see pp. 124-27 for argument).

¹⁴ "Critical Theory," loc. cit., II, 10.

¹⁵ Literary Manuscripts, p. 30.

¹⁶ Jane Austen and her Predecessors, pp. 100, 96, and 98.

¹⁷ "Critical Theory," loc. cit., II, 11 and 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., II, 13.

¹⁹ Jane Austen, A Survey, p. 102.

²⁰ Diary and Letters, II, 154.

²¹ This phrase, "pride of judgment," resembles Litz's phrase, "pride of perception" (Artistic Development, p. 105), used to describe Elizabeth Bennet, but differs in emphasis.

²² Literary Manuscripts, p. 60.

²³ Artistic Development, p. 102.

²⁴ This is uncertain, although many critics speculate

on what changes a revision of Persuasion would have included. The idea that it might have been revised had Jane Austen lived has several possible sources: dissatisfaction with the novel as it stands; Austen's own well-known dissatisfaction with and revision of the ending, along with her habits of revision in general; and her statement in a letter dated March 13, 1817, that she had "a something ready for Publication, which may perhaps appear about a twelvemonth hence" (Letters, p. 484). The interval between completion of the novel (on August 6, 1816, according to her memorandum, as copied by Cassandra Austen and printed by Southam [Literary Manuscripts, p. 53]) and publication would thus have been nineteen months, about twice as long as the intervals for Mansfield Park and Emma. There is some reason to suppose that further revisions were intended, then, though other plausible reasons for the contemplated delay exist: the bankruptcy in 1816 of her brother Henry, who acted as her agent; the slow sale of the 1816 2nd edition of Mansfield Park, which entailed a loss of £182.8.3 deducted from the first profits of Emma; and of course Austen's own ill-health. Details of Austen's literary earnings and losses are usefully summarized by Jane Aiken Hodge in a book of otherwise highly questionable value, The Double Life of Jane Austen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), pp. 207-8.

²⁵ Letters, p. 32.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 298.

²⁷ Rambler No. 97 (19 February 1751), II, 156.

²⁸ Tompkins, p. 103.

²⁹ "Critical Theory," loc. cit., II, 10.

³⁰ Diary and Letters, II, 71.

³¹ Ibid., II, 154.

³² Ibid., II, 72-73.

³³ Letters, pp. 486-87.

³⁴ Early Masters of English Fiction (1956; rpt. Lawrence, Kansas, 1968), p. 88.

³⁵ Memoir of Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman (1926; rpt. Oxford, 1967), p. 89.

³⁶ John Carroll, "Introduction," Samuel Richardson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. and intro. Carroll (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), p. 18.

Since Carroll's writing, however, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist has been published, Mark Kinkead-Weekes' lengthy and very worthwhile study (Ithaca, N. Y., 1973). Kinkead-Weekes devotes two long chapters to Grandison. Although he and I reach some similar conclusions about the novel, our interests and emphases are very different. He

does not see Richardson's concern with manipulating or educating readers' first impressions of character, a concern which seems to me central to Richardson's powers and effect as a novelist. Instead, Kinkead-Weekes concentrates on one aspect of that concern, casuistry. For him, Grandison asks of its readers an interest in questions of duty and conduct to equal that of Richardson and his contemporaries (p. 284), and so he makes himself into an ideal reader in these terms: a casuist, interested in how far the characters' actions are right or wrong in each instance; and a devotee, endowed with an attentiveness and memory for details and for subtleties which Richardson seldom found in his contemporaries.

Recalling F. R. Leavis's analysis of Daniel Deronda, Kinkead-Weekes divides Grandison into two parts, distinct in their methods and intentions, and in the kind of imaginative art which creates them: "Sir Charles" and "Harriet Byron," or the novel of "Ought" versus the novel of "Is" (p. 293), or imagination of "the possible, the ideal" over against "the probable and realistic" (p. 292). To its decided advantage, this approach neither rejects nor minimizes Richardson's didactic intentions, but it does (I would contend) oversimplify them. Casuistry is only one way in which Richardson engages his readers' imaginations and emotions to didactic ends.

Kinkead-Weekes deals in passing with the problem of defining Austen's interest in Grandison, beyond the obvious

"appeal of the novel's opening" (p. 320), and locates it in Richardson's art of "ought" and "is."

For in Mansfield Park she too opposed an art of 'ought' to a far more lively, realistic and appealing art of 'is'. Her most Richardsonian novel is less stark in its opposition, since the author's irony is allowed to play over both sides, but it offers many of the same challenges, difficulties, and rewards. (p. 320)

The distinction between the art of "ought" and "is," while it does work for Grandison, is wholly inadequate to any Austen novel. If Kinhead-Weekes means that Fanny Price, like Sir Charles, represents "the possible, the ideal" in human conduct, then he is making the mistake of most critics who discuss Mansfield Park. Austen is always interested in the conflicts between "ought" and "is" in conduct and feeling, and Fanny Price is, like other Austen heroines, very conscious of these conflicts, particularly as they occur in her feelings, and she is sometimes able to reconcile them, sometimes not. Mansfield Park assimilates questions of "ought" and "is" in conduct and feeling to character as part of its larger concern to manipulate the reader's judgments and sympathies toward the characters, to didactic ends.

I would say that Richardson anticipates this larger concern in Grandison, and that Austen's interest in the novel lies here. Pride and Prejudice is the first of her novels to resemble Grandison in making first impressions and judgment of character a major concern of the characters themselves as well as of the reader, and so its relation to Grandison is especially interesting. Although all the later

novels exhibit this concern as well, Kinkead-Weekes is right to single out Mansfield Park in relation to Grandison, for in both novels the characters discuss and debate questions of conduct very openly and obsessively. In this, Mansfield Park improves on Pride and Prejudice, in which characters judge each other as they discuss problems of judgment. In Mansfield Park they do this as well, both before and after the conduct occurs; the debates on the performance of Lovers' Vows are a good example. The complexity and density of texture which the novel acquires as a result has baffled most critics. Austen herself was able to equal it only in Emma, where debates on character and on conduct are equally prominent, but more balanced, for they center on Emma herself.

³⁷ The Rise of the Novel (1957; rpt. Berkeley, 1962), p. 296.

³⁸ Early Masters, pp. 95-96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Sir Charles Grandison, ed. and intro. Jocelyn Harris (London, 1972), I, xvii; I, 84. All references are to this edition unless otherwise noted, and are included in the text, in the form of the volume and letter numbers in editions published in Richardson's lifetime, followed by the volume and page number of the edition cited.

⁴¹ Selected Letters, p. 252.

- ⁴² Ibid., p. 234.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 248.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 252.
- ⁴⁵ Early Masters, p. 91.
- ⁴⁶ Selected Letters, p. 288.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 305.
- ⁴⁸ The History of the English Novel (1936; rpt. New York, 1966), IV, 67-68 and 74.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., IV, 74.
- ⁵⁰ "Introduction," Grandison, I, xvii.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., I, xx.
- ⁵² Ibid., I, ix.
- ⁵³ Selected Letters, pp. 194-95.
- ⁵⁴ Samuel Richardson, A Biography (Oxford, 1971), pp. 391 and 399.
- ⁵⁵ Selected Letters, p. 234.
- ⁵⁶ Early Masters, pp. 86-87.
- ⁵⁷ Eaves and Kimpel, p. 392.
- ⁵⁸ Selected Letters, p. 248.

59 On his return to England, Sir Charles does write:

Shall I, my dear Jeronymo, own the truth?--The two noblest-minded women in the world, when I went over to Italy, on the invitation of my Lord the Bishop, held almost an equal interest in my heart; and I was thereby enabled justly, and with the greater command of myself, to declare to the Marchioness, and the General, at my last going over, that I held myself bound to you; but that your sister, and you all, were free. But when the dear Clementina began to shew signs of recovery, and seemed to confirm the hopes I had of her partiality to me; and my gratitude and attachment seemed of importance to her complete restoration; then, my Jeronymo, did I content myself with wishing another husband to the English Lady, more worthy of her than my embarrassed situation could have made me. And when I farther experienced the condescending goodness of your whole family, all united in my favour; I had not a wish but for your Clementina. (VI,v; III, 11)

No one points out the incongruity in Sir Charles's having received praises for disinterestedness upon his return to Italy, when by this account he was not exclusively interested in Clementina.

Mark Kinkead-Weekes' reading of these discrepancies in the treatment of Sir Charles is different, and derives from his division of the methods of Grandison into an art of "ought" and an art of "is." He considers that the novel fails at its crisis, Sir Charles's second journey to Italy, because while Harriet can be shown moving from "is" to "ought," to a role of preferring Clementina's happiness with Sir Charles to her own (a role she thinks that she "ought" to play), Sir Charles makes no comparable move from "ought" to "is" in his "delicate Situation" of being caught between Harriet and Clementina. Thus, Kinkead-Weekes interprets the mysteriousness of Sir Charles's motives, his passivity in Italy, and the discrepancies between his accounts of his feelings as indicating

that "Richardson failed to hit on an artistic way of probing his hero's consciousness" (Dramatic Novelist, p. 365). This, not Sir Charles's perfection, causes the failure of Grandison in Kinkead-Weekes' reading.

I would maintain, on the other hand, that the novel gives accounts of Sir Charles's motives and feelings which are incomplete or contradictory and which thus seem to encourage the reader to probe Sir Charles's motives and consciousness, but the novel then fails to reward the reader for his analyses: in the end, Sir Charles is to be thought of in only "one way." I see the Italian section as a failure largely because Clementina is, but also because Sir Charles is excluded from the novel's concern to manipulate first impressions of character. Kinkead-Weekes and I would agree, however, that Richardson's difficulties arise from his refusal to acknowledge that Sir Charles can feel anything but what he "ought" to feel.

⁶⁰ Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1936), p. 213.

⁶¹ Selected Letters, p. 185.

⁶² Early Masters, p. 91.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 92.

⁶⁴ A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the Year 1741 to 1770, ed.

Montagu Pennington, 2nd ed. (London, 1809), II, 157-58.

(Cited hereafter as Carter Letters.)

65 Selected Letters, p. 187.

66 Ibid., p. 248.

67 The temptation to draw a parallel here to Elizabeth Bennet's teaching Darcy to be laughed at is great, but should be resisted. Charlotte's laughter at Lord G. is very different from Elizabeth's at Darcy; Charlotte's can be taken for contempt.

68 Selected Letters, p. 254.

69 Ibid., p. 289.

70 Ibid., pp. 287-88.

71 Ibid., p. 296.

72 Ibid., p. 289.

73 "Introduction," Richardson: Critical Essays, ed. Carroll, p. 2.

74 An ideal reader accepts this; it is worth noting, however, that Austen's contemporaries were very well able to resist her designs. Her intentions were either too complex or too uncongenial for Walter Scott, who misread Elizabeth's motives in his unsigned review of Emma, dated October 1815.

He notes that Elizabeth "does not perceive that she has done a foolish thing until she accidentally visits a very handsome seat and grounds belonging to her admirer" (rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 65).

IV: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Pride and Prejudice (1813) is arguably the most difficult of Jane Austen's works to respond to and deal with, partly because it is so popular and so memorable. For some readers it is the first and most often read of the six novels, and for most its outline or plot is extremely vivid and definite, and thus extremely hard to forget. This creates a special problem: the text is likely to be over-familiar, which makes a fresh or even an attentive response difficult. It is surprisingly easy, for example, to overlook certain passages in Pride and Prejudice, such as the summary of Mr. Collins's upbringing and education provided at the start of Chapter XV. The important question is whether the oversight is the reader's or Austen's: does the reader ignore "The subjection in which his father had brought him up" (70) because he is inattentive, or because Austen neglects to develop its implications, which furnish a major theme in Mansfield Park?

1. Critical Approaches

If undeveloped material in Pride and Prejudice can be slurred over or ignored because of over-familiarity with the text, then the unanimous critical opinion (a unanimity in itself remarkable) that the novel tends toward union of opposites, toward wholeness and completion and perfection,

is at once quite predictable and rather dubious: this unity needs qualification. It does not, particularly, need redefinition; for, as a rule, critics justify their discussions of this much-analyzed novel by supplying new or altered terms for what, precisely, the novel unites or reconciles. This results in some tenuous, strained, and only superficially distinguishable criticism--which no critic dealing with great art can ever wholly avoid, and which is especially unavoidable in dealing with Jane Austen. A few examples suffice. The novel is said to reconcile, variously, the opposing claims of "wit and drama";¹ "local complexity" and "general clarity of design";² "social restraint and the individual will" or "tradition and self-expression";³ "the two extremes of 'art' and 'nature'";⁴ "civilized convention and economic primitivism," or "'feelings' and 'fortune'";⁵ "morality" and "style."⁶ The apparent differences between these sets of terms begin to disappear when they are compared to the more generalized antithetic formulæ with which critics define Austen's concerns throughout her work; that is, these terms correspond to or else refine such familiar balanced oppositions as head and heart, reason and feeling, judgment and fancy, society and the individual, culture and personality. Thus, the first and last sets of critical formulæ cited above actually originate in similar perceptions, although they seem the most distinct. Reuben Brower's view that the novel's "triumph" lies in the union of "wit and drama," or in the

combining of "poetry of wit with the dramatic structure of fiction," rests upon his conclusion that "in the presentation of Elizabeth's and Darcy's gradual revaluation of each other,"⁷ their witty dialogue is ambiguous, allowing for the reader's and the characters' immediate pleasure along with immediate misinterpretation, and requiring of both a later reinterpretation or rereading of character. Roughly, wisdom and wit are finally reconciled; and this view resembles Lionel Trilling's ingenious account of the novel's presentation of "morality as style" in the relations of Elizabeth and Darcy:

a formal rhetoric, traditional and rigorous, must find a way to accommodate a female vivacity, which in turn must recognize the principled demands of the strict male syntax.⁸

Even if a resemblance between these views is denied, a more general agreement among the critics must be acknowledged, and is implied by Trilling's subsequent statement: "The high moral import of the novel lies in the fact that the union of styles is accomplished without injury to either lover."⁹ Evidently, a union or (to delay the term no longer) a marriage at the end which resolves all contradictions and conflicts, is irresistible, and critics assert this combined "conflict and reconciliation"¹⁰ wherever possible. Only one critic speaks instead of finding a "mean" between extremes.¹¹ The others insist on union: on a "mode of simultaneous opposition and union"¹² or a "resolution of conflicts which is a union rather than a compromise."¹³

This insistence on union as the great achievement and

triumph of Pride and Prejudice is contradicted by only one critic: Jane Austen herself. Her remarks on Pride and Prejudice are almost as familiar as the novel itself and, possibly, suffer similarly from inattention; it is too easy for the reader to assume he already knows what they mean. One of the most quoted phrases, written jokingly to her sister Cassandra and calling the novel "rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade,"¹⁴ seems fairly clear. Austen is describing the sustained wit that has helped make this the most generally popular of her novels. But she is also supplying the first recorded declaration of the novel's structural unity, as the rest of the passage indicates:

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.¹⁵

This charmingly, deceptively readable "critique" of her own writing immediately presents difficulties. First, although Austen here claims a singleness or unity in the novel's "story" and "style," she does not imply that this is a virtue--the reverse, in fact. Second, and more important, how seriously can one take this apparent perception of a lack in the novel? The easy playfulness of her remarks combined with their careful structure is quite baffling. Lionel Trilling takes the passage seriously as a rejection of "the shining outward perfection of style" and as a prefiguration

of the "degree of roughness of texture, a certain hard literalness"¹⁶ that he finds in Mansfield Park. But Austen's own words, however playfully meant, suggest not perfection, as Trilling would have it, but rather, excess, imbalance, ingenuity overdone, or brilliance carried too far. This reading of the passage is supported by the novel's known history. An initial version called "First Impressions" was written between 1796-97.¹⁷ It was reworked extensively, apparently plotted according to the 1811-12 calendar,¹⁸ and published under its present title in 1813. Finally, Austen's own comment in another letter to Cassandra that she had "lop't and crop't so successfully . . . that I imagine it must be rather shorter than S. & S. altogether"¹⁹ suggests extensive cutting. It would be extraordinary if a work with this history were to be completely unified in its construction, whatever its surface unity or polish. It is more likely to retain abandoned scaffolding and passages which lead nowhere, such as the discussion of Mr. Collins's upbringing. Accordingly, one can reasonably expect Pride and Prejudice to be over-worked, over-polished, and over-ingenuous compared to the other novels, and it is so in fact.

The elaborate and complex connections between Pride and Prejudice, Cecilia, and Sir Charles Grandison which have been explored in the preceding chapter, fully illustrate the extreme ingenuity of Pride and Prejudice. Its themes combine the study of pride evident in Cecilia with the manipulation

of first impressions characteristic of Grandison. How far this combination was specifically and consciously calculated by Austen cannot be determined, but the novel does successfully encourage its readers to follow Elizabeth Bennet in forming mistaken first impressions of the characters, in retaining them out of pride, and in finally relinquishing them. Austen intends, apparently, to write a didactic comedy of judgment, that is, a comedy which implicates and educates the reader's critical judgment while relentlessly poking fun at it. To achieve these ends, Austen borrows, transforms, and transcends various literary conventions common to eighteenth-century novelists in general but exploited with more than usual art by Burney, Richardson, and Austen herself in her earliest work. Furthermore, the techniques which govern the structure and the comedy of manners in Pride and Prejudice more than suffice for the three later novels as well, for technique is only too various and visible in this novel--that is, over-worked and over-ingenuous--while the later novels select its most effective techniques and use them with far greater economy and density. For these reasons, the techniques of Pride and Prejudice require and repay extensive analysis.

The most obvious technique used in Pride and Prejudice is structural: parallels and contrasts order the characters and organize the action. These structural devices, present in Austen's earliest work (e.g., "Love and Freindship,"

"Jack and Alice," "Lady Susan," and so forth) and fully exploited in Sense and Sensibility, are now harnessed to the theme of judgment. While in Sense and Sensibility, parallels and contrasts between the characters and within the plot illuminate differences, difficulties, errors, and consequences of conduct, in Pride and Prejudice they illuminate the difficulties and consequences of judgment. Austen's interest in constructing a comedy of judgment leads her to develop a further structural device for Pride and Prejudice, linear irony, a device which organizes the action to reverse or undercut the characters' and the readers' expectations. This device, used crudely and sporadically by Burney and Richardson, becomes in Pride and Prejudice an effective and pervasive means to challenge and refine the reader's judgment.

These devices create a structure for Pride and Prejudice far more elaborate than that of Sense and Sensibility, but still other techniques account for the major differences between the novels. To realize her comedy of judgment in Pride and Prejudice, Austen adopts and exploits the conventions of the comedy of manners, particularly wit and dialogue. Her mastery of the possibilities of wit and dialogue in this novel is a triumph that invites but resists analysis. Certainly wit and dialogue do not have the same prominence or significance in Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and the juvenilia. Perhaps the focus on the problems of judgment in Pride and Prejudice drives Austen to explore the ambiguous

relations of perception, judgment, and wit, partially defined by Elizabeth Bennet when she analyzes her prejudice against Darcy:

"I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually abusive without saying any thing just; but one cannot be always laughing at a man without now and then stumbling on something witty." (225-26)

Or Austen may simply be extending a technique of dialogue used in Sense and Sensibility (the characters often discuss their conduct and judgments with each other), so that in Pride and Prejudice characters actually debate themes like first impressions and pride of judgment, besides dramatizing them. In any event, wit and dialogue acquire in Pride and Prejudice a pervasiveness, power, and significance not visible either in Austen's earlier work or in Austen's sources for the comedy of manners, whether these are Restoration comedies, eighteenth-century comic dramas, or the social comedy of Richardson and Burney. It is worth noting also that Pride and Prejudice makes less complex use than the later novels of the possibilities of the comedy of manners, particularly the use of "manners" to indicate morals. The later novels investigate the relations of manners and morals far more profoundly, just as they more fully exploit the expressive and educative possibilities of wit and dialogue.

The techniques of the later novels are those of Pride and Prejudice, then, used more selectively and economically. Yet, for all their obtrusiveness and variety, the newly

mastered techniques which are on display in Pride and Prejudice do unite in a common goal: they produce a comedy of judgment exploring what influences, dictates, undermines, and confounds people's estimations and impressions of each other. These techniques are also so mastered as to elicit from the reader an absorption in the world of Pride and Prejudice which disregards or transcends any disunities or over-polishing in its composition; for the novel does create a powerful impression of unity, witnessed by all the critics, whatever disparate elements it contains.

11. Mastery of Technique: Structure

The elaborate structure and symmetry of Pride and Prejudice have been frequently noticed, but Mary Lascelles first formulated the possible cost:

Exactness of symmetry . . . carries with it one danger. The novelist's subtlety of apprehension may be numbed by this other faculty of his for imposing order on what he apprehends. His apprehension of human relationships, for example, may fail to develop or, if it develops, fail to find due expression because he is impelled to simplify these relationships in his story in the interests of its pattern.²⁰

Lascelles does not claim that Pride and Prejudice is guilty of these faults, but neither does she fully register the astonishing "exactness of symmetry" the novel exhibits. For example, Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a foil to Darcy, possessing his pride unalloyed by any wit, either as humor or as intelligence. At several points in the novel, parallels

and contrasts between Darcy and Lady Catherine are insisted upon, and have considerable effect on Elizabeth's judgment of both characters, and on our own. No objection can be made to this device, schematic as it is. But Austen pursues the scheme until it seems a mechanical reflex: until parallels appear which are extraneous and do not advance the novel's plot or refine its meaning. When the Gardiners discuss Darcy's civility after being introduced to him at Pemberley, their intelligent praise contains echoes which must be deliberate (though lacking the fulsomeness) of Sir William Lucas's and Mr. Collins's characteristic and foolish praise of Lady Catherine's civil invitation to dine at Rosings:

"I confess," said [Mr. Collins], "that I should not have been at all surprised by her Ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation moreover including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!"

"I am the less surprised at what has happened," replied Sir William, "from that knowledge of what the manners of the great really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire. About the Court, such instances of elegant breeding are not uncommon." (160)

The Gardiners claim, rather like Mr. Collins, that Darcy is "superior to any thing they had expected"; Mr. Gardiner notes:

"I was never more surprised than by his behaviour to us. It was more than civil; it was really attentive; and there was no necessity for such attention. His acquaintance with Elizabeth was very trifling." (257)

Like Sir William, Mr. Gardiner, though having no similar

pride in it, adduces his knowledge of the "great" in his reading of Darcy and shows also his superiority in good breeding to Sir William:

"But perhaps he may be a little whimsical in his civilities. . . . Your great men often are; and therefore I shall not take him at his word about fishing, as he might change his mind another day, and warn me off his grounds." (258)

Do such unnecessary and insignificant parallels mean that Pride and Prejudice sacrifices life to symmetry, or that when Jane Austen "lop't and crop't" she left too much of the novel's skeleton showing? Or does Austen succeed in realizing Richardson's aims in Grandison: in finding techniques to educate both the reader's emotional and his moral responsiveness and to elicit and control his sympathies and judgments? The question has a particular urgency for Pride and Prejudice because of all Austen's novels it most obviously and flamboyantly displays pattern and structure. What appeals to a sense of form receives fullest expression here. An elaborate formal structure need not be sterile, certainly, nor does perceiving it offer solely intellectual or esthetic pleasure. When parallels and contrasts are among characters, as in Pride and Prejudice, noting "patterns" engages vanity and even has a moral dimension: it necessarily involves estimating and judging characters in relation to each other. This moral dimension cannot of itself absolve elaborate structures from the charge of being mechanical or lifeless, as many novels witness. The parallels and contrasts among characters in Pride and Prejudice must be examined to discover

whether their "exactness of symmetry" produces lifelessness and oversimplification or whether they support a comic investigation of the theme, "pride of judgment."

