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FEMINISM AND SOCIAL SCENE IN JANE AUSTEN

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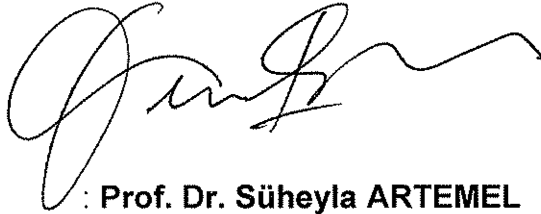

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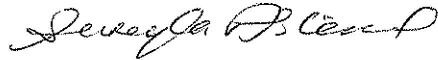

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1. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Austen is the English novelist generally credited with first giving the novelits modern character through her treatment of the details of everyday life in provincial English middle-class society. She was born on December 16,1775 at the parsonage of Steventon, in Hampshire, a village of which her father was rector.She was the youngest of seven children. In 1801,the family moved to Bath, where they lived until 1805 when, upon the death of her father, the family moved first to Southampton and then to Chawton in 1809.It was in Chawton that her major works were composed, although she had begun as a child to write for family amusement.

Jane Austens best known work, Pride and Prejudice, was written in 1797-98 although not published until 1813, two years after the publication of *Sense and Sensibility.* Her three other books belong to a later period: *Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion* being written between 1811 and 1816. *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814 and *Emma* in 1816 during Ms.Austen's lifetime. All were anonymously published, a state of affairs presumably agreeable to Ms.Austen's retiring nature. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published posthumously in 1818 at which time Austen's brother revealed her true authorship.

"It is a truth universally acknowledge, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."This famous quotation , the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates not only her inimitable style and ironical humor, but also her typical subject matter. Austen depicted with a sympathetic

imagination the lives of minor landed gentry, country clergyman, and families in various economic circumstances struggling to maintain or enhance their social position. The most urgent preoccupation of her young, well-bred heroines and heroes is courtship and marriage. Her interest lay in life's title conundrums sentiment and conduct.She exercised her dramatic and humorous skills in a faithful and rendering of the life she knew provincial family life of the middling-rich English gentry. She had no predecessors in this genre and no rivals. Although recognition came slowly to Austen, her fan club has grown hugely and steadily counting many intellectuals and celebrated writers among its members. Virginia Woolf called her "the most perfect artist among women."Macauley idolized her genius, considering *Mansfield Park* to be her greatest novel. Sir Walter Scott described her as having "the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment."And Disraeli was reported to have read *Pride and Prejudice* seventeen times.

For a woman of such genius, Austen lived a remarkably quiet life. She did not marry, nor did she allow her literary work to interfere with her domestic duties. Indeed, she seldom left home at all, except on short visits, chiefly to Bath. Nevertheless, although largely restricting her dramatic and humorous capabilities to a searching observation of the manners of provinicial English society, she is considered an English classic and one of the greatest novelists of all time. She died on July 18, 1817, and was buried in Winchester Cathedral. At the time of her death,she was working on an unfinished novel , *Sandition* , which was published in 1925.

2. INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen is the only woman who has a well established place in the traditional canon (the list of works used to define 'classic literature) before Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Elliot and Elizabeth Gaskell turn up in the middle of the 19th century. But the Canon is an 'edited highlights' version of literary history. And until the middle of the 20th century, it was men doing the editing because it was nearly always men who wrote book reviews and literary histories.

In the late 18th and early 19th century, most works by female authors wasn't seen by male critics as important enough to earn their help in preserving it for the future, so both books and reputations were lost to time. But recent historical research has shown that lots of women were writing when Jane Austen was alive, and many were known by the reading public. And these women were, in fact, following in the footsteps of generations of female authors: the first woman to work as professional writers had done so well over a century before Jane Austen invented 'Elizabeth' and 'Darcy'.

Despite this well established tradition, all female authors in Jane Austen's