(1) Parallels and Contrasts

Darcy, whose character invites the most discussion in the novel and is the most difficult for Elizabeth to judge, is provided with the greatest number of foils. Austen delights in surrounding him with characters who exhibit his pride in combination either with faults he does not possess or with his faults in exaggerated form. Lady Catherine's pride, unsupported by "any extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue" (161), is equally unsupported by good manners. Darcy, whose own manners need correction, is ashamed of hers. Sir William's pride in his knighthood and presentation at court produces an excessive affability which is ridiculous and can be as ill-bred as the outright rudeness of Lady Catherine. His "very gallant" behavior to Elizabeth in presenting her to Darcy as a partner is a good example (26). Miss Bingley is yet another foil to Darcy in her pride and her disdain of Elizabeth's family. Her function is underlined by the parallelism of Chapter VI, which starts with Charlotte's and Elizabeth's discussion of matrimony and ends when Miss Bingley and Darcy reach the same subject. Both Elizabeth and Darcy seem more like their foils Charlotte ~~and~~ and Caroline Bingley than they are in fact; not until later do

the distances between them become clear.

Mr. Collins is the character who serves to criticize Darcy's pride most extensively, although his "'mixture of servility and self-importance'" (64) is foreign to Darcy. The parallels between their proposals of marriage to Elizabeth and their angry, incredulous responses to rejection have been frequently remarked, but are only the most obvious among many such parallels. The character whose "air was grave and stately, and his manners were very formal" (64) at his first introduction is Mr. Collins, rather than Darcy. In addition, Mr. Collins's relation to his "humble abode" at Hunsford is carefully and amusingly constructed to parody Darcy's to Pemberley, from Elizabeth's curiosity, amounting to suspense, about each place before she visits it, to the opportunity granted each proprietor to show Elizabeth the comforts she has rejected. There the resemblance ends, for Mr. Collins's "displaying" his parsonage only emphasizes that his "manners were not altered by his marriage" (155), whereas Darcy's invitations and civilities at Pemberley indicate "the alteration in his manner" since Elizabeth's last encounter with him (252). In the brief accounts of their upbringing, the essential difference between them is clear. Mr. Collins exhibits "the self-conceit of a weak head" (70) and Darcy the self-conceit of a strong one: "'I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit'" (369). All the foils to Darcy point to or qualify not only his pride but his manners;

in addition, Austen provides other explicit foils in manners. Bingley, Wickham, and Colonel Fitzwilliam all show the good manners and pleasing address Darcy lacks at first; their characters also reflect on his in other ways.

Elizabeth is less beset by counterparts. Jane is the principal foil. Her judgment and Elizabeth's are continually compared, and Austen gives neither the advantage. Elizabeth's uncandid interpretation of Caroline Bingley's letter announcing her removal to London is more correct than Jane's candid one, while Jane's candor allows her to judge Darcy more accurately than Elizabeth can at first. It is Elizabeth (so often considered refreshingly unconventional in her judgments) who finds herself concurring in the view of "society"--that is, all Meryton--concerning the respective merits of Wickham and Darcy. Only the "conventional" heroine Jane remains independent and reserves judgment.²¹ Jane and Elizabeth are compared in other respects too, particularly in their responses to being "crossed in love" by Bingley and Wickham, and in their attitudes toward their lovers at the end of the novel. The other Bennet sisters are also to some extent foils to Elizabeth: their foolishness underscores her wit and charm. Charlotte Lucas is, however, a much more interesting foil than the younger Bennets, for she is a sensible woman, and yet she accepts, even courts, Mr. Collins's proposal. Her detached and prudential view of marriage is explicitly opposed to Elizabeth's, and her views and actions receive

Elizabeth's very energetic criticism. Yet, while the Collins ménage is certainly not the novel's norm, neither is it the horror Elizabeth anticipates; and Jane Austen hands her a further comeuppance for her shock at Charlotte's engagement. Her response at the close of Volume I, "'Engaged to Mr. Collins! my dear Charlotte,--impossible!'" (124), returns upon her near the end of Volume III when she announces to Jane her own engagement. Jane exclaims, "'You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be!--engaged to Mr. Darcy! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible'" (372).²²

As if these structures were not complex enough, Austen also contrives explicit parallels between Elizabeth and Darcy. They both are made to feel shame over the conduct of their close relatives. Both possess a younger sister prepared to elope with Wickham at age fifteen. Both are forced to reverse their initial impressions of each other. And the "pride of judgment" of both undergoes thorough humiliation. Their final union, too, is deliberately contrasted with the marriages between Bingley and Jane, Lydia and Wickham, and Charlotte and Mr. Collins. Different sorts of happiness are achieved by each couple, very suitable to the different forms of attraction which first bring them together.

The justification for these carefully wrought parallels and contrasts among the characters has been suggested: they allow Austen to guide the reader's interpretation of the

action and the characters, especially of Elizabeth and Darcy. More interestingly, she can also exploit this highly schematic device to permit her foils or fixed characters to come to life and to unfold, although not to change.²³ Mr. Bennet, for example, is a fixed character. He does not change in the novel. Throughout, his wit is meant to contrast with Elizabeth's, showing both his own imperceptiveness and irresponsibility as a father and the dangers of wit which Elizabeth usually escapes. He strikes his characteristic ironic note even when Lydia elopes. Yet he can unfold. In his conversation with Elizabeth over her engagement to Darcy, he becomes sincere and straightforward, exposing his feelings at last:

"But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about." (376)

The poignance of these final sentences depends on the contrast between the feeling behind them, and Mr. Bennet's usual unconcerned, ironic stance, established by so many scenes. Without that reiteration, this scene would have little effect. But as it is, Mr. Bennet's appeal to Elizabeth reveals the depth of his love for her, and the reader is nearly as much affected by it as Elizabeth. Jane Austen's mastery of these touches accounts for the reader's absorption

in the world of the novel, a world that keeps unfolding, and in which a meticulous structure allows each commonplace incident to acquire resonance from the incidents that precede and follow it.

Although Austen can use her structures to elicit these emotional effects, a sheer delight in pattern for its own sake is also very much in evidence. The contrasts and parallels are indeed frequently carried further than strictly necessary to make thematic points or to reveal character. These overdrawn or superfluous structures are the signature of Austen's early work. She will later subdue them to allow her characters to interact more subtly and, on the whole, more movingly. Yet the patterns in Pride and Prejudice, however elaborate, are not in the end mechanical. The reader is, after all, merely exposed to them. Austen does not harass or pursue him with a tag for every point. The reader is left to discover connections for himself, an activity that furthers intimacy with and absorption in the novel while underlining its theme: a comic exploration of complacency or pride of judgment. Another structural device, however, even more effectively supports the theme while engaging and implicating the reader: the device of linear irony.

(2) Linear Irony

The major structural device in Pride and Prejudice is the creation of ironies within the novel's action which, like

the parallels and contrasts, challenge the reader's attention and judgment throughout, and in the end also engage his feelings. The reversal in Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy which provides the overall, simple structure of the novel also dictates details of structure, but these, the lesser reversals or undercuttings of judgment, are not spelled out as clearly as is the re-estimation of Darcy. Instead, the reader is generally required to perceive them for himself by making appropriate connections between anticipations or judgments and the events which subsequently contradict them. The device can be termed linear irony. Its effects are not immediate and it is a less satisfying means of challenging or engaging the reader's judgment than the devices Austen finds in the conventions of the comedy of manners. Nevertheless, these reversals or linear ironies do offer Austen a fair means of engaging and testing the reader's sympathies and judgments without actually misleading him. The reader is likely to make the same errors in judgment and feeling that Elizabeth does, that is, to share her mistaken first impressions, but he is not forced to. Lloyd Brown is one of the critics who has observed that a reader's

"first impressions," and those of the characters, are aroused and then transformed in order to confirm the multiple connotations of "pride" and "prejudice." . . . The structure externalizes the problems of communication by obliging the reader to be influenced by, even participate in, incidents of misjudgment and noncommunication.²⁴

Austen's techniques for encouraging misjudgments are so effective that a reader can be dazzled by Elizabeth's charm

enough to overlook some of her lesser mistakes or inaccuracies even in a second or third reading, although these are quite clearly indicated in the text. Whatever success the structure obtains, however, in alternately lulling and exercising the reader's power of judgment, its action does force upon the main characters two kinds of reversals in judgment: first, the characters' expectations and judgments of other characters are repeatedly contradicted as the action unfolds; and second, the main characters find themselves forced to contradict or reverse many of their original statements and notions of themselves.

The first of these linear ironies is the most prominent element in the action. Anticipations are quite systematically thwarted or undercut, particularly those which arise from a character's propensity to credit others with his own feelings--even though this propensity (the "sympathetic imagination," in Lascelles' phrase) is, when purged of mere egoism, one of the qualities the entire novel is designed to exercise and develop. Thus Elizabeth predicts misery for Lydia in her first encounter with Mrs. Gardiner after the elopement ("What a meeting for her, when she first sees my aunt!" [305]), and both Jane and Elizabeth dread her homecoming as Mrs. Wickham:

Jane more especially, who gave Lydia the feelings which would have attended herself, had she been the culprit, was wretched in the thought of what her sister must endure. (315)

Of course, they are egregiously in error: "Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (315).

Even Lydia's marriage is not quite as disastrous as Elizabeth anticipates, although her gloomy prognostications for Charlotte's marriage, undercut as they are by Charlotte's "evident enjoyment" of her lot (157), are both more striking and more amusing. Jane's candor has the advantage here, as in Darcy's case, over Elizabeth's righteous indignation:

"You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness." (135-36)

However admirable this judgment is in principle, it is less adequate to the actual consequences of the marriage than is Jane's mild reply:²⁵

"I must think your language too strong in speaking of both . . . and I hope you will be convinced of it, by seeing them happy together." (136)

Austen is perfectly conscious that the strong language of Elizabeth's judgment makes it both more noticeable and, in general, more attractive than the mildness of Jane's. She depends on this kind of response and learns to exploit it thoroughly in dialogue, in order to implicate her readers in the characters' misjudgments, especially Elizabeth's. The subtle and sensitive judgments which Austen requires her characters and her readers to reach by the end are seldom to be found in Elizabeth at the start. Her mistakes about Charlotte, and her subsequent adjustments and reversals of opinion, are typical of the mistakes she makes throughout. The whole of her relation to Charlotte clearly shows that

Elizabeth's confidence in her own judgment frequently becomes willfulness, the willful misunderstanding which Darcy identifies as the shade in her character (58). Willful blindness is at work when she refuses to believe that Charlotte is expressing her real sentiments on marriage in Chapter VI; Elizabeth will not listen to her. There is a coarseness in Charlotte, unperceived at first by Elizabeth, which links her to Mr. Collins. The woman who is sure all Elizabeth's dislike of Darcy "would vanish, if she could suppose him to be in her power" (181) is a very suitable Mrs. Collins, even though she does not deserve Elizabeth's sweeping condemnation.

The other judgments which the action reverses or undercuts are essentially the same, and have similar uses, but they are worth detailing, if only to demonstrate the pervasiveness of this device in Pride and Prejudice. Thus Elizabeth finds herself making allowances for Wickham's pursuit of a mercenary marriage that she will not make for Charlotte. As Austen carefully points out, her judgment is "less clear-sighted perhaps in his case than in Charlotte's" (149-50). Even when Elizabeth's judgment is sensibly exercised, it is often wrong. Austen is always conscious of the limits of good sense, and thus Elizabeth is mistaken in her early, sensible assumption that Bingley will return to Netherfield, despite his sisters' wishes:

she could not for a moment suppose that those wishes, however openly or artfully spoken, could influence a young

man so totally independent of every one. (120)

Elizabeth's mistake here is especially ironic, considering her earlier discussion with Bingley and Darcy on the conditions which would cause Bingley to quit Netherfield. Bingley's persuadableness appears to her in different lights throughout the novel. Her initial position at Netherfield, that yielding to the persuasion of a friend is amiable, works against Jane's happiness later, ironically enough, when Darcy persuades Bingley that Jane is indifferent to him. Later Elizabeth learns that Bingley will not return after all, and she could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution which now made him the slave of his designing friends, and led him to sacrifice his own happiness to the caprice of their inclinations. (133)

After receiving Darcy's letter at Rosings, Elizabeth's judgment must again alter: "His affection was proved to have been sincere, and his conduct cleared of all blame, unless any could attach to the implicitness of his confidence in his friend" (213). In the end, when Darcy has reversed himself, to persuade Bingley that Jane cares for him, Elizabeth is longing to laugh at the whole of Darcy's relation to Bingley, who has been "so easily guided" by him (371).

These ironies are most pervasive in Elizabeth's and Darcy's relations with each other. The gross misjudgments each is capable of (Elizabeth that Darcy is base, Darcy that Elizabeth is "'expecting [his] addresses'" [369]) are corrected

by the proposal scene at Hunsford and by Darcy's subsequent letter, but other corrections or adjustments for lesser errors must be supplied by the reader, since neither Austen nor the characters speak of them. For example, the reader is very ready at first to believe that Elizabeth is as discerning as she thinks. He soon has an opportunity to qualify that judgment, however, for Elizabeth cannot see that Darcy is attracted to her. This is an amiably modest error. Still, it is significant: Elizabeth's discernment has limits, and the reader is offered every chance to dissociate himself from her judgments. Elizabeth does realize later that her judgments of Wickham and Darcy have originated in their responses to her:

"Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned." (208)

She never realizes that Darcy's neglect so quickly became attraction; the reader, on the other hand, is left free from the start to allow her imperception to modify his own perception of the action and his opinion of Darcy and Elizabeth, or not. Austen's complete control of the linear irony she creates for Pride and Prejudice, and her ability to exploit it for precisely the effects she desires, becomes evident when a contrasting form of irony is considered: her treatment of Darcy's unnecessarily scrupulous early behavior to Elizabeth. He does not perceive Elizabeth's dislike, and thus deliberately withdraws his attentions, offering her

"nothing that could elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity" (60). The irony here is immediate, not linear. Darcy's imperceptiveness and vanity are ridiculous and increase the reader's distance from him. Elizabeth's parallel blindness to Darcy's admiration, on the other hand, is so amiable in its absence of vanity that the reader draws closer to her, scarcely registering her mistake, and therefore becoming more likely to acquiesce in her judgments.

Austen learns in the later novels to elicit from her comedy even greater complexity of feeling than this, but her mastery in Pride and Prejudice is astonishing enough. Thus, Elizabeth's and Darcy's mistakenly confident notions about each other's feelings at the start of the novel are succeeded by the reverse: at the end, they are in suspense about each other's feelings, and increasingly unable to estimate them. Their earlier confidence is very appropriate to comedy, as are Elizabeth's pointed remarks to Darcy on the need for care in forming opinions, remarks which she could far more appropriately apply to herself. Even near the end, Elizabeth is doomed to be always incorrect in anticipating Darcy's feelings and reactions. She is wrong in her interpretation of his behavior when she tells him of Lydia's elopement. She supposes he cannot tolerate being the brother-in-law of Wickham (326). She mistakenly expects him to respond favorably to Lady Catherine's intervention. She is, finally, completely unable to interpret his behavior to her, his silence and his

preoccupation, when he visits Longbourn after Lydia's marriage. Darcy himself does not escape this sort of irony; as Lascelles has noted, his indignation at Lady Catherine's "'unjustifiable endeavours'" (381) to separate him from Elizabeth reflects back with perfect parallelism on his earlier intervention between Jane and Bingley.²⁶

Mistaken judgments and estimations of others do not exhaust the novel's ironies against pride of judgment. Elizabeth and Darcy are forced to reverse some of their own behavior and some of their ideas of themselves during the course of the action. The central reversals are obvious: Darcy reforms his manners and Elizabeth learns that she is less discerning than she thought. Other reversals underscore the central ones. Darcy finds himself seeking an introduction to the Gardiners, the very "connections" of Elizabeth that he had scorned at Hunsford. For Darcy to seek any introduction at all represents a change from his earlier refusal to be introduced to Elizabeth at the ball, and from his own later excuse, "'I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers'" (175). When Elizabeth and Darcy finally do dance together at Netherfield, their dance acquires resonance from their earlier abstentions and refusals, and from Elizabeth's amusing, "'I believe, Ma'am, I may safely promise you never to dance with him'" (20). The fault Darcy attributes to himself at first--a resentful temper--is overcome in his relation to Elizabeth, whom he

forgives for her misjudgment, for her petulant refusal, and (more remarkably) for her just criticisms of his manners. Elizabeth's case--overcoming the fault of willful misunderstanding--is not strictly parallel, for she does not at first recognize that she is guilty of this fault. She does, however, as Lascelles notes, find herself acting in defiance of her declaration to Mr. Collins that she is not "'one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time'" (107).²⁷ A simpler, and more immediate, purely comic reversal of this sort is registered by Elizabeth at the end, when Darcy and Bingley visit Longbourn. Her mother's vulgarity makes her feel at first,

that years of happiness could not make Jane or herself amends, for moments of such painful confusion. . . .

Yet the misery, for which years of happiness were to offer no compensation, received soon afterwards material relief, from observing how much the beauty of her sister re-kindled the admiration of her former lover. (337)

A more important reversal is contained in Elizabeth's inability for some time at the end to be open about her feelings and her knowledge (of Bingley's attachment) with Jane, with her father, and of course with Darcy. For the reader and for Elizabeth, whose openness about her feelings is one of her charms, this reserve is especially poignant.

These systematic reversals of the characters' estimations of each other and of themselves have one obvious and important result: in Pride and Prejudice,

Jane Austen is relentless in poking fun at critical judgment. The creation of these linear ironies is only one of her techniques for doing so. The processes by which all discriminations are made are treated comically, even subversively. One of Austen's favorite ideas, emphasized in every one of her novels, is that good looks and charm can be depended on to produce a favorable response. Her characters frequently illustrate this process in their responses to each other, and Austen uses their wit, charm, energy, and other attractive qualities to manipulate her readers' responses as well. Her characters' responses to each other are easier to analyze, however, than those of her readers. Elizabeth in particular is quite blatantly affected by Wickham's good looks, manner, and apparent attraction to herself in her high estimation of his virtues. In their first conversation, Wickham declares that he is prevented from exposing Darcy's baseness to himself by his affectionate remembrance of Darcy's father: "Elizabeth honoured him for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them" (80). Austen's delight in such observations at once carries both her and Elizabeth further:

Elizabeth was again deep in thought, and after a time exclaimed, "To treat in such a manner, the godson, the friend, the favourite of his father!"--She could have added, "A young man too, like you, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable." (80-81)

After this, it can come as no surprise that Elizabeth parts from Wickham for Hunsford, "convinced, that whether married

or single, he must always be her model of the amiable and pleasing" (152); or that later, seeing him again after Darcy's revelations,

She had even learnt to detect, in the very gentleness which had first delighted her, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary. (233)

Wickham is not the only character whose manner and attentions have amusing effects on Elizabeth's judgment. Darcy's initial rudeness assists her to her unfavorable judgment of him, and she is governed by similar considerations in her judgment of the Bingley sisters. Unlike Jane, she does not find them charming: "with a judgment too unassailed by any attention to herself, she was very little disposed to approve them" (15). She likes them later for their attentions to Jane during her illness, and when these are withdrawn, Elizabeth is "restored . . . to the enjoyment of all her original dislike" (35). Richardson's observation that everyone retains and justifies his first impressions "in compliment to himself"²⁸ could hardly be more thoroughly exemplified than it is in Elizabeth.

In poking fun at these impressions and judgments, Jane Austen is showing an amused acquaintance with the human heart and amusing herself at Elizabeth's expense. Misjudgments are treated comically here, though they are to receive very different treatment in Mansfield Park. The pure comedy of such brief and typical incidents as Lady Catherine's and Mr. Collins's misinterpretation of Darcy's dejection at leaving Rosings

(they think him in love with his cousin Anne, whereas he is instead the recently rejected lover of Elizabeth) does not conflict with the more complex but still comic tone of other misinterpretations. The tone remains comic even when rather stringent observations are made. Witness Elizabeth's acknowledgement of the obstacles which human nature places in the way of overcoming first impressions:

"The general prejudice against Mr. Darcy is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Meryton, to attempt to place him in an amiable light." (226)

The implications of this remark are serious, and reflect upon Elizabeth's own conduct, as she knows perfectly well, but the remark is still fundamentally comic. The structure of Pride and Prejudice exposes, then, the unreliable and indeed ludicrous processes which inform judgments of character and which dictate that first impressions will be as erroneous as they are tenacious. But discriminations and judgments are thus undercut only so that Austen can insist at the same time on the inevitability of making them and the obligation to do so. The "moral certainty" in Austen's novels which is so welcome and so refreshing to many moderns rests upon the fullest possible perception of the fallibilities of judgment, its inextricable linkages to feeling and inevitable humiliation in consequence.

Jane Austen does believe that feelings and judgment can be made to work more closely together. Her novels are constructed to increase this harmonious interaction, not

simply in the responses of the main characters, but also in the reader's responses. The novels of her predecessors share this intention. Richardson and Burney, at least, are capable of conceiving plots which dramatize the failures of their characters' judgments, though not with Austen's economy, relentlessness, or charm. They can even, sometimes, succeed in creating a "mixed character" who elicits fairly complex responses from readers, though again, not to compare with Austen's characters. What, then, distinguishes Austen, more than a greater degree of success in achieving these results? What accounts for her ability to "engage the heart" (in McKillop's phrase) in a structure as complicated as that of Pride and Prejudice? How does she succeed in eliciting an emotional response in combination with the intellectual agility she demands from her readers?

Such questions are mistaken insofar as they assume that intellectual and emotional responses are separable. As Jane Austen clearly shows, feeling, especially self-love, is inextricably linked to judgment, an intellectual and moral activity. Yet Austen engages and exploits, manipulates and educates, more than just her readers' vanity. She achieves this engagement largely through her management of the literary conventions available to her, a management which always includes some adaptation or transformation. The conventional structure for a novel--courtship ending in marriage--is adopted, though (as all the critics point out)

the marriage represents a higher union than simply that of two characters, however admirable. The conventional material is, moreover, frequently made to carry more meaning than usual, thus offering a challenge to the contemporary reader's expectations. The demands which in this sense Pride and Prejudice makes of its readers may account for Austen's choosing to rework and publish Sense and Sensibility first; the use of convention in that novel is far more "conventional," more in accord with what readers would expect. The presence in both novels of the same convention, discovery of guilt hidden in the past, is typical: Willoughby's guilt, when disclosed, is as much a surprise to the reader as it is to Elinor and Marianne, and would have been impossible to infer; on the other hand, although neither the reader nor Elizabeth could have any way of discovering the precise details of Wickham's attempt to elope with Georgiana Darcy before the attempt is revealed by Darcy, Elizabeth could have deduced his specious character from his conduct in their first conversation, and so could the reader. In general, however, Austen's use of convention in Pride and Prejudice must be compared to that of earlier novelists if her achievement is to be measured. The heroine of Burney's Evelina overhears no good of herself from the hero, Lord Orville, at the start of the novel, but the real consequences of this incident for their relationship are minimal. One has only to compare the complex thematic use Austen makes of the same incident

in Pride and Prejudice to appreciate her power to invest conventional material with meaning. The convention which, above all, Jane Austen succeeds in adapting and begins to transform in Pride and Prejudice is the comedy of manners, a literary convention used by Richardson and Burney among other novelists, but not fully developed or exploited by them. Austen's mastery of this convention, its centrality in Pride and Prejudice, and its importance in engaging and controlling the reader's responses to that novel, are indisputable.

111. Development of Technique: The Comedy of Manners

The usual definition of the comedy of manners derives from Restoration comedy:

this form deals with the relations and intrigues of gentlemen and ladies living in a polished and sophisticated society, evokes laughter mainly at the violations of social conventions and decorum, and relies for its effect in great part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue.²⁹

This general definition ignores, as it must, the achievement of the best works in the genre (such as The Way of the World) in which true wit and good manners serve to define the characters' worth in the world they inhabit. An analogous use of manners to indicate morals, especially in such actions as Mr. Knightley's asking Harriet Smith to dance in Emma or, conversely, Emma's rudeness to Miss Bates, is frequently noticed and much admired in Jane Austen's novels, though sometimes with an implication that the device is common or

conventional, however extraordinary the handling. But models for these incidents are not to be found in the social comedy of novelists who precede Austen. Even Burney and Richardson treat social comedy or the comedy of manners in a way that illuminates Jane Austen's achievement and her mastery, instead of anticipating it, with a few exceptions in Sir Charles Grandison.

The form itself is a literary convention which depends very much on highly developed and codified social convention, not simply for its material (the "manners" of a period), but for its significance: its ability to embody in comic confrontations important differences between characters and distinct evaluations of them ("morals"). The social conventions supporting the literary convention must ideally be serious as well as elaborate. The behavior dictated by social conventions must invite scrutiny and must reward it, so that description of social conduct can be a reliable index to character. Description of social conduct has at the same time another function, and one more usually associated with the comedy of manners: the recording of a particular social milieu or world. This wider and essentially simpler use of the convention, while important, does not serve to define Austen's differences from her predecessors as clearly as does the other use which the convention permits: the possibility of indicating the grossest and most minute discriminations among characters. For in Austen's novels, as Jane Nardin claims,

"All deviations from [the code of propriety] have a meaning; all reveal something about character"; and Nardin's recent study carefully documents the complex ways Austen uses "social behavior" as the "external manifestation" of a character's "internal moral and psychological condition."³⁰

(1) Manners

Before Jane Austen, the comedy of manners adapted to the novel form tends to make only rather gross discriminations among manners and characters, as in the novels of Fanny Burney. Burney describes extremes of vulgarity, affectation and naiveté, and she exhibits these extremes in comic confrontations with each other and with polite behavior. As a result, although she may distinguish between various forms of affectation (in Evelina, between the impertinence of Sir Clement Willoughby and the foppishness of Mr. Lovel, and in Cecilia, between the sects of the "supercilious," "voluble," "jargonists," and "insensiblists," so classified by Mr. Gosport at the Pantheon assembly [IV, vi; II, 192-93]), she does not similarly distinguish differences in polite behavior. Instead, she takes polite behavior for granted, or at least is not interested in particularizing it. When Lord Orville first appears, "His conversation was sensible and spirited; his air and address were open and noble; his manners gentle, attentive, and infinitely engaging,"³¹ but no details or examples are supplied until his behavior can appear in

opposition to Evelina's naiveté, Lovel's affectation, and Sir Clement's impertinence. Good breeding in Burney's novels is portrayed in chiaroscuro: it can shine by contrast only, and one result of this technique is that Burney's ballrooms and drawing-rooms are overstocked with vulgarians. Samuel Johnson highly approved this technique. The vulgarians who delighted him so much in Evelina are, in his view, successful only because they shine by contrast. Fanny Burney has recorded his pronouncement that the "comic humour of character . . . owes its effect to contrast; for without Lord Orville, and Mr. Villars, and that melancholy and gentleman-like half-starved Scotchman, poor Macartney, the Brangtons, and the Duvals, would be less than nothing; for vulgarity, in its own unshadowed glare, is only disgusting."³² Johnson evidently does not regret that the comedy of manners in Burney's novels is always raucous, and never aims at or allows those fine discriminations between well-bred men and women that Richardson and Jane Austen deal with. To assess Austen's mastery of the comedy of manners, then, will require a detailed assessment of Richardson's achievement in the genre.

Richardson's interest in drawing fine distinctions among characters is obsessive, but even in Sir Charles Grandison he does not rely on conventionally good manners to indicate moral stature. He is eager, first, to portray the manners of "high life" accurately, in order to offer through his

exemplary characters some prescriptions of his own for truly polite behavior. He must, then, show himself and his characters to be familiar with the conventional code of manners, not violating it. But since he was not familiar with the more minute or stylized conventions of good society, he relied on his "polite" correspondents to correct details of social usage in his novels.³³ A prescriptive attitude toward conduct or manners is characteristic of Richardson and his audience, and is thus very prominent in his novels. This prescriptiveness distinguishes Richardson's concern with accuracy in presenting the minutiae of manners from Austen's. She is as concerned that every detail she includes be correct. She revised inexact detail of this sort (for example, introducing a country surgeon to a lord) in her niece Anna's manuscript novel.³⁴ But she does not share Richardson's didacticism about manners: whatever didactic intentions she may have, Austen makes no effort like his to prescribe the manners or conduct appropriate to every occasion of domestic life. When Richardson writes to a correspondent (who is actually urging him to extend Grandison beyond its seven volumes) that, "By what we have seen of both [Sir Charles and Harriet], we know how they will behave on every future call or occasion,"³⁵ it is only too true.

Nevertheless, Richardson does include comic confrontations between his characters that do belong to the comedy of manners, quite literally. He inserts in Grandison some of the stock

situations and characters of eighteenth-century comic drama, and these became the stock-in-trade of many subsequent novelists. For example, in the first volumes of Grandison, the manners of Harriet's suitors are very deliberately contrasted, not only by Harriet herself in her letters, but by scenes which bring together the rival lovers. Richardson is conscious of the theatricality of these encounters when he describes one of them as "Scenes of courtship conversations, between [Harriet], Mr. Greville, and Sir Hargrave" in his "Index, Historical and Characteristical" to the novel.³⁶ Similarly, Richardson will occasionally introduce into his drawing-rooms some examples of the vulgar or villainous characters usually included in the dramatis personae of eighteenth-century comedies: Emily's wicked mother and her stepfather, Captain O'Hara (a stage Irishman if ever there was one), invade Sir Charles's house in town before their inevitable reformation.

On the whole, the good characters in Sir Charles Grandison outnumber the bad or low ones, and the behavior of the good is intended to be not only exemplary but (as a rule) morally and socially conventional as well, except of course when it rises above convention. Richardson's real interest in manners lies here, in fact--in being able to portray unconventional behavior as a virtue, indicating character so sublime that it soars above common forms. His characters attempt to extend and sometimes to transcend

conventional social relations. The characters in Grandison all aspire to "family." They seek to extend the solid and stable relations most sanctioned by society, and marrying is only the most obvious way of doing so. Throughout the novel, the characters adopt each other's cousins, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers as their own, in formulæ that become increasingly predictable, mechanical, tiresome, and ridiculous; but these rituals are Richardson's inadequate answer to a serious question and a profound human longing: is it possible to have stable relationships which are either undefined or unsanctioned by society?³⁷

Henry James addresses himself to this question when he shows in The Awkward Age (the ultimate comedy of manners in novel form) that Mrs. Brook's attempts to maintain some relation with a man who is neither her husband nor a relative, who is not a lover but is more than a friend, are doomed. Without an established, accepted social definition, these relations collapse under the strains and abrasions of conflicting emotional needs and demands. A conventional relationship like marriage provides the established structures, rituals, limits, and obligations which partially satisfy and partially distance emotional demands, permitting security and above all relaxation and relief, from the intolerable strain of a relationship which must be continually re-examined and redefined.

Grandison's comedy of manners is not that of The Awkward

Age, and Richardson's ability to imagine the longing for and, above all, the costs of non-conventional relationships cannot be compared to James's. Nevertheless, Harriet Byron's attempt to make her rejected suitor Mr. Fowler a "brother" and his uncle a "father," in defiance of their own feelings, anticipates in a completely different moral context Mrs. Brook's efforts to create relationships which allow her to retain the affections and attentions of the men she cares for. Similarly, Clementina tries at the end to live with Sir Charles and Harriet as a sister to both, though she still loves him, and though decorum requires avoiding him at least until she herself enjoys the protection of marriage. Earlier, Richardson contrives a parallel situation for Harriet, who is called sister by Sir Charles, Charlotte, and Lord and Lady L. Harriet's feelings at first are caught between a longing for a closer relation to Sir Charles and a complete dissatisfaction with the sisterly relation she is offered. Later she promises herself that she will be the friend of Sir Charles and Clementina once they are married, herself remaining single, all in defiance of convention. The characters' longings for stable relations conflict with the special circumstances they find themselves in. In these circumstances, their feelings are not sanctioned by and cannot be expressed within social convention or "decorums." The tensions which result, between actual and admissible feelings, are sometimes moving, and find their

echoes in Austen's novels, although never in this context: Austen does not share Richardson's or James's interest in contriving "special circumstances" to test character or to criticize social convention. Always, she interests herself in presenting what the conventions, at their best, can offer to human relations, and in registering their costs.

Richardson does explore at least one "serious and elaborate" social form for his social comedy, the compliment, a form Austen's novels also exploit from time to time. Mr. Collins's "'little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions'" (68) typify her broadly comic attitude in the early novels, while the treatment of compliments in Emma, for example, is incalculably more complex. Mr. Elton's effusive and parading gallantry, Frank Churchill's flirting, Mr. Woodhouse's solicitous and selfish politeness, Harriet's unconscious flattery of Emma, Mrs. Elton's constant and usually successful angling for compliments, all these differences in manners, and more, are registered, and assist in defining the characters who are exposed to them as well as those responsible for them. Furthermore, all the concern with flattery and compliments culminates, like so much in the novel, in Mr. Knightley's proposal: "'I cannot make speeches, Emma'" (430). The powerful emotional and thematic significance Austen can extract from so (apparently) insignificant a social form, while preserving a comic tone throughout,

becomes even more astonishing when compared to Richardson's similar attempt in Grandison. His (and his characters') scrutiny of compliments and the motives behind them becomes so serious, so anxious, so full of meaning, so obsessive finally, that comedy is undermined. The obsessiveness insists only too much on the connection between manners and morals, so that comic confrontations and comic release are nearly impossible.

This obsession with compliments might be expected from an author who was notoriously greedy of praise and who died, according to Samuel Johnson, "'merely for want of change among his flatterers.'" ³⁸ In justice to Richardson's intense concern with ulterior motives for compliments, his early exposure to the disingenuousness which can underlie conventional formulae should be remembered. In his biographical letter to Johannes Stinstra he reveals that at thirteen he was party to ladies' "Love Secrets" and was writing letters for them:

I have been directed to chide, & even repulse, when an Offence was either taken or given, at the very time that the Heart of the Chider or Repulser was open before me, overflowing with Esteem & Affection; & the fair Repulser dreading to be taken at her Word. ³⁹

Richardson's tone is light, but still registers the same consciousness of deception and awareness of the need for self-protection which accompany analyses of compliments in Grandison, qualifying the comic incongruities revealed. Thus Harriet, having arrived in London, recalls her friends' wishes

that she will acquaint them with all the admiration she receives, and her uncle's comment that "The vanity of the Sex . . . will not suffer any thing of this sort to escape our Harriet." She is led from this lightness immediately to a serious reflection, the first of several on the subject:

It is true, my Lucy, that we young women are too apt to be pleased with the admiration pretended for us by the other Sex. But I have always endeavour'd to keep down any foolish pride of this sort, by such considerations as these: That flattery is the vice of men: That they seek to raise us in order to lower us, and in the end to exalt themselves on the ruins of the pride they either hope to find, or inspire: That humility, as it shines brightest in an high condition, best becomes a flatter'd woman of all women: That she who is puffed up by the praises of men, on the supposed advantages of person, answers their end upon her; and seems to own, that she thinks it a principal part of hers, to be admired by them: And what can give more importance to them, and less to herself, than this?

(I, v; I, 18-19)

This analysis of men's motives in paying compliments, and the dangers women run in accepting them, is only preliminary. The form of a compliment, the manner of its delivery, and above all the manner of its reception, are felt to supply significant information about the characters responsible for them: about their manners, their perceptivity, even at times their moral worth. This social form can serve, then, as a reliable index to character in Richardson's novels, and the main characters, who so often hear their own praises, are very much aware that this is so. As a result, they feel a need for careful calculation and scrutiny of their responses to compliments. When Lady Betty, a new acquaintance in London, claims that she expects to be "equally delighted and improved"

by Harriet's company, Harriet is wary.

I bowed in silence. I love not to make disqualifying speeches; by such we seem to intimate that we believe the complimenter to be in earnest, or perhaps that we think the compliment our due, and want to hear it either repeated or confirmed; and yet, possibly, we have not that pretty confusion, and those transient blushes, ready, which Mr. Greville archly says are always to be at hand when we affect to disclaim the attributes given us.

Lady Betty was so good as to stop there; tho' the muscles of her agreeable face shewed a polite promptitude, had I, by disclaiming her compliments, provok'd them to perform their office. (I, v; I, 22)

This interaction is complex. Even between women, the giving and receiving of compliments may be a snare for vanity and manipulateness. When compliments occur between men and women, however, the stakes are higher, for compliments are prescribed in two antithetical contexts: they belong to formal courtship ("paying addresses") and they belong to gallantry and coquetry, what Richardson calls "polite raillery," and what "no English word but flirtation could very well describe," as Austen puts it in Emma (368). Serious "intentions" or mere mockery may lie behind a compliment, but in either case, the conventional stance of the person who receives it is disbelief, a stance which, as Harriet Byron notes, compromises one's sincerity and in any case asks for a repetition of the offense. Harriet's response when Sir Hargrave proposes to her sheds some interesting light on the resulting intricacy of these forms:

I would have played a little female trifling upon him, and affected to take his professions only for polite raillery, which men call making love to young women, who perhaps are frequently but too willing to take in earnest what the wretches mean but in jest; but the fervour

with which he renewed (as he called it) his declaration, admitted not of fooling; and yet his volubility might have made questionable the sincerity of his declarations. As therefore I could not think of encouraging his addresses, I thought it best to answer him with openness and unreserve.

(I, xvii; I, 83)

Pretended disbelief, or "trifling," would be in order only if Harriet were planning to encourage Sir Hargrave. The exchanges of compliments that form the surface of polite conversation in Richardson's novels and which are, above all, required in the encounters of men and women, are an extremely complex social form, whose complexity derives from the conflicting motives it can accommodate. Sincerity, insincerity, perceptiveness, consideration, deviousness, vanity, hypocrisy, vulgarity, delicacy, manipulateness--all these may be contained within and revealed below the smooth surface of the forms of polite admiration. Thus these forms seem to be idea for "serious" comedy, the comedy of manners which reveals character.

Richardson does extract from the forms some comedy of this sort, as when the pedant Walden tries to overawe Harriet with his learning:

And pray, Miss Byron--I am afraid of all smatterers in learning. Those who know a little--and ladies cannot know to the bottom--They have not the happiness of an University education--

Nor is every man at the University, I presume, Sir, a Mr. Walden.

He took it for a compliment--Why as to that Madam--bowing--But this is a misfortune to ladies, not a fault in them.

(I, xii; I, 50)

More effective comedy over compliments occurs earlier, however, when Sir Hargrave is introduced:

for he forgets not to pay his respects to himself at every glass; yet does he with a seeming consciousness, as if he would hide a vanity too apparent to be concealed; breaking from it, if he finds himself observed, with an half-careless, yet seemingly dissatisfied air, pretending to have discover'd something amiss in himself. This seldom fails to bring him a compliment: Of which he shows himself very sensible, by affectedly disclaiming the merit of it; perhaps with this speech, bowing, with his spread hand on his breast, waving his head to and fro--By my Soul, Madam (or Sir) you do me too much honour.

Such a man is Sir Hargrave Pollexfen. He placed himself next to the country girl; and laid himself out in fine speeches to her, running on in such a manner, that I had not for some time an opportunity to convince him that I had been in company of gay people before. He would have it that I was a perfect beauty, and he supposed me very young--Very silly of course: And gave himself such airs, as if he were sure of my admiration.

I viewed him steadily several times; and my eye once falling under his, as I was looking at him, I dare say, he at that moment pity'd the poor fond heart, which he supposed was in tumults about him; when, at the very time I was considering, whether, if I were obliged to have the one or the other, as a punishment for some great fault I had committed, my choice would fall on Mr. Singleton, or on him. (I, xi; I, 45-46)

Harriet's observations and attitudes must have delighted Austen. In Emma, the heroine's attitude toward Mr. Elton similarly combines close observation with ironic reflection. When Mr. Elton praises Emma's drawing, her "'inimitable figure-pieces,'" Emma's thoughts indicate her own amused detachment but her response feeds his vanity, as Harriet Byron's does Sir Hargrave's:

Yes, good man!--thought Emma--but what has all that to do with taking likenesses? You know nothing of drawing. Don't pretend to be in raptures about mine. Keep your raptures for Harriet's face. "Well, if you give me such kind encouragement, Mr. Elton, I believe I shall try what I can do." (43-44)

These examples show Austen's comedy to be more powerful than Richardson's even at his best, not simply because she

dramatizes it more, which is the usual explanation. She learns in Mansfield Park and Emma to make each incident express more and more comic or emotional incongruity. Emma's delusions about Mr. Elton's love for Harriet Smith, which spring from her own vanity, complicate this incident and create a combination of distance with engagement in the reader that Richardson's account of Harriet and Sir Hargrave does not demand.

The major difference between Richardson's and Austen's treatment of social forms, and particularly of "polite raillery," is that in this context at least, Richardson lacks a sense of play. He can allow Harriet's relations with Sir Hargrave to be amusing at first because Sir Hargrave is a fool, and Harriet is in no danger of being attracted to him. When he becomes the villain who has abducted Harriet, he can no longer be treated comically, and should not be; but Richardson's impulse to turn folly into villainy is characteristic. Sir Hargrave's future role in the action is predictable to anyone familiar with Richardson's work: having become the stock libertine, he pursues his unregenerate courses until he reaches a penitent deathbed. Richardson usually finds the relations between men and women either too threatening or else too easily assimilated to the conventions of melodrama for him to sustain a comic or playful tone. He is serious when he allows Sir Charles to say, "Men and Women are Devils to one another. They need no other tempter" (II,

xxxii; I, 439). Grandison begins as if Richardson can treat relations between the sexes comically, but Harriet's suitors soon become pathetic rather than comic, and her vanity, wit, and social life decline as she falls in love, so that only characters who are almost uniformly good remain, and Richardson could not allow them to be coquettes. Jane Austen is perfectly capable of exploring and rendering all the willfulness or ugliness that can lie behind flirtation, as is evident in her treatment of the relations between Julia and Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford in Mansfield Park, or in her treatment of Frank Churchill and Emma at Box Hill. She is, however, equally capable of a number of other attitudes toward flirtation, ranging from her detached ridicule of its mindless vanity in Kitty and Lydia Bennet to her playful delight in Elizabeth's having "dressed with more than usual care" for the ball at Netherfield and having "prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of [Wickham's] heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening" (PP, p. 89).

Just as Richardson's attitude toward manners in his comedy lacks, as a rule, Austen's sense of play, his inclusion of revealing gestures in manner lacks her sense of structure. Although in Grandison he declares that in "small instances . . . are the characters of the heart displayed, far more than in greater" (III, xviii; II, 108), and in his letters

that "in the minutiae lie often the unfoldings of the Story, as well as of the heart,"⁴⁰ his minutiae are essentially decorative, not structural: they create no real consequences for the plot. The "small instance" he refers to is typical. Sir Charles, having rather abruptly left his circle in the drawing-room, takes the first opportunity to return to it, in order to explain that he is not really angry with anyone. The incident is edifying, not moving, and not important to the plot. It simply shows Sir Charles's moral greatness in yet another context. Jane Austen actually invents, then, the "illustrative" or characteristic gesture in manner which is also emotionally resonant or structural or both. Mr. Knightley's asking Harriet to dance, to take the most famous example, is all three. It illustrates his character, including his complete superiority to Mr. Elton. It relieves a painfully embarrassing situation, for Harriet, Mrs. Weston, Emma, and the reader; it also permits Emma to ask Mr. Knightley to dance with her later, an incident highly charged with emotion because of Emma's unconscious love for him and his conscious love for her which he thinks unrequited. Finally, the incident has important consequences for the plot, by allowing Harriet to think herself in love with Mr. Knightley, a development vital to the climax: Emma's discovery of her love for Mr. Knightley and their subsequent engagement. Few gestures even in Austen's novels are so significant, but those less embedded in plot can also have great power, as

when in Mansfield Park Edmund Bertram gives Fanny Price a gold chain, or Sir Thomas orders her a fire although angry with her.

The sense of play and sense of structure which Jane Austen brings to her treatment of manners invests them with comic, emotional, moral, and thematic content that her predecessors cannot attain. Her finest achievements in this mode occur in the later novels, although Pride and Prejudice foreshadows some of the later mastery of small, significant incident when Elizabeth unconventionally walks cross-country to visit Jane, when Lady Catherine keeps Charlotte Collins outside by her carriage, or when Darcy is silent and thoughtful at Longbourn near the end. These incidents, although they point to Austen's later development, do not fully anticipate it. Instead, the best effects in Pride and Prejudice are achieved because Austen experiments with and masters other elements in the comedy of manners: wit and dialogue. The two are distinct, though sometimes confused. Dialogue may or may not be witty, while wit need not form part of anything deserving the name of dialogue, which implies reciprocity: at least in some sense, ideas and opinions are being exchanged among reasonably attentive speakers, not merely displayed by them.

(2) Wit and Dialogue

Whether wit appears in dialogue, so understood, or not,

an author can count on favorable responses to it and to characters responsible for it, since pleasure in well-phrased judgments or criticisms, and in perceptions or exposures of incongruity, is essentially an intellectual rather than a moral response. If wit is to be registered as anything but delightful, extremely skillful treatment is needed, like that in Mansfield Park and Emma. Once Mr. Knightley has rebuked Emma for the witty remark to Miss Bates she "could not resist" (370), a careful reader must feel shock, embarrassment, and even horror at Emma's wit. Austen's treatment makes her remark seem anything but witty, as well. In Pride and Prejudice, her demands of the reader's emotions in response to wit are less complex and less strenuous, for her interest lies primarily in a more easily handled theme. Austen exposes the imperceptiveness rather than the ugliness which pleasure in wit can produce. Nevertheless, she does demand that the reader register the inaccuracies of judgment encouraged by Elizabeth's wit. In her treatment of Mr. Bennet, she requires a yet more complex response.

In Chapter II, Mr. Bennet's wit displays his contempt for his wife and provokes her to expose herself before their children. Jane Austen inserts this scene as a possible check to the reader's simple delight in Elizabeth's wit even before that delight can occur, for Elizabeth says nothing remarkable until Chapter IV. Although Chapter II is composed almost entirely of speeches, they do not constitute dialogue

in the sense previously defined. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet talk at cross-purposes. Mrs. Bennet is wholly oblivious to her husband's mockery, but neither her idiocy nor her blindness can excuse him. Mr. Bennet's wit seldom appears in dialogue whatever his company, in fact, for his ironic detachment usually precludes it. Two typical examples suffice. At the Netherfield ball he puts a stop to Mary's indifferent singing with an isolated remark, "'That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit'" (101). When Elizabeth tries to persuade him to prevent Lydia's going to Brighton, he replies, "'Lydia will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances'" (230). This remark is as irresponsible as it is amusing. It is also firmly attached to the plot, for in Brighton Lydia does expose herself: she elopes with Wickham, an action that brings about the denouement. The rest of the scene between Elizabeth and her father counterpoints her earnestness with his irresponsibility. Although in speaking to Elizabeth Mr. Bennet can be serious, even affectionate, his detachment and withdrawal usually operate even then. His only "dialogue" occurs at the end, when he appeals to Elizabeth to reconsider her engagement. Moved as he is in the scene, he quickly resumes his ironic

stance once assured that Elizabeth loves Darcy.

Wit is, fortunately, more a part of dialogue in Pride and Prejudice than separable from it. Nothing could be more tedious, however, than dialogue (or narrative for that matter) composed entirely of epigrams, as some of George Meredith's novels too frequently testify. Although Austen herself refers to the "epigrammatism of the general style,"⁴¹ she has taken care that most of the wit be significant and resonant beyond whatever immediate effect it creates. Even if the effect of wit like Mr. Bennet's is primarily immediate, then, Austen does give it thematic usefulness. And the wit which she embeds in dialogue is at least as immediately delightful as Mr. Bennet's and often has far more complex uses in controlling the reader's response to the characters.

The popular judgment that dialogue is the great achievement of Pride and Prejudice is certainly correct, although admiration is usually confined to its wit and its success in revealing character. Besides its entertaining and dramatic qualities, however, the witty dialogue among groups of characters in Pride and Prejudice gives fuller expression to feeling, perception, and judgment, and consequently to the themes, than the dialogue of Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey permits or intends. Without relinquishing earlier techniques of dialogue, Austen experiments with a number of new ones which allow increased expressiveness and

which demand increasingly complex responses from readers. As a result, dialogue can be seen in various forms throughout Pride and Prejudice. These forms shade into one another and it is not important to insist on them; it is important to see Austen in the process of discovering and developing techniques of dialogue which the later novels perfect. In Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion, the characters' talk is so much more carefully orchestrated and highly organized than in Pride and Prejudice that it must be distinguished by a more suggestive and wider term than dialogue: conversation. The conversations in the later novels are created by techniques fully evident in the dialogues of Pride and Prejudice but used with greater selectivity, density, and economy, and thus with greater power.

A form of dialogue visible in Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility but eliminated later is a legacy from the eighteenth-century novel and supplies "social comedy" narrowly defined. A number of speakers expose their characteristic faults or foibles by their various responses to a particular event or topic. This form of dialogue is very common in Pride and Prejudice. Chapter V, containing the five-way debate on pride is a typical example, once more. Different views of Darcy's pride are aired and the contrasts among them are highly amusing. Mrs. Bennet is vulgar ("'every body says that he is ate up with pride'"), Jane is candid ("'is not there a little mistake? . . . I certainly

saw Mr. Darcy speaking to [Mrs. Long]'"), Charlotte is worldly ("he has a right to be proud"), Elizabeth ironic ("I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine"), and Mary moralizing ("I am convinced that [pride] is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary'") (19-20).

Some critics cite scenes like these as evidence that Austen adopts a kind of relativism: "The meaning of any statement or action, such a method suggests, is not single, but multiple in ratio to the number of minds perceiving it."⁴² But "relativistic impressionism"⁴³ is hardly Austen's aim. For her, and for the eighteenth century in general, human motives are fathomable, however complex; human judgments are corrigible, however prone to error; and human misconduct can be understood as folly and vice, not as their modern counterparts, neurosis and a secularized notion of original sin. Thus, Jane Austen inherits a comic tradition which assumes that a complete, instructive, and morally useful picture of society can be obtained by bringing together characters who exhibit manners, follies, and affectations carefully chosen to contrast with each other as much as possible. The plays of Congreve and the novels of Fielding and Burney supply social comedy or the comedy of manners in this narrow sense. The form has undeniable virtues. It

allows fools like Mrs. Bennet to expose their folly with wonderful economy, while wits like Elizabeth shine by comparison. It can even be used if the follies of rational characters are to be displayed, as in Sense and Sensibility when Marianne's amusing notion that Colonel Brandon at thirty-five is too old and infirm to love is contrasted with the more accurate views of Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor (SS, pp. 37-38). But the broad, glaring contrasts essential to this form of dialogue disqualify it for the finer discriminations among feelings, perceptions, and judgments which are Austen's major interest and which the new techniques of Pride and Prejudice accommodate.

These new techniques may be roughly divided into two classes according to the effects they produce on the reader. First, effects may be immediate, and will depend on what the reader knows that the characters do not. Or effects may be delayed, and will depend on what the reader either can know but for various reasons does not realize (e.g., that Wickham's account of Darcy is specious), or what he simply cannot know until a later point in the novel or until a second reading.⁴⁴ Good examples of this last class are the linear ironies Austen contrives in Pride and Prejudice which do not stem directly from Elizabeth's misunderstanding of Darcy and Wickham: for example, Elizabeth's shock at Charlotte's engagement set against Jane's later shock at Elizabeth's. The difference between this sort of linear irony and earlier

structural ironies in Austen's work is interesting. The discussion of Colonel Brandon's "infirmity" in Sense and Sensibility does create structural irony, for Marianne, having thought that Colonel Brandon, "'if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have long outlived every sensation of the kind'" (37), marries him at last, although he is a man "whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married,--and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat" (378). In this instance, irony produces a comic effect independent of the novel's thematic concern with distinguishing sensitive, considerate behavior from insensitivity and self-indulgence. In Pride and Prejudice, however, ironies of structure recur and are intimately connected with the theme, pride of judgment. That is, linear irony in the dialogue and structure of Pride and Prejudice humiliates pride of judgment, thereby directly serving the theme.

Austen's ability to make dialogue serve her themes is not confined to the delayed effects supplied by linear irony or by such tours de force as Wickham's first conversations with Elizabeth. Most of the dialogue in Pride and Prejudice creates immediate effects, wither those already discussed (comic effects typical of eighteenth-century social comedy of contrasts), or more complex effects which depend on what the reader knows that the characters do not. These complex effects are both emotional and comic. They increase in power

the more the reader "knows"--that is, the more attention he pays--and are Jane Austen's signature and her triumph. That is, she finds techniques which allow dialogue to convey the emotional and comic incongruities which exist among small groups of characters, but these techniques make enormous demands on a reader. He has every incentive to read closely, for the more he is aware of the characters' motives, reactions, and misconceptions, the funnier the comedy. And the perfect lucidity with which unstated emotions and judgments display themselves to an attentive reader gives him that illusion of engagement with life which great art always produces, paradoxically enough, by being clear, highly organized, and complex where life is opaque and incoherent. Pride and Prejudice is a great work insofar as its brilliant lucidity transcends the complexity of life in this sense. But it is a puzzling and even flawed work, if compared to Austen's later novels, insofar as its lucidity can also be excessive and glaring, violating life. When Austen writes mere social comedy, like that of Chapter V, character necessarily is simplified, for the comic effect depends on broad contrasts. Characters merely personify different manners and attitudes: Elizabeth is ironic, Jane candid, Charlotte worldly, and so on. Such comedy is too lucid. When Austen writes her own higher comedy in Pride and Prejudice, she succeeds in permitting characters to expose, beneath the surface restraints of polite, clever talk, their unstated and incongruous (or

clashing) motives, judgments, and feelings. The range of comic and emotional incongruity which Austen learns to make her dialogue convey and her readers perceive in Pride and Prejudice is nicely illustrated on the one hand by the early scenes at Netherfield and on the other by Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth.

The dialogues at Netherfield reveal incongruities in manners, motives, and judgments which the reader registers as largely comic, although discrepancies and incongruities in feeling inevitably accompany them. This form of dialogue, in other words, never permits purely comic incongruity; emotional incongruity always complicates the comedy. Sometimes, indeed, emotional incongruity is the source of comedy: the discrepancy between Miss Bingley's interest in Darcy and his perfect indifference to her is wholly comic, for instance, as is Miss Bingley's jealousy of Elizabeth. The discrepancy between Darcy's interest in Elizabeth and her dislike is, however, more complex in its effects. When Darcy and Elizabeth identify each other's faults of character, the scene is principally comic, for each complacently misunderstands the other's meaning and motives, and the reader knows more than either can. Such comedy is central to the themes and plot of the novel, for Darcy's fault is "'a propensity to hate every body'" and Elizabeth's "'wilfully to misunderstand them'" (58). Yet the scene has undercurrents of sexual antagonism and attraction not entirely

contained by the comedy of misjudgment enacted on the surface or by the linear irony which allows Elizabeth's and Darcy's judgments of each other to be felt again and again throughout the novel.

A more readily analyzed scene in which comic incongruity is complicated and amplified by emotional incongruity occurs earlier, at the start of Chapter X. The scene makes demands on a reader's judgment, feeling, and attention that no scene in the earlier novels begins to demand. Dialogue is both more expressive in this scene than anywhere in Sense and Sensibility or Northanger Abbey, and funnier too. In other words, Jane Austen has so mastered dialogue that its emotional, thematic, and comic content is much greater in Pride and Prejudice as a whole than in any preceding work; its demands on the reader and its rewards are greater in proportion as well. This form of dialogue, the source of what may as well be called Austen's high comedy, is perfectly illustrated by the scene which takes up the first half of Chapter X. The dialogue opens comically, develops emotional undertones and thematic implications through a variety of new techniques which ask much of the reader's attention, and ends with a higher, more complex comedy than anything promised by its beginning.

Austen prefaces the dialogue in this scene by noting that Darcy is writing to his sister, Miss Bingley is praising his efforts, and Elizabeth is "sufficiently amused" by their

"curious dialogue, . . . exactly in unison with her opinion of each" (47). The reader should allow this observation to guide his understanding of the entire scene. He should notice that nothing Darcy says shakes Elizabeth's opinion of his pride, conceit, and ill-temper. The dialogue is so skillfully contrived, however, that while a prejudiced mind, like Elizabeth's, can see these qualities in Darcy's remarks, an open mind will not. When Darcy replies to Miss Bingley's inane question, "'do you always write such charming long letters,'" with "'They are generally long; but whether always charming is not for me to determine,'" a reader can take its politely repelling irony as evidence that Darcy, neither seeking nor liking Miss Bingley's flattery, puts up with it and her remarkably well.⁴⁵ The reader, of course, is better able than Elizabeth to interpret Darcy's behavior correctly, having information she has not: that Darcy is attracted to Elizabeth and is as well-acquainted with Miss Bingley's jealousy as with her designs on him. These emotions have been amply demonstrated by Darcy's earlier pointed (but still polite) rebuke to Miss Bingley's catty remarks about Elizabeth: "'there is meanness in all the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable'" (40). Ambiguity is not entirely dispelled by such speeches, of course. A reader can take Darcy's remarks here and in Chapter X as Elizabeth would: evidence of ill-mannered conceit. If so,

the reader's appreciation of the finer comedy in these scenes is simply delayed, and the immediate effect for him is purely comic. He is, then, like Elizabeth, "sufficiently amused" by the "curious dialogue." But the immediate effect ought to be more complex. The reader should be able to see Darcy as politely, forbearingly ironic in his reception of Miss Bingley's officious compliments and should be aware that Elizabeth is viewing the same behavior as evidence of his rudeness and his pride. Thus, the reader is asked to respond at several levels: to the comic incongruity at the surface between Miss Bingley's attempts to captivate and Darcy's indifference; to a comic incongruity below the surface between Elizabeth's prejudiced, complacent, but tacit misjudgment of Darcy's behavior and the reader's own better knowledge; and to the emotional incongruity between Darcy's growing attraction to Elizabeth and her antagonism, an incongruity scarcely felt at this point in the scene but manifest later.⁴⁶

Once again, if the reader fails to be conscious of any of these incongruities, then their effect is simply delayed rather than immediate: they are felt at last as linear ironies in the novel's comic attack on pride of judgment. The unconscious reader is but the more closely implicated by the linear irony which in the end humiliates the pride and certainty of judgment Elizabeth displays in this scene. At the close of Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth is able to reinterpret Darcy's behavior, explicitly recognizing what

she would not see earlier, although she could have seen it and the reader should. She tells Darcy, "'You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone'" (380). Linear irony allows Austen to create comedy in which nothing is lost: each effect, if not immediately felt, will be felt later, and will in either case serve the theme.

As the scene in Chapter X progresses, its demands on the reader only increase. Miss Bingley's flattery peaks: "'a person who can write a long letter, with ease, cannot write ill'" (48). Bingley is moved to interrupt with the first of several jokes he makes in this scene at Darcy's expense: "'That will not do for a compliment to Darcy . . . because he does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables.--Do not you, Darcy?'" A dramatization of Bingley's and Darcy's friendship follows, which the reader ought to register, and which Elizabeth overlooks. The affectionate exchange between Bingley and Darcy could modify Elizabeth's earlier judgment that Darcy "was only the man who made himself agreeable no where" (23), but does not. The reader must register her obliviousness while he takes in the two men's friendly, bantering discussion of Bingley's character, to which Elizabeth contributes twice. This discussion begins with a casual reference to essential differences between Bingley and Darcy. Darcy remarks that his style of writing is "'very different'" from Bingley's.

Miss Bingley cites her brother's careless and blotted letters, and he declares, "'My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them--by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents'" (48). Elizabeth takes the opportunity to praise Bingley for his humility, a quality she believes that Darcy conspicuously lacks. The reader should observe that all Elizabeth's speeches in this scene show her to be preoccupied with Darcy's character and with a desire to goad him. Darcy will not let her comment pass, observing that the "'appearance of humility . . . is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast.'" This Johnsonian distinction⁴⁷ amuses Bingley: "'And which of the two do you call my little recent piece of modesty?'" Darcy's reply analyzes Bingley's character in a friendly, intimate, but also formal style:

"you are really proud of your defects in writing. . . . When you told Mrs. Bennet this morning that if you ever resolved on quitting Netherfield you should be gone in five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of panegyric, of compliment to yourself--and yet what is there so very laudable in a precipitance which must leave very necessary business undone, and can be of no real advantage to yourself or any one else?" (49)

Two new techniques of dialogue become apparent here. Jane Austen allows her characters to refer to earlier conversations. And she allows the characters to debate as well as dramatize the central issue: judgment of character, in this case Bingley's. The effects of these techniques are best understood, however, in relation to the entire scene, whose tensions increase enormously from this point.

Bingley's reply to Darcy's analysis of his character is amused and friendly in tone, but after an initial laugh over remembering "'at night all the foolish things that were said in the morning,'" becomes rather self-justifying. He would, he says, leave Netherfield as quickly as he had claimed, and so "'did not assume the character of needless precipitance merely to shew off before the ladies'" (49). Darcy, as a friend will, pursues his advantage: he is "'by no means convinced'" that Bingley would leave so readily:

"if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, 'Bingley, you had better stay till next week,' you would probably do it, you would probably not go--and, at another word, might stay a month." (49)

At this point, the witty exchange between Darcy and Bingley has acquired a slight edge audible to an attentive reader, but the tone remains good-humored. Although Darcy claims to know Bingley better than he does himself, in another sense both men understand each other perfectly. The comedy of this section of the scene arises from the discrepancy between their intimacy and Elizabeth's obliviousness to it. She sees Bingley's sweetness without his amusement at Darcy, and Darcy's arrogance without his affection for Bingley. She believes herself to see more than either, however, as her next remark shows. She tells Darcy, "'You have only proved by this . . . that Mr. Bingley did not do justice to his own disposition. You have shewn him off now much more than he did himself'" (49). Once again, she is eager to praise Bingley for a quality she thinks lacking in Darcy,

but more important, she gives a new and complex turn to the dialogue by addressing Darcy directly and rather accusingly. From this point, Darcy's character is openly discussed by Darcy and Elizabeth, although ostensibly Bingley's character is still the principal subject. In this way, comic incongruity gives way to emotional incongruity; the comedy of judgment openly and tacitly enacted by the characters becomes more highly charged and more complex; and the reader must register these judgments while adjusting his own.

Bingley assists the shift in subject to Darcy's character. His reply to Elizabeth begins genially and amusingly enough with, "'I am exceedingly gratified . . . by your converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn which that gentleman did by no means intend.'" Sweet-tempered as he certainly is, Bingley now displays some of the strain which always attends being oneself a topic of conversation by inaccurately claiming that Darcy "'would certainly think the better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat denial, and ride off as fast as I could.'" Elizabeth's reply perversely but wittily places the worst possible construction on this joke. "'Would Mr. Darcy then consider the rashness of your original intention as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?'" Bingley refers her to Darcy for an answer, and Darcy rightly observes that "'You expect me to account for opinions which you chuse to call mine, but

which I have never acknowledged'" (50). Whatever the reader's delight in Elizabeth's wit, he ought to recognize her perverseness and her injustice, both of which increase as her debate with Darcy continues; Darcy's increasing (and pardonable) irritation is evident, of course, both to the reader and to all the characters present.

Elizabeth at first refuses to argue the question Darcy raises. She willfully prefers to make pointed remarks about Darcy's character: "'To yield readily--easily--to the persuasion of a friend is no merit with you.'" Darcy ignores her attack and her change of subject. He attempts to continue the discussion as if it were rational and candid: "'To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either.'" Elizabeth's reply constitutes her strongest criticism of Darcy in this scene and, in a manner typical of Jane Austen's highest comedy, reflects upon her rather than him: "'You appear to me, Mr. Darcy, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection.'" Elizabeth herself has been allowing nothing for the friendship and affection of Bingley and Darcy in her response to their dialogue. Instead, every speech of both has been even more "exactly in unison with her opinion of each" than were the initial exchanges between Miss Bingley and Darcy. At this point the reader must dissociate himself from Elizabeth's prejudice. Her misreading of the dialogue is willful, and her attacks on Darcy are gratuitous. She is not the judge

she thinks herself. The reader does not feel these incongruities as comic ones, however. The emotional undertones of the dialogue have become too serious, sharp, and powerful. Dialogue registers emotional incongruity in preference to comic incongruity whenever the more or less intense emotional undercurrents which often lie beneath the surface of polite, witty talk are felt, to an extent by the characters themselves, and to a greater degree by the reader.⁴⁸ The increasingly stilted dialogue testifies that Elizabeth and Darcy sense these emotional tensions. Their argument has become a conflict of wills, judgments, and feelings; Bingley registers the reader's discomfort as well as his own when he interrupts them.

It is worth mentioning here that the apparent subject of Elizabeth's and Darcy's dispute--persuadableness in general and Bingley's in particular--is not a central issue in the novel but does become important later in the action, when Bingley is persuaded by Darcy that Jane does not love him and that he should leave Netherfield. Linear irony controls every speech in this scene, but its effects on this dispute are particularly complicated. Darcy will offer Bingley more than "'one argument in favour of [the] propriety'" (50) of staying away from Netherfield and forgetting Jane, as his letter to Elizabeth explains, but only the "'assurance . . . of your sister's indifference'" (Hardly an argument) convinces Bingley that he should remain in London (199). The humility in Bingley

which Elizabeth praises in Chapter X becomes his "'great natural modesty, with a stronger dependence on [Darcy's] judgment than on his own,'" and allows him to be too easily persuaded (199). Finally, since examples multiply, Elizabeth claims very complacently in Chapter X that she is "'not particularly speaking of such a case as you have supposed about Mr. Bingley. We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs, before we discuss the discretion of his behaviour thereupon'" (50). When the circumstance of Bingley's leaving Netherfield does occur, however, it is no matter for rational argument. Darcy's interference ruins Jane's happiness, and Elizabeth's angry reference to it when Darcy proposes precludes any discussion of Bingley's discretion.

Bingley's interruption of Elizabeth's exchange with Darcy brings the discussion of persuadableness to a close, for the moment. His discomfort at their quarrel also elicits from him an even more personal remark about Darcy than any of those Elizabeth has been guilty of: "'I declare I do not know a more awful object than Darcy, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at his own house especially, and of a Sunday evening when he has nothing to do'" (50-51). Elizabeth is considerate enough to check a laugh at this reflection on Darcy because she "thought she could perceive that he was rather offended," despite his smile. The reader is well aware that Darcy's offense is

more likely to have proceeded from Elizabeth's remarks than from Bingley's. The dialogue then closes quietly. Darcy acknowledges Bingley's discomfort and his strategy by suggesting that Bingley wishes to "silence" the argument. Bingley agrees, still under the impression that the argument is about him ("If you and Miss Bennet will defer [your dispute] till I am out of the room, I shall be very thankful; and then you may say whatever you like of me"). Elizabeth is quite ready to desist. And Darcy resumes his letter, closing the scene with perfect symmetry.

Extended analysis inevitably is heavy-handed and makes this scene appear more solemn than it is in fact. Austen's touch is light and sure, allowing comic incongruity to modulate brilliantly into a complex clash of wills, judgments, and feelings, closing in symmetry but not harmony, each character certain he understands what has passed and confirmed in his original opinions of the others despite all counter-evidence offered within this "curious dialogue." The counter-evidence is twofold: Elizabeth, Bingley, and Darcy reveal their own characters while they discuss Bingley's character, Darcy's, and character in general. That is, the speakers articulate, debate, and dramatize the central issue of Pride and Prejudice: judging and estimating character. Discussion of character becomes a common topic in Pride and Prejudice, and frequently the character is present, as in this instance, to bear a part in the debate.

When Bingley's character is a subject of debate between Bingley, Darcy, and Elizabeth in Chapter X, the characters and the relations of all three are being dramatized. At the same time, all three observe the drama as well as participate in it, so that they are judging and responding to each other's characters, just as the reader must. As a result, the reader is asked to be aware of a threefold process of judgment when he reads the dialogue. On the surface the characters are openly judging Bingley's character. Tacitly, they are judging each other. And finally, the reader is judging them. As one critic says of Emma, "the process of reading runs parallel to the life read about."⁴⁹ This process is only intensified when Darcy and Elizabeth discuss Darcy's character, pretending that Bingley's character is their subject. The reader must also register all the other elements in the dialogue which have been mentioned: play of wit; talk on other important issues (character in general, persuadableness, humility, pride); and comic and emotional incongruity acted out on qualities other than judgment (Miss Bingley's interest in Darcy, Darcy's and Bingley's friendship, Elizabeth's hostility to it). The technique of linear irony, variously implemented, requires further that the reader recall and re-estimate the scene at various points later in the novel. These requirements alone are quite sufficiently exacting. To add to them the complex awareness of three processes of judgment

required of the reader by Austen's discovery that the characters can talk about judgment while enacting it is to make the demands of dialogue in this scene seem almost superhuman.

The differences between a scene like this one and a scene in which the topic of conversation is less charged, however thematic it may be, cannot be overemphasized. Once more, the debate on pride in Chapter V is apposite. Its topic is thematic but is used simply: to provide comedy and to display contrasts among the characters. In Pride and Prejudice, then, Jane Austen can be seen in the process of discovering the technique of dialogue she exploits so successfully afterward, the technique of choosing topics for conversation which do not simply reveal differences among characters but which voice, dramatize, and complicate the problems of judgment and sympathy which are the novels' themes. This technique creates comic and emotional effects which are cumulative. Linear irony does permit these effects to be felt cumulatively in Pride and Prejudice, but in Emma and Mansfield Park, every speech and incident reflects back and forth upon every other. A grid or web is created, not merely a line.

Another related and new technique in this scene has been already mentioned: Austen's discovery that earlier discussions can be referred to and built upon in subsequent dialogues. This is a deceptively simple and obvious technique

which only a great artist like Austen can use to advantage. The technique gives dialogue greater significance as well as verisimilitude. Characters do refer to previous conversations in the earlier novels, certainly, but their references serve different purposes. When Colonel Brandon exposes Willoughby's character to Elinor in Sense and Sensibility, he begins by asking her to recall an earlier conversation "'in which I alluded to a lady I had once known, as resembling, in some measure, your sister Marianne'" (205). This lady was the near relation whom he had loved and lost, and whose illegitimate child, Eliza Williams, had been seduced by Willoughby. But Colonel Brandon's early allusion to the lady is simply meant to prepare the reader for the later revelation. Jane Austen prescribes just such preparation in advice to a niece who is writing a novel: "St. Julian's History was quite a surprise to me; You had not very long known it yourself I suspect," she observes, suggesting, "Had not you better give some hint of St. Julian's early history in the beginning of the story?"⁵⁰ In Pride and Prejudice, references to earlier conversations serve the themes, not just the plot, and help to create the two significant new effects the novel supplies: a sense of interconnection between the dialogues which grants them a cumulative effect; and a sense that what is said by the characters is as important as what they do or experience.

A number of critics have, like Norman Page, noted that

Pride and Prejudice is "full of conversations and of references to conversation" and is, "to an appreciable extent, not so much about what is done as about what is said."⁵¹ Others have carried these observations further, noting that the conversations bear a close relation to the novel's structure and themes. But these critics tend to focus on the linear irony which the dialogues create, or on analysis of the characters' styles of speech, whenever they rightly claim, as Brown does, that Austen "does not restrict the satiric implications of a given exchange to its immediate context."⁵² Certainly linear irony and the verbal styles of characters in the dialogues of Pride and Prejudice repay analysis, but I would contend that the most important technical discoveries for increasing the weight and the significance of dialogue in this novel are even more simple and direct. Austen permits her characters to articulate and discuss the novel's central themes, to refer to previous discussions, and to analyze what is happening at the moment (as when Darcy tells Bingley, "'I see your design. . . . You dislike an argument, and want to silence this'" [51])). These last two techniques increase verisimilitude while all three heighten the emotional content of dialogue. One of Austen's most significant discoveries in Pride and Prejudice is just this: that without violating decorum, surprisingly direct statements, either about emotions, or revealing them, can be made; that these statements produce a much higher emotional temperature than most comedy permits;

but that these powerful emotions can still be contained within a comedy of misjudgment and error. In Pride and Prejudice, then, dialogue can express comic, emotional, and judgmental incongruity simultaneously, and thus makes enormous demands on the reader.

The dialogues in the three later novels (properly, conversations) become one of Austen's most powerful devices to engage and control her readers' responses, for she becomes increasingly skillful in rendering the conscious and unconscious complexities of feeling which the clever and civilized conversation of a roomful of people will partially convey and partially conceal. She seems to have attempted such a scene in Sense and Sensibility, when Elinor and Marianne dine at Mrs. John Dashwood's London residence and meet Edward Ferrars' mother. Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. John Dashwood slight Elinor and flatter Lucy Steele, ignorant of Lucy's engagement to Edward and fearing that Edward and Elinor are lovers. Though all the characters in the scene are completely at odds, full of misconceptions and of incompatible feelings and designs, the scene is not particularly moving or effective, for it is isolated. Emotional incongruity is best felt only as a cumulative effect. To orchestrate dialogues or conversations so that they are not isolated, so that the emotional incongruities registered within them are cumulative, is a formidable achievement, one which helps define the greatness of

Mansfield Park and Emma. Austen acquires there the capacity to organize and orchestrate the feelings and judgments of more than two characters at once, whereas in Pride and Prejudice she does not really attempt to extend this exacting treatment of dialogue beyond the encounters of Elizabeth and Darcy, beginning at Netherfield and continuing to Darcy's second proposal. In the later novels, Austen can handle a group of very different personalities, all highly developed, so as to do full justice to each. In Emma, for example, character is so embedded in and revealed through conversations like those between Mr. Knightley and Emma on women, marriage, or sense, that what they say and do constitutes a complex comedy of intimacy in conversation: again, every speech and action reflects on every other, and all effects are cumulative. "Comedy of manners" and "linear irony" are terms which cannot reach to relations so dense and so subtle. Reginald Farrar acknowledges this in his famous remark that to reread Pride and Prejudice is to repeat a pleasure, while rereadings 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 sun of its delights."⁵³

Farrar is not altogether just to Pride and Prejudice. Fresh readings should increase one's awareness of its brilliance and complexity. And Pride and Prejudice does approach Emma in density and power at the end, in the

dialogues of Elizabeth and Darcy once they are engaged. Until then, their encounters are governed by some misconception about each other, used to create comic or emotional incongruity or both. An extreme of emotional incongruity is provided by Darcy's first proposal, for example, although the dialogue does register the cross-purposes in manners, motives, and judgments which usually produce the principally comic incongruities of the drawing-room scenes at Netherfield and Rosings. The emotional content of this scene precludes comedy, however. The dialogue demands complicated, even contradictory responses in feeling and judgment from the reader. These difficult responses signal a form of dialogue which expresses emotional incongruity almost exclusively. When Darcy first proposes, then, readers must rejoice in the criticisms he receives, for he richly deserves them, yet because his love for Elizabeth also endears him, her humiliating rejection is painful. Sympathy and judgment, pain and pleasure, are evoked together and reinforce each other, producing in the reader an intensity and complexity of feeling which approaches Elizabeth's own at the end of the scene.

Once Elizabeth and Darcy are engaged, however, they are free to discuss, compare, and reinterpret everything that has happened between them--particularly the origin and progress of their love. These last exchanges constitute the final form or stage of dialogue evident in the novel and

create an entirely new effect. They provide relaxation and release of a kind equalled only at the end of Emma and touched on at the end of Persuasion. This release is an effect so peculiar to Austen's novels that calling it a "stage" of dialogue is almost an indignity: it is rather a triumph of dialogue, something even Austen cannot always accomplish, as Persuasion shows,⁵⁴ but which no other novelist begins to approach. The triumph lies in actually rendering through conversation a relationship which wholly convinces and satisfies the imagination, the mind, and the heart, that a "happy ending" (the most hackneyed of literary conventions, yet the least common in serious art) has been not merely asserted or conjured up, but actually achieved.

At the end of Pride and Prejudice, then, literary and social convention unite in a marriage which fulfills all the demands of imagination and of personality: mutual affection and intimacy. Intimacy or knowledge produces an acceptance which goes beyond judgment (and all former misjudgments) to affection. In the light of affection, even Darcy's unpreparedness to laugh at himself is an amiable blemish, sure to disappear in Elizabeth's company. In Jane Austen's work, then, the comedy of manners (including the social and literary conventions which govern it, and the dialogue and conversations which give shape to it) increasingly allows the fullest expression and development of character, for Austen's comedy is successful and expressive in direct

proportion to her mastery of convention, especially dialogue. In Pride and Prejudice, then, the final conversations of Elizabeth and Darcy ratify their intended marriage. Their marriage affirms a literary and social convention which gives to judgment and sympathy their most solid, stable, and indeed highest form--affection and intimacy--and confirms that in life and in literature conventions need not be limitations: they are a resource, not a restraint, for the human spirit.

iv. The Achievement of Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice climaxes a complicated first stage in Jane Austen's astonishingly coherent and sustained artistic development. That development is based upon Austen's highly sophisticated awareness of the reader's possible responses to fiction and upon her desire to exploit, through increasingly sophisticated techniques, the novel's possibilities for manipulating, controlling, and educating those responses, particularly sympathy and judgment. Northanger Abbey, however, concerns itself with manipulating the less difficult but parallel responses to literature, distress and suspense. In Sense and Sensibility, sympathy and judgment are elicited, controlled, and educated by the elaborate technique of contrast which informs the novel. Pride and Prejudice has even more complex designs upon its readers' sympathies and judgments. It assimilates the technique of contrast used

in Sense and Sensibility to a more highly organized structural principle, linear irony, in order to subject pride of judgment to subversive treatment. The phrase "pride of judgment" suggests the connections (explored by all Austen's succeeding novels) between the operations of critical and moral judgment and the operations of feelings like pride or like delight in wit and charm. These connections are examined in the readers of Austen's novels as much as in the characters. Samuel Richardson's understanding of pride of judgment and its recalcitrance in readers of fiction is once more apposite:

We often cheat ourselves on the Entrance into a Character, by setting it down in our minds for such or such and when it rises or sinks upon us, are hardly able to reconcile it to our first hasty Impressions. And who is it that is not fond of justifying his first impressions, in compliment to himself?⁵⁵

The process Richardson describes is precisely what Austen wishes to elicit and to correct in her readers at the same time that she elicits and corrects it in Elizabeth Bennet. The wit and dialogue of the characters in Pride and Prejudice create a comedy of manners which encourages readers to form confident first impressions of character (without dictating them) and to assent to Elizabeth's judgments (without insisting on them). Subsequently, however, the structures which contain the comedy of manners--Austen's technique of contrast and her technique of linear irony--undermine those impressions and judgments which the comedy has invited; the reader's judgment is as chastened at the end as Elizabeth's.

This subversive treatment of judgment is not cynical,

however. Although the novel relentlessly exposes the fallibility of judgment, it also insists on educating and refining it. Its success in doing so signifies that Austen has triumphantly assimilated and transcended not merely her own prior achievements in the novel but those of her predecessors, Fanny Burney and Samuel Richardson. Cecilia and Sir Charles Grandison only partially succeed as comic novels incorporating the eighteenth-century didactic aim formulated by Samuel Johnson: to teach the passions to move at the command of virtue. Pride and Prejudice realizes this aim, as far as it can be realized in a novel, by finding literary devices which allow it to succeed where Cecilia and Grandison fail. All three novels do, however, employ certain literary devices in common, particularly the comedy of manners. Cecilia and Grandison also anticipate Austen's novels in using techniques of contrast to embody their themes and in showing traces of the technique of linear irony which Pride and Prejudice perfects. Grandison shares the thematic device central to Austen's novel, an attempt to manipulate first impressions of character. But the comedy of manners in Richardson's and Burney's novels does not profit from these structural and thematic devices as Austen's does. The earlier novelists have a sense of structure but do not apply it systematically to their comedy. The sense of play and the economy of Austen's comedy is equally foreign to Richardson and Burney.

These are serious and significant differences. Yet perhaps Pride and Prejudice is more successful than Cecilia and Grandison in realizing eighteenth-century didactic aims largely because Austen is more penetrating than either Burney or Richardson in her understanding of the relations between fiction, readers, passions, and virtues. While she shares eighteenth-century views of the purpose of fiction, she does not accept any of the false assumptions or conventions these views entailed, notably that readers will helplessly imitate the actions of characters in novels. She is not persuaded that fiction can or should be exemplary. She recognizes instead that a novel is likely to produce effects in the mind only, and seldom there: mental habits are as tenacious as any, and stock responses can be confidently expected of readers in preference to any others. A novelist can combat these responses and, with difficulty, educate them, but only if they are wholly understood, anticipated, and allowed for, as they are in all of Austen's novels. In Pride and Prejudice, then, Austen intends to use eighteenth-century literary devices to an eighteenth-century end, moral and emotional didacticism: or, the educating of judgment and sympathy. Her sophisticated awareness of the reader's response to fiction, along with her artistic economy, sense of structure, and sense of play, allow her so to combine these literary devices (the comedy of manners, a technique of contrast, and linear irony) that

she succeeds brilliantly where her predecessors succeed partially or fail miserably: in delighting and instructing the reader.

The greatness of Pride and Prejudice remains, of course, undefined. If it were Austen's last novel, it would be considered a perfect work of its kind, not to be surpassed. No possibility of transcending its achievements could be imagined if Mansfield Park, Emma, and (to a lesser extent) Persuasion had not followed it. Nevertheless, Pride and Prejudice does anticipate the characteristic triumph of these greater novels, an ability to create intimacy with and absorption in their characters and their worlds. The last three novels extend and improve upon the techniques of Pride and Prejudice, whose theme and the methods embodying it dictate unremitting exposure to the characters and especially to their talk, which provides the fullest possible understanding of them. Yet any attempt to determine whether the theme suggested the possible shape and uses of the structure and the dialogue or whether on the other hand the form preceded the matter, is more than usually futile, so well do they mesh and so perfect is the effect: absolute immersion in the world created.

¹ Brewer, "Light and Bright," rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 63.

² Litz, p. 106.

³ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴ Samuel Klinger, "Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice in the Eighteenth-Century Mode," UTQ, 16 (1947); rpt. in E. Rubenstein, ed., Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Pride and Prejudice (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), p. 54.

⁵ Van Ghent, pp. 105-6.

⁶ Trilling, "Mansfield Park," rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 134.

⁷ "Light and Bright," loc. cit., pp. 62 and 63.

⁸ "Mansfield Park," loc. cit., p. 134.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Klinger, p. 54.

¹² Van Ghent, p. 105.

¹³ Litz, p. 102.

¹⁴ Letters, p. 299.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 299-300.

¹⁶ "Mansfield Park," loc. cit., p. 135.

¹⁷ W. and R. A. Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters (1913; rpt. London, 1965), p. 96.

¹⁸ R. MacKinnon, cited by Chapman in "Chronology of Pride and Prejudice," appendix, PP, pp. 400-8.

¹⁹ Letters, p. 298.

²⁰ Jane Austen and her Art, p. 163.

²¹ Tave makes the same point that Jane Bennet "can be right where Elizabeth is wrong: on the particular point for which she is pleading, a suspension of judgment on Darcy when Wickham has been destroying his character, she is right while everybody else is condemning Darcy as the worst of men" (Some Words of Jane Austen, p. 88).

²² Tave notes the parallel as well; in his estimation, it underlines the importance placed by the novel on marrying with affection (Some Words of Jane Austen, pp. 135-36).

²³ E. M. Forster makes nearly the same observation when he declares that all Austen's characters, even apparently "flat" ones, "are ready for an extended life," in answer to his own acute question, "Why do the characters in Jane Austen give us a slightly new pleasure each time they come

in, as opposed to the merely repetitive pleasure that is caused by a character in Dickens? Why do they combine so well in a conversation, and draw one another out without seeming to do so, and never perform?" (Aspects of the Novel [1927; rpt. New York, 1963], p. 75). These questions deserve fuller consideration than Forster was able to give in his lectures. My own partial answers are contained in the section "Wit and Dialogue" and in the Conclusion, but I would add here that in Pride and Prejudice, Austen's highly schematic parallels and contrasts among her minor characters make them seem known and predictable, with the result that deviations from the pattern, like Mr. Bennet's, are registered with great certainty and power.

Norman Page would add that Austen is interested in rendering the "moral excellence" of a character like Miss Bates, not in making her merely a subject of "humorous observation" as Dickens would, "and the language used necessarily reflects this purpose" (Language of Jane Austen, p. 58). Page contrasts the description of Miss Tox in Chapter I of Dombey and Son with that of Miss Bates (E, p. 21), noting the "virtually complete absence" of visualization in Austen's presentation of character, resulting in focus on "speech and action, and the analysis of their implications, rather than upon costume and scenery" (pp. 58 and 59). He later notes that "Whereas in Dickens . . . paralinguistic qualities may not only reinforce but at times contradict the spoken word,

revealing the hollowness of a verbal facade, the irony and criticism in Jane Austen's intention find expression within the actual language of the dialogue" (p. 119).

²⁴ Bits of Ivory, p. 38.

²⁵ Darrel Mansell makes a similar point when he says, "the novel comes a little closer to confirming Jane's disturbing opinion [that the Collinses can be happy together] than her sister's" (Novels of Jane Austen, p. 85).

²⁶ Jane Austen and her Art, p. 154.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁸ Selected Letters, p. 288.

²⁹ M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1957), p. 13.

³⁰ Elegant Decorums, pp. 22 and 23. Nardin's phrase, "internal moral and psychological condition," glosses over one of the most interesting questions Austen's novels present: to what extent does Austen view character in moral terms and in psychological terms? Jane Austen is often said to provide a transition between the eighteenth-century moral view of character and the nineteenth-century psychological view (cf. Middlemarch). To go beyond this useful truism is difficult. My own sense is that the traditional moral terms as Austen uses them offer a tool for the analysis and understanding of

human motives and behavior quite as satisfactory and coherent for the purposes of ordinary, daily life as are the terms of Freudian psychology. In many places the concepts overlap. Behavior we classify as neurosis Austen would deem folly, for instance, and it would be difficult to determine which of these concepts is the more useful in assisting human beings to amend or to accept their faults and themselves.

³¹ Evelina, ed. and intro. Edward A. Bloom (London, 1970), p. 30.

³² Memoirs of Doctor Burney (London, 1832), II, 156. Fanny Burney had this account of Samuel Johnson's praise of Evelina at second hand. She notes in the Memoirs that Mrs. Thrale recounted it to her at Streatham; Burney in turn relayed it to Mr. Crisp in "a long journal letter," which she "abridged" for the Memoirs (II, 156-57).

³³ Much evidence exists to show that Richardson's audience considered absolute accuracy essential in representing social conventions, and any failure in accuracy ludicrous. Elizabeth Carter congratulates her friend Catherine Talbot on having apparently made the language of Grandison more correct than that of Clarissa (Carter Letters, II, 142), but regrets that Richardson has included "the grievous old-fashioned word kinswoman" (II, 158). Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson's favorite correspondent, shows a close reading of the text and an attentiveness to flaws in usage which would not disgrace

a grammarian. She points out that portraits must be hung in the dining room, not the bedchamber, and that Sir Charles must pay his compliments to his aunt, Lady W., before he can be free to embrace his bride when they all arrive together at Grandison Hall (mentioned by Harris, "A Note on the Text," Grandison, I, xxxvi). The awkwardness of the resulting emendation is amusing: "At our alighting, Sir Charles (after paying his compliments in a most respectful manner to Lady W.) clasping me in his arms . . . " (6th ed. [1770], VII, 18); but even more, Lady Bradshaigh's attention to these details is significant.

³⁴ Letters, p. 394.

³⁵ "Appendix," Grandison, III, 469.

³⁶ S. v. "Miss Byron," in the last volume of later contemporary editions.

³⁷ This discussion closely resembles that of Kinhead-Weekes, who sees in Richardson's "novel of 'Ought'" in Grandison evidence of "the very strength of his desire to imagine beyond the normal horizon of human capacity." The novel focuses on "the behaviour which produces the expanding family of the heart . . . because of the intensity of Richardson's drive to overcome human isolation, and to lay hold of an image of people bound together by stronger ties than blood" (Dramatic Novelist, pp. 293, 290, and 291).

Kinhead-Weekes thinks that the "family of the heart" which Grandison exhibits among its characters is meant to include its readers as well. Citing Susannah Highmore's drawing of Richardson reading Grandison to his circle in the grotto at North End, Kinhead-Weekes infers: "Both the moral casuistry and the response of the heart that it awakens, bind the separate individuals into a circle, within the pages of the novel, and within the grotto where the novel is read" (p. 291). While I agree that Richardson's imagination is engaged by the "family of the heart" and that his novels seek to portray and to extend it, "moral casuistry" seems to me but one of the methods Richardson uses to achieve this end.

³⁸ Quoted by McKillop, Samuel Richardson, p. 159.

³⁹ Selected Letters, p. 231.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 289.

⁴¹ Letters, p. 300.

⁴² Duckworth, p. 117.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴⁴ Litz makes a similar distinction, in passing, between the reader's "immediate grasp of the inherent dramatic irony" in Elizabeth's and Darcy's exchange on the subject of forming proper and unprejudiced judgments of character, an exchange made while they dance at Netherfield, and the reader's later

perceptions: "a first encounter with this passage does not exhaust its ironic implications, and only in retrospect--or upon second reading--do we understand its relation to the total pattern of dramatic action" (Artistic Development, pp. 108-9).

⁴⁵ Whether or not Darcy's manners are polite is a central question for critics as well as for the characters in the novel. Nardin takes a firm stand: "Jane Austen is at pains to show her readers that [Darcy's] manners are often awkward and cold, but consistently polite" (Elegant Decorums, p. 56). Brower emphasizes Austen's success in making Darcy's manners ambiguous: every speech to Elizabeth, as a rule, "may be interpreted more or less pleasantly, depending on whether we connect it with his present or past behavior," i.e., his rude refusal to dance at Meryton ("Light and Bright," rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 66).

My own feeling is that Austen's intention is more complicated still. She intends that Darcy's manners in the first part of the novel should bear three interpretations. First, Elizabeth's: his manners are proud, unpleasant, and rude. Second, an interpretation available to a candid reader even on a first reading: his manners are correct and forbearing but haughty, particularly to those he considers beneath him. Third, Darcy's own accurate estimation of them, reached at the end: his manners, however polite and correct on the surface, have lacked genuine politeness, that

is, real consideration for others' feelings. Ideally, good manners prescribe and express feeling, considerate behavior, but Darcy's early manners are divorced from good feeling. As a result, he can be guilty of an "'unpardonable'" breach of manners when he proposes to Elizabeth (367). He describes the faults in his manners and their source thus:

"I was spoilt by my parents, who . . . allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own." (369)

To claim in this way that Austen incorporates in the text at least three views of Darcy's manners is not to contradict but to qualify the ideas of Brower or of Babb, who claims that "Jane Austen tempts us to accept her heroine's view of Darcy at every turn, though just as consistently leaving the door open to a more favorable interpretation of his behavior" (Fabric of Dialogue, p. 115).

⁴⁶ This distinction between comic and emotional incongruity in Austen's dialogue runs parallel to Lascelles' distinction between the two kinds of pleasing "incongruity" which are the "source of delight" in "narrative and dramatic comedy" (Jane Austen and her Art, p. 140). She writes, "pleasure may arise from contemplation of incongruity, in and for itself--the incongruity of Malvolio in the posture of a lover. Or it may arise from contemplation of incongruity in the assurance that its discord will be resolved--the discord of Viola's cross fortunes in love" (p. 140). Thus, "incongruity

may be so presented to the reason as to satisfy in itself, so presented to the emotions (through sympathy) as to stir a desire which can be satisfied only by resolution of its discord" (p. 141). The former sort of incongruity I have called comic, the latter sort emotional.

⁴⁷ Chapman's notes to his edition of Pride and Prejudice suggest Boswell's Life of Johnson (25 April 1778) as a source for this distinction: "'All censure of a man's self is oblique praise'" (PP, p. 392).

⁴⁸ Brower's analysis of the "union of wit and drama" in Elizabeth's and Darcy's exchanges seems like this discussion of emotional incongruity in their conversations but actually arises from a different reading. Brower thinks their speeches are ambiguous, in order to permit the reader as well as the characters to reread them later ("Light and Bright," loc. cit., p. 71). In attributing ambiguity to Darcy's gallant speeches to Elizabeth, however, he goes too far, as Austen makes Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth perfectly clear to the reader, an attraction which complicates the reader's responses to Darcy. Brower's value for the "ambiguity" of these exchanges makes his dissatisfaction with the final conversations of Elizabeth and Darcy less surprising than it otherwise would be: the purpose of these conversations is that ambiguity is dispelled, and release and intimacy effected. The conversations are extremely powerful emotionally, an aspect

of Austen's dialogue that Brower does not consider.

⁴⁹ W. J. Harvey, "The Plot of Emma," rpt. in Casebook, p. 241.

⁵⁰ Letters, p. 421.

⁵¹ Language of Jane Austen, pp. 25 and 26.

⁵² Bits of Ivory, p. 187. Brown concentrates on the "organic function" of the characters' styles of speech in connecting dialogue to structure and theme (p. 128). For example, he sees a link between Elizabeth's tendency "to lapse into sentimental jargon" in describing Bingley as "once 'violently in love' with her sister," and her misjudgments in general: her "unthinking acceptance of the trite and the superficial" which "reflects the structural pattern of the first half of the novel" (pp. 123 and 124). Litz, on the other hand, concentrates on linear irony (although not by that name) when he describes connections between dialogue, structure, and theme (pp. 108-9).

⁵³ "Jane Austen," Quarterly Review, 228 (1917), 23-24.

⁵⁴ Chapman's edition of Two Chapters of Persuasion (Oxford, 1926) includes the first draft of Volume II, Chapter XI, which became, with a few alterations, Chapter XII in the final version of the novel, the last chapter. This chapter is, then, the only one in all Austen's novels

for which we possess both a rough draft and the final version, and erasures in the last pages of this rough draft show Austen making three attempts to assert that Mrs. Smith finds Captain Wentworth perfect. Austen writes successively that his aid in recovering Mrs. Smith's property "convinced her of his being much nearer Perfection than her intercourse with the world had"; "And having done so much for her, scarcely could his wife even think him nearer perfection"; "Mrs Smith's estimate of his Perfection could be surpassed only by that Wife's" (notes to p. 38). These attempts were wholly abandoned; no assertion of perfection is to be found in the last pages of Persuasion, whereas Emma ends with a declaration of "the perfect happiness of the union" (484) and Mansfield Park with Fanny living at the parsonage and finding it "as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park, had long been" (473). That Austen wished to strike this note at the end of Persuasion and decided against it fully accords with one's sense of the novel's differences from its two very great predecessors.

⁵⁵ Selected Letters, pp. 287-88.

CONCLUSION

The best of Jane Austen's immediate predecessors and contemporaries in the novel create domestic and moralizing fiction, highly patterned and explicitly didactic, although with substantial elements of more subtle literary art. Austen's triumph in her early novels is to assimilate their achievements and to better them so that her own fiction realizes their aims: to delight and instruct. Her ability to delight is undeniable; her didactic intentions less acknowledged. In the early novels, Austen discovers themes and techniques which engage and increasingly complicate the reader's judgments and sympathies. His emotions, perceptions, and moral sense are exercised in an increasingly complete and realized world; his responses are jolted, tested, and refined. Whether or not Q. D. Leavis is right to define the "peculiar property of a good novel" as "the series of shocks it gives to the reader's preconceptions," she is wrong to claim that George Eliot "seems to have been the first novelist to be conscious of this most important function of the novel."¹ Not only Austen but Sterne and Richardson anticipate Eliot in being fully conscious of this possible effect of the novel and fully determined to exploit it. A more significant comparison between Austen and Eliot links

them also to Henry James. They share a conviction that literary experience can and should result in an enlarged, enriched, or expanded consciousness. However differently all three might define an "enriched consciousness" and however diverse their means of achieving it, they all make problems of intellectual, moral, and emotional responsiveness central issues in their novels. They all create characters difficult for readers to judge or to like, and then require complex combinations of judgment and sympathy, which readers can produce only by refining and educating their responses and consciousness.

This effect is especially characteristic of the two later novels of Jane Austen which exhibit the same relation to the early novels as these in their turn show to earlier fiction. While technique seems to become "invisible" in Mansfield Park and Emma, demands and power intensify. The difficulty is to locate the techniques which account for the intensity and depth sensed by every reader of these novels. My own impression is that Austen's management of dialogue or conversation largely accounts for the fullness and power of Mansfield Park and Emma, and for their success in educating readers' judgments and sympathies. In these novels, the responses of the characters to each other are orchestrated in conversations which combine incongruity and complexity

of feeling with the greatest possible clarity. Accordingly, an attentive reader will find that these conversations make immense demands upon his emotional, moral, and perceptual responses. Yet these complicated effects can be attributed on the whole to two very simple techniques which, taken together, improve enormously on the techniques of Pride and Prejudice: Austen carefully limits the number of topics which appear in conversation and she allows these topics to be repeated frequently. For example, the same characters (or different ones) will take up and refer to topics which have been discussed earlier. The second of these techniques is, certainly, prominent enough in Pride and Prejudice; the first, however, is not. Although the later novels use essentially the same techniques of dialogue developed in Pride and Prejudice, these techniques are used with far greater economy and power.

These claims require substantiation, however, if they are not to seem merely truisms--or, worse, a mere assertion that Mansfield Park and Emma are better novels than Pride and Prejudice. Substantiating them requires something perilously close to the unlovely activity of word-counting. Nevertheless, if the topics of conversation which occur in comparable pages from early chapters in each of the six novels are tabulated and compared, the results are surprisingly revealing, even interesting. And these results document the development in the novels' techniques

of dialogue or conversation.

In Northanger Abbey (Chs. II-VIII; pp. 18-59), very little sustained conversation occurs. Sixteen separate topics of conversation may be found in these pages, and only two repeat or extend earlier discussions; predictably, these two topics are Bath society and novels. Other topics range from journal keeping and female friendship to muslin gowns and the speed of horses. Conversation in Sense and Sensibility (Chs. IV-XI; pp. 18-58) is more sustained and homogeneous: two of the ten topics are repeats (e.g., Edward Ferrars' feelings for Elinor and hers for him; Colonel Brandon's character) and all have some relation to each other and to the novel's themes or plot (e.g., discussion of Edward's character, Willoughby's character, second attachments, "catching men," love and marriage after age twenty-seven). In Pride and Prejudice, however, dialogue expands almost explosively: Chapters VI-XI (pp. 21-58) cover twenty-eight separable topics of conversation, only seven of which can be said to involve repetition. Most of these topics are related to each other and to the themes, although many serve principally to allow characters to display themselves in Burneyan social comedy (e.g., the topics of reading, libraries, accomplished women, town and country). Some of the repeated topics directly serve the themes (Bingley's persuadableness, faults of character, manners), but others bear only indirect relations to the plot or the

themes (dancing, Elizabeth's walk to Netherfield, her fine eyes). Although the homogeneity of Sense and Sensibility is absent, Austen's art here is nonetheless greater. As discussed in Chapter IV, what the characters say on these several topics forces the reader to register various degrees of comic and emotional incongruity, at least in these scenes which gather together some of the "intricate characters" (PP, p. 42).

In Mansfield Park, Chapters II-VI (pp. 23-62), Austen's concern to make conversations serve the themes, reveal characters, and produce cumulative effects is clear. Only fourteen topics of conversation can be isolated. Four among them are repeats; most topics are discussed by three or more characters; later conversations revert to almost all the topics covered in these chapters; and later events reflect on every single one of them. For example, Fanny Price's projected move to the White house to live with Mrs. Norris, a repeated subject, is successively discussed by Lady Bertram and Fanny, by Fanny and Edmund, and by Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram; Fanny's place or position at Mansfield is, of course, a central theme. The subject of improvements and planting, another repeated topic, is widely canvassed at dinner in Chapter VI. Although other topics intervene, Mrs. Norris, Mr. Rushworth, and Maria Bertram, Lady Bertram and Dr. Grant, and Mary, Edmund and Fanny take up the subject in succession, and of course

it gains importance as the novel progresses. The justly celebrated scenes at Sotherton stem from and enormously extend the implications of this earlier conversation.

Emma, however, brings all these techniques to a climax, as one might expect. In Chapters III-VII (pp. 20-56), only ten topics of conversation occur, and five are repeats. Furthermore, because these five repetitions themselves include repeats, the actual tally is even more impressive. Robert Martin's character, station, and manners are discussed three times, Emma's influence on Harriet Smith twice, and Emma's "likeness" of Harriet three times, leaving only two other topics: Mr. Elton and his manners, and Emma, her character, looks, and possible marriage. This tabulation makes clear the novel's almost obsessive concern with assessment of character in dialogue, and makes Persuasion seem even more anomalous than usual.

In Chapters III-VI (pp. 17-52) of Persuasion, conversation is so scarce that only five topics appear, and no discussion explores character. If the next forty pages or so are examined instead, a more respectable result is obtained: in Chapters VII-X (pp. 53-92), ten subjects may be counted and, with some effort, two may be considered repeats of the discussion of marriage in Chapter VIII (e.g., the subsequent conversations on the Crofts' marriage and on the possible marriage of Captain Wentworth to one of the Musgrove girls). These conversations seldom include more than two or three

characters, and although Anne hears all of them, she hardly ever contributes anything to discussion. The departure from Emma and from Mansfield Park could scarcely be more radical. Similarly, Persuasion makes fuller use than either of these novels of soliloquies, apostrophes, and reported, perfunctory conversations, in which a character's speech is quoted but no exchange of words occurs. Examples in Chapters III-VI are Anne's reflections on the Crofts' tenancy of Kellynch ("'he, perhaps, may be walking here'" [25]), her family's comments on her uselessness, the Musgroves' brief enquiries about Bath, Mary's complaints of illness and complaints about servants, comments on Anne's music, on the removal of the Crofts to Kellynch, and on the Crofts' connections. The similarly-placed segments in the other novels contain very few of these failed or avoided conversations. Emma has only one (Mr. Woodhouse's polite offers of food to his guests); Mansfield Park three (Sir Thomas's exhortation to Tom, Mrs. Norris's wonderful indignation at Mrs. Grant's lavish housekeeping, and Sir Thomas's parting adjuration to Fanny); and Pride and Prejudice none. Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey have a few, but not as many as Persuasion.²

These observations merely reinforce those impressions of the novels that most readers are likely to have formed already, such as a sense of Anne Elliot's isolation and repression, or of the thinner texture of Persuasion in comparison to

Mansfield Park and Emma. And it should be noted that this tabulation of "topics" is far from exact or objective. Other readers would, doubtless, describe and count them differently, and in any case, topics of conversation in the later novels are especially fluid and hard to define. Nevertheless, this tabulation does document Austen's mastery of the powerful device of repetition. In the later novels, every recurrence of a topic, perception, or incident reflects back on and adds to the previous ones, producing a cumulative effect. In Emma particularly, subjects are treated with an almost musical sense of structure, recurring with much the same increase in tension and power as they do in a Bach fugue.

A tabulation of topics in the novels also hints at other differences in techniques of dialogue, among them the higher and more direct emotional content of dialogue in Mansfield Park and Emma. These differences may be examined lightly, but in some detail nonetheless, by comparing the demands and effects on an attentive reader of a very brief passage from each of the later novels, demands and effects which in the end serve Austen's didactic purposes. The passages of dialogue will be taken from the sections already tabulated, so as to assure relatively manageable content: for if every effect in the last three novels is cumulative, earlier scenes are necessarily much simpler than later ones. The selections will bear on a topic common to all the novels: judgment of character. This topic is central also to the

scene between Elizabeth Bennet, Darcy, and Bingley discussed earlier at such length. To focus in this way on the demands and effects of a few brief passages should permit a sufficiently close approach to the particular achievements of dialogue in the later novels.

In Chapter III of Mansfield Park, Fanny Price is fifteen and is threatened with removal from Mansfield to live with her aunt Mrs. Norris. In a brief scene, she tells her cousin Edmund Bertram of "her distress," and he attempts to reconcile her to the move, as she knows he will. The exchange quoted below typifies the quality of this scene well enough, although any selection inevitably does violence to the integrity of the whole. Edmund has just told Fanny that she will be important to her aunt, and as a result Fanny's character becomes the subject between them:

"I can never be important to any one."

"What is to prevent you?"

"Every thing--my situation--my foolishness and awkwardness."

"As to your foolishness and awkwardness, my dear Fanny, believe me, you never have a shadow of either, but in using the words so improperly. There is no reason in the world why you should not be important where you are known. You have good sense, and a sweet temper, and I am sure you have a grateful heart, that could never receive kindness without wishing to return it. I do not know any better qualifications for a friend and companion."

"You are too kind," said Fanny, colouring at such praise; "how shall I ever thank you as I ought, for thinking so well of me? Oh! cousin, if I am to go away, I shall remember your goodness, to the last moment of my life."

"Why, indeed, Fanny, I should hope to be remembered at such a distance as the White house. You speak as if you were going two hundred miles off, instead of only across the park." (26)

Even so brief a passage makes extensive demands on a reader's perceptions and feeling, that is, his judgment and sympathy. Of the two, judgment is easier: the demands made upon it are rather less stringent. Edmund is evaluating Fanny's character, her strengths and limits, as part of another question requiring judgment: will it be to Fanny's advantage to live with Mrs. Norris? The reader is asked, therefore, to judge how far Edmund's estimation first of her character and second of the advantages for her of living under Mrs. Norris's care may be correct. Judgment, then, is at issue between Fanny and Edmund and between them and the reader as well. And, as so often in Mansfield Park, judgment is confounded. The second of these issues remains undecided and unresolved in conversation (Fanny is not really convinced by Edmund), although not in action, for of course "Mrs. Norris had not the smallest intention of taking her" (28).

Linear irony, the technique used in Pride and Prejudice to confound the reader's judgment, is not at work here, for even on a first reading the reader is likely to anticipate this outcome. Mrs. Norris's determination to do nothing for Fanny has been firmly established, and Edmund's willingness to credit the reverse despite his professed knowledge of her character ("I am glad her love of money does not interfere" [26]), seems intended to cast doubt on his judgment. Another technique used in Pride and

Prejudice, parallels and contrasts among characters and incidents, is more visible: this scene is meant to be weighed against the other scenes in which Fanny's removal is discussed if the reader is to estimate Fanny's character and her position accurately. Lady Bertram's indifference to Fanny's leaving--except in the matter of tacking on her patterns (25)--gives weight to Fanny's bleak statement that she "'can never be important to any one,'" even though in a few years Fanny will be important enough to her aunt that Lady Bertram is "'sure I shall miss her very much'" when she goes to Portsmouth (371). Mrs. Norris's response to the White house plan ("'Fanny live with me! the last thing in the world for me to think of, or for any body to wish that really knows us both'" [28]), while motivated by selfishness, does seem a truer judgment on the eligibility of the scheme than Edmund's. More important, however, are the parallels to this scene which reverberate throughout the novel. Fanny's "importance" or position at Mansfield is a central theme, dwelt on in the two preceding chapters and prominent afterward, reaching a kind of climax of horror when Mrs. Norris rebukes her for refusing to act ("'I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her--very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is'" [147]), and a climax of squalor when Fanny is exiled to Portsmouth. If Fanny's character is to be understood by the reader, and if he is

to feel for her properly, he must correctly judge her painful position at Mansfield and be conscious of all the difficulties she must contend with there. The early chapters give details of her youth in order to force the reader to estimate her position; the childhood of no other Austen heroine receives such attention.

The emotional demands made by this scene are much greater than those it makes upon our judgment. Terms like emotional incongruity or comic incongruity, which work well enough to describe the effects of dialogue in Pride and Prejudice, seem inadequate here, partly because feelings are expressed so openly. Fanny's fears, sense of inferiority, and gratitude, are expressed with almost overwhelming directness. Edmund's support and reassurance are equally direct. The reader is made to feel Fanny's distress, twice mentioned earlier in the scene, in all its strength; for her distress barely has released her feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, anxiety, and self-consciousness. The bleakness of her "'I can never be important to any one'" has all the poignance of adolescent despair, which is to say, a touch of the self-indulgent and the exaggerated as well. More shocking is a similar statement she makes later in the same scene: "'If I could suppose my aunt really to care for me, it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to any body!--Here, I know I am of none, and yet I love the place so well'" (27). It is worth noting

that Edmund does not reassure her when he cannot. He does not reply to her that she is of consequence at Mansfield, which would be a lie; he only says that she will not lose everything. She will have the park, gardens, and library to use as before, plus the same horse to ride and people to see. Edmund's reassurance is of the best kind, then, honest as well as affectionate; readers who dislike his "priggish" manner should pay more attention to his good nature and good feeling in relation to Fanny.

The reader of this brief exchange is asked, then, to register Fanny's strong sense of being unloved, unwanted, foolish, and awkward, coupled with her strong capacity for love: earlier in the scene she says, once more, "'I love this house and every thing in it'" (26), and Edmund speaks of her "'constant little heart'" (27). The scene should make the reader feel Fanny's limits and strengths, both derived from the same source: her extreme capacity for feeling. Yet at the same time, the reader is asked to remain at some distance from her. Fanny's feelings have some of the excesses of self-conscious adolescence. When they overflow in this exchange ("'Oh! cousin, if I am to go away, I shall remember your goodness, to the last moment of my life'"), Edmund's reply combines affection with distance: "'Why, indeed, Fanny, I should hope to be remembered at such a distance as the White house. You speak as if you were going two hundred miles off, instead of only across the park.'"

Austen is asking, then, that the reader fully register the strength of Fanny's emotions, while preserving a sense of their excess: in short, a poignant approach to comedy. She requires that her readers feel the same affectionate distance from Fanny that Edmund shows; but affection must predominate.

The response demanded for Fanny here and elsewhere in Mansfield Park does go against the grain of most readers' feelings, as Austen is aware. The weakly, retiring Miss de Bourgh in Pride and Prejudice testifies that Austen is perfectly conscious of how unattractive these qualities can be. To give them to a heroine along with such other equally unattractive qualities as adolescent self-consciousness, anxiety, and fearfulness, is a risk Austen deliberately runs. She intends to write a novel in which responses and judgment are highly problematic, for the characters and for the reader. The risks of this design are great. Austen succeeds in evoking such complex, contradictory, and fluctuating responses for each character that the book confuses most readers, largely because they do not think that the contradictions and the resulting anxieties are controlled or intended. Since Fanny Price is the heroine, and since she is "well principled and religious" (294), therefore good, these readers assume that their own lack of unqualified sympathy for her indicates a failure in Austen's intention or execution.

On the contrary: Fanny Price is not meant to be a complete or model woman. Once again, she is subject to many of the errors common to adolescents: she takes things too seriously, she feels things excessively, and she is too self-conscious.³ Within the novel, these errors are occasionally amusing or distancing, and are meant to be so. Fanny's lack of wit, charm, and vitality is a thematic necessity. Only if she and Edmund are largely without these qualities can the Crawfords' charm be felt sufficiently to qualify their faults, so that they become equally difficult for Edmund and Fanny, and for the reader, to judge. Austen is deliberately separating goodness and charm. The novel depends upon a struggle between these two orders of attraction, for the characters and for the reader. The charming characters, Henry and Mary Crawford, find themselves attracted against their expectation and even against their will to the good characters. Edmund is attracted to Mary against his better judgment. And even Fanny, whose love for Edmund renders the attentions of Henry and Mary painful to her, finds herself feeling more for both than she expects or desires. The reader in turn feels for and judges all four, but uneasily, for Austen makes feeling and judgment even more difficult for the reader than for the characters themselves. Austen insists at almost every point on registering the characters' conflicting feelings and their opposing judgments of themselves and of each other; and she

demands that the reader judge among them. An obsessive concern with judgment in relation to feeling is the signature of Mansfield Park and accounts for both its tensions and its power. The presence of a character good, witty, and utterly charming, like Elizabeth Bennet, would destroy the novel by dissipating its tensions, for in Mansfield Park a very delicate balance among the claims of the characters is sustained and required.

One of the best examples of this balance is visible in Austen's treatment of Henry Crawford's courtship of Fanny. The reader experiences extraordinary difficulty in responding to Henry and to Fanny both; they invite sympathy and censure alternately. Fanny's feeling that "She might have disdained him in all the dignity of angry virtue, in the grounds of Sotherton, or the theatre at Mansfield Park" (328) is shared by the reader to some extent, perhaps even exceeded, for the reader knows as Fanny cannot with what vain, selfish, "'idle designs'" (292) Henry began to pay attention to her: "I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart'" (229). Yet what emerges as or becomes his sincere love creates sympathy for him, in the reader as in Fanny:

He was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested, love; whose feelings were apparently become all that was honourable and upright, whose views of happiness were all fixed on a marriage of attachment; who was pouring out his sense of her merits, describing and describing again his affection, proving, as far as words

could prove it, and in the language, tone, and spirit of a man of talent too, that he sought her for her gentleness, and her goodness; and to complete the whole, he was now the Mr. Crawford who had procured William's promotion! (328)

As a result, Fanny and the reader "must be compassionate" (328), the reader rather more so, for Fanny's coldness and rejection create more sympathy for Crawford, and even some slight critical feeling toward her. The manner in which Austen arranges that the reader will feel critical of Fanny while sympathizing with her distress typifies the methods of Mansfield Park in general. Austen has first made clear that the mode of Fanny's rejection was

so pitying and agitated, and words intermingled with her refusal [were] so expressive of obligation and concern, that to a temper of vanity and hope like Crawford's, the truth, or at least the strength of her indifference, might well be questionable; and he was not so irrational as Fanny considered him, in the professions of persevering, assiduous, and not desponding attachment which closed the interview. (328)

Having thus excused Crawford to the reader, she allows Fanny to be harsh:

Now she was angry. Some resentment did arise at a perseverance so selfish and ungenerous. Here was again a want of delicacy and regard for others which had formerly so struck and disgusted her. Here was again a something of the same Mr. Crawford whom she had so reprobated before. How evidently was there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned. (328-29)

Thanks to Austen's preparations, the reader is unlikely to assent to this strong censure, however he may feel for Fanny's unfortunate position, being in love with one man and sought by another, and however generally correct he might otherwise think Fanny's judgment that to persist in an unwelcome courtship is ungenerous. But before the reader

has time to adjust and weigh all his complex responses to so much highly charged material (love, rejection, hope, anger, distress, indignation), all is undercut by: "So thought Fanny in good truth and sober sadness, as she sat musing over that too great indulgence and luxury of a fire upstairs" (329).

Jane Austen allows no easy responses, either of sympathy or judgment, to the characters or to the incidents in Mansfield Park. As Henry Crawford's courtship progresses, the reader's difficulties increase. At Portsmouth, he seems especially feeling and considerate. Fanny actually finds herself thinking of him seriously, as a result. She reflects that if she were able to return his affection, she would have been able, once married, to invite Susan to stay with her, for "She thought he was really good-tempered, and could fancy his entering into a plan of that sort, most pleasantly" (419). Yet Austen allows her to reflect also, "so very feeling as he now expressed himself, and really seemed, might it not be fairly supposed, that he would not much longer persevere in a suit so distressing to her?" (414). And Austen carefully points out that her perception of his improvement does not consider "in how different a circle she had been just seeing him, nor how much might be owing to contrast" (413). This complex treatment allows Henry Crawford's elopement with Maria to seem consistent and credible, even though the reader's sympathies have been so recently excited for him.

Equally credible is Austen's statement that "Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward--and a reward very voluntarily bestowed--within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary" (467).

The didactic intention of Mansfield Park depends very greatly on this complicated treatment of the characters and on these complex and difficult demands of the reader's judgments and sympathies--which have been far from exhaustively described in relation to Henry Crawford's courtship of Fanny. Mansfield Park explores feeling in relation to conduct, judgment, and principle in order to educate the reader into a fuller awareness of all three. The novel does not simply affirm the value of any one of these--not even principle. Austen investigates the costs, for social conduct and for moral judgment, of either underestimating the power of emotional life, or being excessively vulnerable to it, as Fanny is; and these costs are exacted from principled and unprincipled characters alike. The costs to Fanny are clear. The costs of neglecting or ignoring passion may be less obvious. Sir Thomas Bertram, for instance, Edmund, and Henry Crawford underestimate and fail to allow for the nature and strength of Maria Bertram's feelings, and suffer for the result in proportion as their conduct to her deserves. Edmund, who is "'not at all afraid for'" Maria, despite Fanny's hints, "'after such a proof as she has given [by engaging herself to Mr. Rushworth], that her feelings are

not strong'" (116), cannot see Maria's love for Crawford and does not prevent its consequences, either at Mansfield or at London. Her father sanctions her marriage despite perceiving her indifference to Mr. Rushworth:

Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others. It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain . . . and if Maria could now speak so securely of her happiness with [Mr. Rushworth], speaking certainly without the prejudice, the blindness of love, she ought to be believed. Her feelings probably were not acute; he had never supposed them to be so. (201)

Henry Crawford, however, unprincipled and more selfish than either Edmund or Sir Thomas, loses the most by having "put himself in the power of feelings on her side, more strong than he had supposed" (468).

The misjudgment and misconduct of Sir Thomas, one of the novel's most principled characters, should convince readers that Austen's subject is rather the perhaps unavoidable difficulties and limits of principle than its efficacy. Fanny, whose conduct and principle are consistently right, finds nonetheless that her feelings complicate and perplex her judgments always. When she thinks of her resolve not to act in Lovers' Vows, "her doubts were increasing":

Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for? what might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance, had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature--selfishness--and a fear of exposing herself? And would Edmund's judgment, would his persuasion of Sir Thomas's disapprobation of the whole, be enough to justify her in a determined denial in spite of all the rest? It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples. (153)⁴

Fanny experiences some form of distress on almost every page of Mansfield Park; this instance is merely one of the more elaborate. Perhaps part of Austen's intention is to create a heroine whose complicated "distress" is legitimate and genuine, not spurious as it is in the sentimental novel. Certainly Austen succeeds in making Fanny's position increasingly difficult as the novel progresses: she is more and more distressed. In the exchange I have quoted between Fanny and Edmund, on the other hand, although Fanny's distress is emphasized, the scene actually dramatizes something else. In it, Fanny and Edmund are entirely open and loving.⁵ Their affection is directly expressed and satisfies Fanny. Later, however, she loses Edmund insofar as his love is extended to Mary Crawford. Fanny is then in the false and painful position of receiving Edmund's brotherly confidences about his love for Mary when her own love for him is not that of a sister. Aware of her love and jealousy, Fanny can no longer be open with Edmund about her feelings and her judgments, particularly about Mary. She suffers from loss, then, and from concealment, and only at the end is she relieved of both. This early, open exchange between Fanny and Edmund is necessary if the reader is to register fully the pain of her later loss and repression. Irony operates here in relation to feeling, not to judgment as in Pride and Prejudice, and the effect upon the reader is cumulative. In Pride and Prejudice, the

technique of linear irony guarantees that the action will reverse or undercut almost every judgment, so that the effects are felt cumulatively; all reversals support the novel's comic attack on pride of judgment. But these effects are obtained through a linear or symmetrical structure, rather than by increasing the force of each successive misjudgment. Elizabeth's later judgments and reassessments systematically balance or cancel earlier ones. In Mansfield Park, on the other hand, each intimate conversation between Edmund and Fanny gains in emotional complexity and power as the discrepancy between the kind of love they feel for each other increases. Each later sign of Edmund's love, such as his gift of a gold chain, is both welcome and increasingly painful to Fanny, and each must be felt in relation to this early scene in which his love relieves her distress instead of augmenting it.

The dialogue and the narrative in Mansfield Park register powerful feelings on almost every page, usually painful ones like anxiety, uncertainty, jealousy, and distress. These are felt cumulatively, far more strongly than any accompanying value the novel may suggest for peace and tranquillity--a value many critics detect.⁶ This powerful representation of feeling informs and complicates the novel's presentation of judgment also. Judgment occurs and is required on every page; Nardin points out, rightly, that few of the characters in Mansfield Park are "moral

nonentities."⁷ As a result, the reader (like Fanny) can never relax. He must continually weigh and judge among the characters' different estimations of themselves and each other while his sympathies are being strongly solicited by them. He is, for example, attracted to the Crawfords' liveliness and wit; he is repelled by their coarseness and selfishness; he recognizes that they have never before met people as full of "'heart'" as some of those at Mansfield, and that they are powerfully affected as a result (as Mary says, "'You have all so much more heart among you, than one finds in the world at large'" [359]); and he feels for the various jealousies, anxieties, and uncertainties that all the characters labor under, sometimes amused and sometimes appalled at the distance between their real and their professed feelings, motives, and judgments. The tone of Mansfield Park is, therefore, painfully anxious, in keeping with its didactic intention: to make the reader feel more than he ever has the complexity and difficulty of moral and emotional response to character.

The tone of Emma is otherwise, genial and expansive, in keeping with its separate didactic intention. If Pride and Prejudice treats judgment comically and Mansfield Park treats it seriously, even obsessively, then Emma may be said to treat it almost cavalierly. Austen asks the reader of Emma to exercise his judgment even more carefully and more

strenuously in some ways than in Mansfield Park and then requires him to transcend it altogether, in the interests of something greater: love. Emma creates a comedy of intimacy or of love which embraces all the characters, however irritating and exasperating they may be, and however much they invite harsh judgment at first. Austen obliquely voiced this intention when she said, "'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like,'"⁸ for of course the point is that she insists on each reader's liking Emma, however annoyed or critical he may also feel. Austen insists on similar complexity in the reader's responses to the other characters, notably Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates,⁹ and most notable of all, Mrs. Elton.

No character in all Austen's works is more exasperating, more impossible than Mrs. Elton, who parodies all Emma's faults and has none of her virtues. She thinks herself the center and leader of Highbury as Emma has done, but receives no parallel humiliation, for Austen allows her to think as well of herself at the end as ever, or perhaps better. None of the other characters challenges her self-complacency: their good breeding forbids it, and they must therefore receive her impertinences with civility. Her speeches grate on the reader's nerves as much as on the characters'. Yet she has the last speech in the novel (although not the last word), indeed the only speech in the last chapter. Austen seems to be insisting on her presence even while she is

asserting the "perfect happiness" Emma and Mr. Knightley will enjoy (484), not in order to undercut or qualify that happiness, but for another, more important reason. Part of Austen's intention in Emma is to render irritating characters like Mrs. Elton so faithfully as to provoke her readers, and then to require that the reader accept them, and sometimes love them, because he knows them so well. Mr. Knightley gives almost a formula for the novel when he says to Emma, "'I could not think about you so much without doating on you, faults and all'" (462). While the reader is not quite asked to dote on Mrs. Elton, faults and all, he must allow his intimate knowledge of her to be felt more strongly than his irritation and annoyance. Her comment on the marriage, for example ("'Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!-- Selina would stare when she heard of it'"), perfectly accords with everything the reader knows of her: her love of finery and parade, and her self-complacency on the score of her relation to Selina Suckling and her barouche-landau.

Austen's intentions for Mrs. Elton are best understood by ~~comparison~~ with her treatment of an equally abrasive character, Mrs. Norris, in Mansfield Park. After Maria Rushworth's elopement with Henry Crawford,

Mrs. Norris . . . as most attached to Maria, was really the greatest sufferer. Maria was her first favourite, the dearest of all; the match had been her own contriving, as she had been wont with such pride of heart to feel and say, and this conclusion of it almost overpowered her.

She was an altered creature, quieted, stupified,

indifferent to every thing that passed. (MP, p. 448)

Mrs. Norris is humiliated as Mrs. Elton is not. The alteration in her creates some slight sympathy in the reader as an accompaniment to his sense that she has got just what she deserves--more sympathy, certainly, than he would have supposed possible. Richard Simpson was the first of many critics to be struck by Austen's complex handling:

Even Mrs. Norris, the only one of her characters who is thoroughly and consistently selfish, ends by placing herself in a situation of trouble and sacrifice, in undertaking to be the guardian of her degraded niece.¹⁰

Austen's treatment is still more complicated than Simpson suggests. Having created some sympathetic feeling in the reader for Mrs. Norris, Austen allows her removal from Mansfield to be a welcome relief to the other characters. "Not even Fanny had tears for aunt Norris--not even when she was gone for ever" (466). Sir Thomas's response is even more significant:

He had felt her as an hourly evil, which was so much the worse, as there seemed no chance of its ceasing but with life; she seemed a part of himself, that must be borne for ever. To be relieved from her, therefore, was so great a felicity, that had she not left bitter remembrances behind her, there might have been danger of his learning almost to approve the evil which produced such a good. (466)

What Fanny has considered "the little irritations, sometimes introduced by aunt Norris" (392) are wholly eliminated from the world Mansfield Park creates at the end. Mrs. Elton, on the other hand, is the world. Neither she nor the irritations and annoyances she creates are eliminated from Highbury. She cannot be expelled, so she must be known,

accepted, and absorbed.

Emma is a comedy more of intimacy than of judgment, though judgment of character is so frequently at issue in the novel and though the plot is brilliantly constructed to challenge and exercise the reader's judgment. Because intimacy is the special quality and effect of Emma, it dictates many details of the novel's composition, including the need to portray a close, small world like Highbury faithfully and exhaustively. The society of Highbury, its amusements, its interests, its daily routines, must all be made familiar to the reader. Most important, of course, is the need to make characters known, and Austen fulfills this need through conversations in which the characters make themselves known as they discuss themselves or others. These conversations are enormously complex as a result. No analysis can exhaust the implications or connections of even the briefest of them, for everything in Emma reflects on everything else, creating an almost impenetrable density.¹¹ Nevertheless, some of the techniques which allow Austen to create a world of such fullness, substance, and intricacy are visible in dialogue from the early chapter in which Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston discuss Emma.

The most important of these techniques is so simple and direct as to require no analysis: Austen promotes intimacy between her readers and her characters by creating characters who are intimate with each other and whose speech

reflects their intimacy. Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston know Emma well, first of all, and what they say of her reflects their affection as well as their knowledge of her, faults and all. They also know each other so well that earlier in the scene they can openly discuss what might seem an impossibly rude, threatening, or painful subject: Mr. Knightley's disapproval of Mrs. Weston as a governess for Emma. Mrs. Weston says, most directly, "'I am sure you always thought me unfit for the office I held,'" and Mr. Knightley's reply is even more direct. "'Yes,' said he, smiling. 'You are better placed here; very fit for a wife, but not at all for a governess'" (38). Mr. Knightley's smile indicates the affectionate intimacy that saves his remark from harshness, and Mrs. Weston is not at all offended. That their intimacy is perfectly reciprocal is clear when Mrs. Weston corrects him later in the scene and he accepts her correction with good grace. She advises him not to discuss with Mr. John Knightley or Isabella his disapproval of Emma's "'intimacy'" with Harriet Smith, as she does not "'think any possible good'" will be achieved. Mrs. Weston continues,

"It has been so many years my province to give advice, that you cannot be surprized, Mr. Knightley, at this little remains of office."

"Not at all," cried he; "I am much obliged to you for it. It is very good advice, and it shall have a better fate than your advice has often found; for it shall be attended to."

"Mrs. John Knightley is easily alarmed, and might be made unhappy about her sister."

"Be satisfied," said he, "I will not raise any outcry."

I will keep my ill-humour to myself. I have a very sincere interest in Emma. Isabella does not seem more my sister; has never excited a greater interest; perhaps hardly so great. There is an anxiety, a curiosity in what one feels for Emma. I wonder what will become of her!"

"So do I," said Mrs. Weston gently; "very much."

"She always declares she will never marry, which, of course, means just nothing at all. But I have no idea that she has yet ever seen a man she cared for. It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object. I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good. But there is nobody hereabouts to attach her; and she goes so seldom from home." (40-41)

This passage, brief as it is and simple by comparison to any exchange in which Emma herself participates, bears an ironic relation to almost all of the novel's plot. Mr. Knightley, of course, is not yet aware of his own love for Emma, and when she later shows an interest in Frank Churchill even before meeting him, Mr. Knightley's hostility and jealousy reveal to himself his love for her. "He had been in love with Emma, and jealous of Frank Churchill, from about the same period, one sentiment having probably enlightened him as to the other" (432). So far from liking "'to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return,'" when he suspects "a something of private liking, of private understanding even, between Frank Churchill and Jane" (344), a liking that would threaten Emma if she loves Frank, he attempts to warn her, for "He could not see her in a situation of such danger, without trying to preserve her" (349). More ironic still, when Emma actually is "'in love with a proper object,'" Mr. Knightley himself, and "'in some doubt of a return,'" it does "do her good," for it

makes her "understand the deceptions she had been thus practising on herself, and living under!--The blunders, the blindness of her own head and heart!" (411-12).

A kind of linear irony is at work here, although the term seems increasingly inadequate to the connections between this passage and others in the novel. Linear irony implies reversal, which does not really describe what happens between Mr. Knightley's ambiguously phrased declaration that "'Isabella does not seem more my sister'" and his later very moving response when Emma invites him to dance, saying, "You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

"Brother and sister! no, indeed." (331)

This exchange is highly charged with feeling because of the incongruity between Mr. Knightley's now conscious love for Emma and her still unconscious love for him. His denial of a fraternal relation to her reflects back on his earlier remark poignantly rather than ironically or comically. The reader should note too that Emma's words here are phrased ambiguously, quite like his earlier ones. Even when both are unaware of their love, they are far from ready to see themselves as brother and sister.

A less powerful connection but an important one exists also between Mr. Knightley's willingness to keep his ill-humor to himself and such incidents as Emma's readiness to repress her discontent when Mr. Weston injudiciously invites Mrs. Elton to join their expedition to Box Hill:

so it was to be, if she had no objection. Now, as her objection was nothing but her very great dislike of Mrs. Elton, of which Mr. Weston must already be perfectly aware, it was not worth bringing forward again;--it could not be done without a reproof to him, which would be giving pain to his wife; and she found herself therefore obliged to consent to an arrangement which she would have done a great deal to avoid; an arrangement which would probably expose her even to the degradation of being said to be of Mrs. Elton's party! Every feeling was offended; and the forbearance of her outward submission left a heavy arrears due of secret severity in her reflections on the unmanageable good-will of Mr. Weston's temper. (353)

Touches like these make Emma the miracle it is. The complexity of response required of a reader is immense. He must register Emma's faults and virtues at every line, for her snobbery and her considerateness are perfectly intermixed. The reader also, sharing Emma's hearty dislike of Mrs. Elton, will be equally indignant at Mr. Weston's "unmanageable good-will," and is as likely as Emma to wish some outlet for this indignation. But annoyance, irritation, ill-humor, and indignation are not allowed free expression; they must not be permitted to hurt others. Forbearance is, therefore, of great value in this novel, although not the greatest. Emma's forbearance here is admirable, and does make one love her. She is forbearing in this scene, however, not loving or good-natured, and forbearance can give way under stress, as Emma's does at Box Hill, allowing her to insult Miss Bates. Love, a higher and more generous sentiment, is required. Emma's love for her father, who is a clear foil to Miss Bates, makes forbearance unnecessary or irrelevant in her relations with him, although his demands

on her are ceaseless and his selfish fretfulness far more irritating than Miss Bates's verbosity. Mr. Knightley's suppression of his ill-humor in this early scene, then, announces a theme which will be sounded and varied again and again in Emma, reaching a climax at Box Hill.

Similarly, his ready acceptance of advice echoes another important motif, for giving and taking advice are frequently at issue, whether Emma is advising Harriet, as in the preceding chapter, or being advised by Mr. Knightley.

Austen uses the dialogue between Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston to create other, more immediate effects on the reader than linear irony allows. One such effect is produced when Mr. Knightley declares that "'there is nobody hereabouts to attach'" Emma. His comments on her in all of Chapter V ostensibly declare him an affectionate friend with no other idea in mind; he considers that she has never yet seen anyone she could care for. Austen is guarding against the reader's anticipating the conclusion too soon by allowing Mr. Knightley thus to ignore the possibility that he could be Emma's suitor; the reader is made more likely to ignore it also. Yet Mr. Knightley's ignorance is no unfair trick to mislead the reader. His unconscious love for Emma is not merely necessary to the plot but perfectly consistent with the history of his relation to her. When Mr. Knightley claims, on the other hand, that "'There is an anxiety, a curiosity in what one

feels for Emma. I wonder what will become of her,'" Austen's intentions are different. She is allowing him to articulate the central issue of the novel. What one feels for Emma is as important, page by page, as the unfolding of her character and destiny, and Austen is using Mr. Knightley's speech in the simplest, most direct way to guide the reader's attention to the question of his own response to Emma. The speeches of Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston also give the reader, in an unobtrusive way, some information about Emma's early history which helps the reader to understand, allow for, and feel for her character, particularly the information that "'ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all'" (37). What Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston say has other effects on the reader's response to Emma too. Their speeches voice their different estimations of her character and conduct (especially of her intimacy with Harriet Smith) and require the reader to judge between them. This use of dialogue is, however, more conventional and less daring than its use as a kind of aside to the reader, reminding him of his task. Mr. Knightley's mentioning "'an anxiety, a curiosity'" in her feelings for Emma is rather like Edmund Bertram's declaring to Fanny that "'There is no reason in the world why you should not be important where you are known'" (MP, p. 26). Both statements are addressed to the reader as much as to

Mrs. Weston or Fanny.

The effects any passage in Emma has upon a reader's perceptions and judgments are difficult to separate from both emotional and comic effects. Techniques and their effects are simply much less obvious than in Pride and Prejudice: what is the effect, for instance, on a second reading, of Mr. Knightley's ignorance of his own heart in Chapter V? Some amusement is certainly felt at the discrepancy between this ignorance and his decided, definite pronouncements about his feelings for Emma and indeed about everything else. Yet this amusement is qualified; his ignorance comes to seem painful, as it leads to his difficult position as observer of Emma's flirtation with Frank Churchill. Thus, his response to Mrs. Weston's praise of Emma's beauty creates an almost indefinable effect. He says first, "'I confess that I have seldom seen a face or figure more pleasing to me than her's. But I am a partial old friend,'" and then more powerfully, "'I love to look at her'" (39). The incongruity between what he acknowledges to himself and what he really feels, between so much open and so much concealed affection, is extremely moving, although how and why may be difficult to say.

Certainly the effect is not like that produced when Elizabeth Bennet tells Darcy, "'It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to

be secure of judging properly at first'" (PP, p. 93), even though Elizabeth's remark is not purely comic either. The different effects seem attributable to the higher emotional content which informs and underlies dialogue in the later novels. Unacknowledged or suppressed love is a major theme in them all, along with an investigation of its consequences. These are visible in Fanny Price, Maria Bertram, Jane Fairfax, Emma, Mr. Knightley, Anne Elliot, and Captain Wentworth, to name only the most important characters.

Concealment in general is also prominent in Emma. Mrs. Weston's reply to Mr. Knightley's comments about wishing to see Emma in love is oblique, for "Part of her meaning was to conceal some favourite thoughts of her own and Mr. Weston's on the subject, as much as possible. There were wishes at Randalls respecting Emma's destiny, but it was not desirable to have them suspected" (41). These thoughts are of a marriage between Frank Churchill and Emma, thoughts Emma herself entertains. It is typical of Austen's practice in Emma that she should end this scene, which has expressed so much openness, good will, and intimacy between Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston, with slight obliquity and reserve. As Austen comments later, when Emma has received Mr. Knightley's declaration of love, and is obliged to conceal both her former fear that he loved Harriet, and Harriet's existing attachment,

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; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material. (431)

This passage has been sometimes taken as evidence that Austen acknowledges an almost modern consciousness of human isolation and of the impossibility of knowing or being known. On the contrary: the whole thrust of Emma is toward openness, knowledge, and intimacy. The limits or restrictions which human nature dictates for these qualities (limits Austen's novels fully concede) are less interesting to Jane Austen than are their possibilities in human relations. Once Emma hears that Harriet is engaged to Robert Martin,

High in the rank of her most serious and heartfelt felicities, was the reflection that all necessity of concealment from Mr. Knightley would soon be over. The disguise, equivocation, mystery, so hateful to her to practise, might soon be over. She could now look forward to giving him that full and perfect confidence which her disposition was most ready to welcome as a duty. (475)

This passage carries more weight within Emma than its counterpart, reinforced as it is by the very moving, open, intimate conversations between Mr. Knightley and Emma after their engagement. When Emma congratulates Jane Fairfax on her approaching marriage, saying, "'Oh! if you knew how much I love every thing that is decided and open!'" (460), a value for openness is asserted even at the risk of wounding Jane, for Emma's remark inevitably reflects on Jane's secret engagement.

The plot of Emma moves toward the release and acknowledgement of concealed love, and the result is intimacy. The secret engagement of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill is revealed and all the mystification associated with it dispelled, just as the unconscious love of Emma and Mr. Knightley is made conscious. In the process, of course, the plot takes in a great deal more, including Emma's misconduct, her various stages of repentance, and her relapses, all of which have complicated effects in controlling the reader's judgment of her and sympathy for her. Yet the emphasis on judgment, enhanced as it is by the central mystery tantalizingly presented for the reader to make out, is oddly undercut at the end, making Emma the comedy of intimacy that it is, not a comedy of judgment.

Frank Churchill, for example, has conducted himself in the novel so as to invite and deserve the reader's harshest criticism. He too parodies Emma's worst qualities, for he fools and manipulates everyone. Emma says to him at last, "'I think there is a little likeness between us'" (478), but in fact Frank is much worse than Emma. He is irresponsible and thoughtless. He torments Jane, whom he loves. When his duplicity and cruelty are first revealed, Emma's righteous indignation is most welcome to the reader and voices his own judgment of Frank's conduct:

"Impropriety! Oh! Mrs. Weston--it is too calm a censure. Much, much beyond impropriety!--It has sunk him, I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what a man should be!--None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life." (397)

Emma is, of course, thinking unconsciously of Mr. Knightley as she speaks, and a little of her own impropriety in relation to both Jane and Frank (that is, her suspecting an attachment between Jane and Mr. Dixon and her imparting that suspicion to Frank). Every judgment in Emma is qualified by self-regarding considerations like these, certainly. Nevertheless, Emma's indignation is meant to be felt as the first in a series of judgments of Frank Churchill's character, judgments whose reversals undercut moral judgment in general and Emma's, Mr. Knightley's, and the reader's in particular.

Emma herself is soon forced by Mrs. Weston to "listen better" to excuses for Frank, and is in any case quickly taken up with her own concerns (e.g., thinking Frank's uncle would have consented as readily to a marriage with Harriet as with Jane). The summary of Mr. Knightley's response to Frank's engagement offers an even finer and more sustained joke on moral judgment than does Emma's first response:

He had found [Emma] agitated and low.--Frank Churchill was a villain.--He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate.--She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow. (433)

This response finds an echo in Emma's later reaction to Frank Churchill's letter of explanation:

though it was impossible not to feel that he had been wrong, yet he had been less wrong than she had supposed--and he had suffered, and was very sorry--and he was so grateful to Mrs. Weston, and so much in love with Miss Fairfax, and she was so happy herself, that there was no being severe; and could he have entered the room, she must have shaken hands with him as heartily as ever. (444)

This letter has much the same softening effect on the reader as on Emma, and so Mr. Knightley is brought back again to provide one more reversal as he goes over it, revealing in his stringent comments what the reader and Emma should have thought. And yet Mr. Knightley's heart is hardly in the subject. He doesn't want to read the letter in the first place, cuts short his judgment, and proceeds to talk with Emma of their marriage: "'I have another person's interest at present so much at heart, that I cannot think any longer about Frank Churchill'" (448).

The didactic effect of Emma is a complicated one. The reader's judgment is evoked, beguiled, confounded, refined, and then dissolved or transcended by love. Even more is required of his sympathies. Miss Bates, for example, is so perfectly rendered in her tiresome verbosity that Walter Scott's review cites Austen's treatment of her as a fault:

Characters of folly or simplicity, such as those of old Woodhouse and Miss Bates, are ridiculous when first presented, but if too often brought forward or too long dwelt upon, their prosing is apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real society.¹²

Yet Scott's reaction half fulfills Austen's intention. Unless Miss Bates is felt as boring, even irritating, and unless the reader is to that extent implicated in Emma's insult at Box Hill, one part of the effect of that splendid scene is lost. At Box Hill, all the tension, irritation, and frustration that the action has generated explodes. The reader is made to know what every character is feeling during the scene, partly through dialogue and narrative, and partly through the knowledge of each that the novel has so carefully imparted. The amount and kind of bad feeling expressed, the incongruity between every character's feelings and motives, the various ways in which each partly understands and partly mistakes the others, are all astonishing. Emma's rudeness is not surprising in the context of so much bad feeling, and yet it is shocking. Almost as shocking is Mr. Weston's conundrum, which immediately follows: "'What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection? . . . M. and A.--Em--ma. --Do you understand?'" (371). The juxtaposition of Emma's most unkind act and Mr. Weston's tribute is a touch typical of Emma. Yet the scene does not stop here, as in a sense it should; it keeps going, and the reader's attention is absorbed by the ugliness which follows, most notably Frank Churchill's declaration to Emma that when he returns from abroad, "'I shall come to you for my wife'" (373), a flirtatious remark aimed at Jane Fairfax that seems to her to be

serious courtship of Emma, and to Emma a "commission" to groom Harriet for the post, for deluded as she is otherwise, Emma does know that Frank Churchill's gallantry to her "new, in her own estimation, meant nothing" (368). Indeed, the reader would be in as much danger as Emma of overlooking her rudeness without Mr. Knightley's rebuke. His words to Emma, "'How could you be so unfeeling,'" are addressed in part to the reader, and indeed his words so firmly fix the incident as the central one of the scene, both in Emma's mind and in the reader's, that to reread the chapter and to find Emma's insult buried in so much more obviously ugly interaction is a shock. In any case, that Emma is struck and chastened by Mr. Knightley's rebuke is clear, not only in the tears she sheds going home, but in her reflections in the evening. "As a daughter, she hoped she was not without a heart. She hoped no one could have said to her, 'How could you be so unfeeling to your father?'" (377). To be "feeling" in the best sense is what Emma teaches, and complicated sequences like these account for its extraordinary power to evoke, exasperate, perplex, extend, and enlarge the reader's capacity to feel. Austen's attempts to educate the reader's sympathies as well as his judgments have never been so ambitious or so successful.

Persuasion is very different. Although Austen's abiding concern with the interrelations of feeling and judgment are

responsible for a good deal of continuity in her works, considerable diversity arises from the perfecting of her techniques and the extending of her range. Between Emma and Persuasion, however, a disparity exists which may seem to indicate regression rather than extension. The elegaic tone of Persuasion may appear thin after the energy of Emma. As D. F. Tovey has rightly noted, however, "When an artist is great enough to produce a number of works widely differing in character, there is nothing he enjoys so much as the strongest possible contrasts between two successive works." He adduces the "unique sense of power" an artist will feel when "he finds himself fit for a delicate task just after he has triumphed in a colossal one."¹³ Tovey's words could be a formula for the composition of Persuasion. The restrained yet poignant tone is highly appropriate to a story whose heroine is no longer young and has made her significant moral choice, to break her engagement, seven years before the novel opens. The emotional costs and consequences of this choice, and of being "forced into prudence" (P, p. 30) are the subject, along with the possibility of escaping those consequences so as to have a second chance for youth and happiness.

The differences between Persuasion and the other two late novels are more interesting than their similarities. The emotional content of Persuasion is very high, for instance, quite as high as in Mansfield Park or Emma, but emotional interest is not as widely dispersed among the

characters. Anne's feelings are registered almost to the exclusion of anyone else's, and more important, her feelings are seldom expressed in dialogue. Not conversation but silent attentiveness is Anne Elliot's most characteristic mode of expressing herself for much of the novel, thereby giving great power to her exchange with Captain Harville at the end. Her reserve breaks down far enough that she speaks her own feelings at last:

"All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone."

She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed. (235)

Although Anne unmistakably expresses the strength of her feelings in this scene, she stops short of complete openness. Only Captain Wentworth, listening nearby, understands the meaning behind her words and their relation to her own experience.

The techniques of Persuasion do not differ entirely from those of the preceding novels, of course. Dialogue does have importance in Persuasion and Austen does incorporate some linear irony into its structure, for this scene between Anne and Captain Harville, overheard by Wentworth, reverses an earlier, often quoted one in which Anne overhears Wentworth talking to Louisa Musgrove, ostensibly of his impression of Louisa's firmness of character, but actually about his judgment of Anne's weakness. Again, only Anne can infer the direction of his thoughts from his words. He concludes, in "his former

earnest tone,"

"My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind."

He had done,--and was unanswered. It would have surprised Anne, if Louisa could have readily answered such a speech--words of such interest, spoken with such serious warmth!--she could imagine what Louisa was feeling. For herself--she feared to move, lest she should be seen. While she remained, a bush of low rambling holly protected her, and they were moving on. Before they were beyond her hearing, however, Louisa spoke again.

"Mary is good-natured enough in many respects," said she, "but she does sometimes provoke me excessively, by her nonsense and her pride; the Elliot pride. She has a great deal too much of the Elliot pride.--We do so wish that Charles had married Anne instead.--I suppose you know he wanted to marry Anne?"

After a moment's pause, Captain Wentworth said,

"Do you mean that she refused him?"

"Oh! yes, certainly."

"When did that happen?"

"I do not exactly know, for Henrietta and I were at school at the time; but I believe about a year before he married Mary. I wish she had accepted him. We should all have liked her a great deal better; and papa and mamma always think it was her great friend Lady Russell's doing, that she did not.--They think Charles might not be learned and bookish enough to please Lady Russell, and that therefore, she persuaded Anne to refuse him."

The sounds were retreating, and Anne distinguished no more. Her own emotions still kept her fixed. She had much to recover from, before she could move. The listener's proverbial fate was not absolutely hers; she had heard no evil of herself,--but she had heard a great deal of very painful import. She saw how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth; and there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity in his manner, which must give her extreme agitation. (88-89)

This passage underscores the major difference in technique between Persuasion and Mansfield Park or Emma. The speeches of Wentworth and Louisa actually have less effect on the reader than the narrative passages which describe Anne's responses to their dialogue. In this sense, narrative is more important than dialogue throughout Persuasion. Austen's

principal interest in this passage is to convey Anne's feelings to the reader, not Wentworth's or Louisa's. The narrative focuses on Anne's feelings, yet what is left unsaid about them is more important than what is said. Anne's feelings in hearing what she supposes to be Wentworth's courtship of Louisa must be inferred, for they are not precisely stated. Instead, the narrative dwells on the emotion she projects onto Louisa: "she could imagine what Louisa was feeling." But neither Louisa's feelings nor Anne's are really specified. "For herself --she feared to move, lest she should be seen"; "Her own emotions still kept her fixed"; "She had much to recover from"; "she had heard a great deal of very painful import"; "there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner, which must give her extreme agitation." Fear, pain, and agitation are mentioned, but their precise direction and content are left to the reader's imaginative sympathy, particularly with respect to the laconic "For herself." Anne's sensations at hearing Louisa speak so casually of her marrying Charles Musgrove or at hearing Louisa attribute her refusing him to Lady Russell's interference must also be imagined in relation to details we have been given earlier: that Lady Russell persuaded Anne to break her engagement to Captain Wentworth, and that she would have liked to persuade Anne to marry Charles Musgrove.

Anne's feelings in these circumstances are readily imagined and felt, but would be registered differently and

less immediately by the reader if the narrative spelled them out more precisely. Although Austen's dialogue often operates in the way narrative does in this passage, that is, although dialogue frequently requires much imaginative effort from the reader's sympathies and judgment if he is to take in all that is happening, narrative seldom requires this much direct engagement. Comparison with Mansfield Park nicely illustrates the difference. Fanny Price and Anne Elliot resemble each other, as many critics have noted, in their forced reserve, their isolation, their goodness, and their position: watching the man they love court another woman. Nevertheless, although the narrative of Mansfield Park often registers Fanny's painful feelings, the effect produced is not the same, whether Austen chooses to describe her feelings closely and specifically or not. When Fanny watches Mary Crawford and Edmund rehearse a love scene from Lovers' Vows,

In watching them she forgot herself; and agitated by the increasing spirit of Edmund's manner, had once closed the page and turned away exactly as he wanted help. It was imputed to very reasonable weariness, and she was thanked and pitied; but she deserved their pity, more than she hoped they would ever surmise. (MP, p. 170)

A general awareness of Fanny's painful feelings is possible, but nothing more, as in Mansfield Park interest is distributed more generally among the characters. The reader is made almost as interested in and aware of the feelings of Edmund and Mary as of Fanny in this sequence. When on the other hand Fanny is alone after having displeased

Sir Thomas by her refusal of Henry Crawford, the spelling out of her distress, while poignant enough, is not as painful as reading Sir Thomas's angry rebuke and does not call for the same effort of imagination:

Her mind was all disorder. The past, present, future, every thing was terrible. But her uncle's anger gave her the severest pain of all. Selfish and ungrateful! to have appeared so to him! She was miserable for ever. She had no one to take her part, to counsel, or speak for her. Her only friend was absent. He might have softened his father; but all, perhaps all, would thank her selfish and ungrateful. She might have to endure the reproach again and again; she might hear it, or see it, or know it to exist for ever in every connection about her. She could not but feel some resentment against Mr. Crawford; yet, if he really loved her, and were unhappy too!--it was all wretchedness together. (321)

A little distance from Fanny is required by such phrases as "She was miserable for ever." Her immature certainty that present pain will endure always is dwelt on in the passage and distances the reader slightly from that pain, although it is very real. On the other hand, very little emotional distance from Anne Elliot is permitted to the reader of Persuasion.

In Mansfield Park and Emma, Austen masters techniques which allow her to render dense, highly complicated worlds with a number of important central characters. Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse are the most central, certainly, but the claims of other characters are powerfully registered. In Persuasion, everything centers on Anne Elliot. Other characters are important insofar as they either draw her out or suppress her, as her father and Elizabeth do: she

"was nobody with either" (5). Once she leaves Kellynch, however, all the other characters draw her out to some extent, even Mary, the most selfish of them, for Anne is always able to involve herself imaginatively in others' concerns. The other characters are, indeed, largely rendered to the reader through Anne's imaginative involvement with them. As a result, the world of Persuasion is attenuated, very deliberately. For this reason, although examples of nearly all the literary techniques Austen has developed can be found by searching the passage I have quoted at length, they are employed so sparingly that it hardly seems worth the trouble of seeking them out. Parallels and contrasts among the characters do exist in Persuasion, for instance, and are implied when Louisa Musgrave mentions the Elliot pride. The coldness, reserve, and pride of the Elliots are explicitly opposed to the cheerfulness of the Musgroves and the warmth and openness of the naval characters: the Crofts, the Harvilles, and Captains Wentworth and Benwick. Similarly, the dialogue between Louisa and Captain Wentworth has some ironic relations to the plot. Anne's reflections on Louisa's accident at Lyme refer to this earlier exchange: "Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character" (116). The indications given in the exchange of Wentworth's "feeling and curiosity" about

Anne are significant too, as his misjudgment of her is important, and as the reader shares much of Anne's concern to probe his feelings. But the major effect of this or any other exchange in Persuasion is to make the reader feel for Anne.

Austen's interest in educating judgment and sympathy is confined in Persuasion to what she wants her readers to feel for Anne. Furthermore, Austen has set moral conflict and moral choice to one side in this novel. The conventional conflict between love (for Captain Wentworth) and duty (to Lady Russell), a conflict which provides the stuff of so many third-rate plays and novels and vitiates better novels like Cecilia and Sir Charles Grandison, is set nearly eight years in the past. Although Anne makes several references to this conflict, regretting her choice at the start of the novel and, very naturally, justifying it to herself at the end once she has regained Wentworth's love, Austen is not really interested in the question of whether Anne's choice was right. Instead, Austen interests herself in the emotional consequences of such a choice. Anne's sufferings as a result of having been "forced into prudence" in her youth are not dwelt on, but the results are clear: "Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect" (28).

The subject of Persuasion is Anne's recovery of youth,

bloom, and spirits, and more: the delivery of her emotional life from the contracting effects of loss. Anne recovers in Persuasion all she has lost. The plot releases her by bringing her into contact with different sets of people who allow her to expand and open herself a bit. Each new set permits Anne to experience and to express more and more feeling. As her world expands, from Kellynch to Uppercross, Lyme, and Bath, so does her emotional life. All the later novels are expansive in a sense, for their power to create cumulative effects means that their worlds grow larger with meaning as the stories progress. In Persuasion, however, this effect is confined to the outward expansion of Anne's feelings. This structure, simple and obvious by comparison with the structures of the novels that precede it, allows the substance of Persuasion to be Anne's gradual recovery of possibility, of hope, and finally of happiness. Openness and love replace restraint and loss. Although they could scarcely be more different from those of Emma, the theme and treatment in Persuasion are lovely in themselves, and valuable to those readers who prefer variety and range to duplication of effects.

Evidence that Persuasion represents variation and extension of Austen's powers rather than relaxation is offered by Sanditon, the novel left incomplete at her

death. Its twelve chapters form an exposition which barely suffices to sketch the characters and themes and fails to hint at the development they will receive, yet the chapters create a world as full and varied as that of Persuasion is purposely attenuated. The village of Sanditon and its activities are presented in minute detail which exceeds the portrait of Highbury in Emma. The sensible judgments of Charlotte Heywood are slightly touched by a literary imagination and are counterpointed with variously deformed judgments: the hasty and hazardous speculations of Mr. Parker, the selfish and mercenary calculations of Lady Denham, the hypochondria of Mr. Parker's sisters and brother, the literary libertinism of Sir Edward Denham. As Charlotte points out, "The Parkers, were no doubt a family of Imagination & quick feelings" (MW, p. 412), and clearly the interaction of these qualities with judgment would have been a major theme. B. C. Southam has called attention to the enigmatic quality events and characters take on when seen through Charlotte's eyes, and to her difficulty in judging them; he notes that the enigma confronts the reader also: "Jane Austen is being purposely enigmatic, challenging us to fathom the importance of the characters and the direction of the plot."¹⁴ If so, she has assimilated the burlesque energy of Northanger Abbey (its playful attempts to jolt the reader's expectations, and its jokes on the relation of literature and life) to

subject matter typical of the later novels: registering and requiring judgment at every point while perplexing it and indicating the fallibilities and absurdities which result from its interaction with feeling or imagination.

The fragment ends with the entrance of Sidney Parker, a character who is clearly to be as sensible and as perceptive as Charlotte, whatever his other qualities. His presence, added to Clara Brereton's and Charlotte's, would have allowed the novel to begin in earnest, for he offers the possibility of flirtation or courtship and, more important, of sensible conversation: in an Austen novel, at least three sensible characters distributed among the dullards and fools are required for that. Conversation in this sense is all that Sanditon lacks to make it promise as much as Emma. But it is vain to regret the Austen novels we lack, while we have the rest.

Jane Austen's desire to educate the judgment and sympathy of readers encourages her to develop increasingly sophisticated and effective methods for realizing her intentions. Awareness of these didactic intentions helps in turn to define her achievement. Attention to the ways in which she manipulates the perceptions, judgment, and feelings of her readers makes it impossible to feel the presence of limits in any of the novels after Northanger Abbey, so

convincing and absorbing are they and so close are their concerns to the ordinary concerns of daily life: forming impressions of people, modulating them as closer relations are established, and producing those adjustments and compromises between the pressures and demands of others' personalities and one's own which are required to sustain affection and intimacy in the relations one already has. In Austen's novels, the concerns of literature and of everyday life are one, and in Emma they receive their fullest and most powerful treatment: using a highly formal structure, the novel creates an almost impenetrable density which is, I think, as close as art can come to rendering the formless density of life.

¹ Fiction and the Reading Public (London, 1932), p. 256.

² Since labelling the topics of conversation in the novels is in many cases a quite dubious process, it may be wise to tabulate my own determinations more fully than I would care to in the text. The topics of conversation are listed in the order in which they appear in the page spans indicated. Underlined are those topics which I consider repeats of previous ones.

MA, pp. 18-59: lack of acquaintance at the ball; conversations at Bath; journal keeping; letter writing; muslin; Ann Radcliffe's novel Udolpho; female friendship; Henry Tilney; how to treat young men; speed of horses; carriages; novels; the Thorpes' characters; Bath; Eleanor Tilney; dancing.

SS, pp. 18-58: Edward's character and tastes; Elinor's feelings for Edward; infirmity of Colonel Brandon; marriage and love after age twenty-seven; Edward's feelings and Elinor's; Willoughby's character; "catching men"; exchange of ideas; Brandon's character; second attachments.

PP, pp. 21-58: securing lovers; knowing them; teasing; dancing; fine eyes and admiration; silly daughters; schemes to get Jane to Netherfield; colds and Elizabeth's walk; Elizabeth's walk; reading; libraries; accomplished women; arts of captivation; Bingley's character; intricate characters; town and country; manners; love and sonnets;

balls; writing letters and style; Bingley's persuadableness; dancing a reel; manners of Elizabeth's family; Elizabeth's eyes; conversation at balls; admiring figures; laughter; faults in character.

MP, pp. 23-62: Fanny to move (Lady Bertram and Fanny); Fanny to move and her character (Edmund and Fanny); Fanny to move (Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram); money and Mrs. Norris's character, in relation to Fanny's horse; matrimony and flirting (Henry, Mary, and Mrs. Grant); Miss Bertrams and matrimony as maneuvering (Mary, Henry, Mrs. Grant); manners; improvements and planting; London versus country customs; letter writing; the navy; improvements at Sotherton.

E, pp. 20-56: Robert Martin, his reading and station; Robert Martin, his reading and manners; Mr. Elton and manners; Emma's influence on Harriet Smith and vice versa; Emma's character, looks, and possible marriage; Emma's influence on Harriet; taking likenesses of Harriet and in general; likeness of Harriet; Robert Martin's proposal and manners and station; Mr. Elton and Harriet's likeness.

P, pp. 17-52: naval officers as tenants; the navy as a profession; Admiral Croft and the Wentworths; Mrs. Clay as a threat to Sir Walter; Mary's health and grievances.

P, pp. 53-92: going to party despite accident to child; navy ships and life; poor Dick Musgrove; women on ships; marriage; matches for Louisa and Henrietta--Captain Wentworth and Charles Hayter; Crofts' marriage; firmness of

character; Anne's refusal of Charles Musgrove; marriage of Captain Wentworth to either Louisa or Henrietta Musgrove.

³ A number of recent critics have tried to vindicate Fanny Price, Mansfield Park, and Jane Austen by claiming as I do that Fanny has limitations, but too often with unfortunate and strained results. See especially John Lucas's account, one which involves extensive and almost willful misreading. "Critics who protest that Fanny is too perfect are quite wrong. After all she is shown to be not particularly intelligent, she is less attractive than Mary, and her deep affection for her brother is both plausible, given her loneliness, and a bit absurd, given his decidedly prosaic nature" ("Introduction," Mansfield Park, ed. and intro. John Lucas [London, 1970], pp. xv-xvi).

⁴ David Lodge cites this passage in his fine study of the novel, saying as I would that "No passage could better illustrate Jane Austen's insight into the difficulty of judging the correct line of action in complex situations. The very scrupulosity and self-awareness which are essential for the proper exercise of judgment, may militate against it" (Language of Fiction, p. 112).

⁵ I would disagree, then, with Page's contention that "Fanny's strongest feelings do not find utterance" (Language of Jane Austen, p. 37).

⁶ Trilling's essay on Mansfield Park contains the most

famous assertion of this value. He asserts the novel's "preference for rest over motion" ("Mansfield Park," rpt. in Critical Essays, p. 127).

⁷ Elegant Decorums, p. 82.

⁸ Quoted by Austen-Leigh, Memoir, p. 157.

⁹ Several critics note Austen's affectionate treatment of Miss Bates and Mr. Woodhouse. A. C. Bradley exaggerates, however, when he speaks of them as objects "equally of our laughter and our unqualified respect and affection" ("Jane Austen," p. 21): "unqualified respect" for Mr. Woodhouse? Reginald Farrar is more accurate in noting that Emma "is the ripest and kindest of all Jane Austen's work. Here alone she can laugh at people, and still like them," particularly Miss Bates and Mr. Woodhouse, who are "candidates for love as well as laughter" ("Jane Austen," p. 26). Trilling's claims are wider and more exaggerated. He thinks Austen creates in Highbury "an idyllic world" in which "there are no bad people, and no adverse judgments to be made" ("Introduction," Emma, intro. Trilling [Boston, 1957], p. xxi). Trilling is mistaken. While no adverse judgments of Miss Bates and Mr. Woodhouse are permitted at the end of Emma, unless many such judgments are registered earlier by the reader, much of Austen's intention is lost. None of these critics acknowledge Austen's peculiar triumph: to create acceptance and love for a number of characters who

provoke at first so much harsh judgment. Louis Kronenberger's formulation is both neat and correct: "it required something of a magician to create Miss Bates, to make a crashing bore irresistible; or, with Mr. Woodhouse, to make a cranky valetudinarian a delight" (The Polished Surface [New York, 1969], p. 132).

¹⁰ Rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 249.

¹¹ Edgar F. Shannon attributes this effect in Emma to Austen's technique of "'repetition with variation,'" a phrase he borrows from Forster's definition of rhythm in the novel as "repetition plus variation": see Aspects of the Novel, p. 240 ("Emma: Character and Construction," PMLA, 71 [1956]; rpt. in Casebook, p. 141).

¹² Rpt. in Critical Heritage, p. 68.

¹³ Essays in Musical Analysis, I (1935; rpt. London, 1968), 61 and 62.

¹⁴ Literary Manuscripts, p. 121.

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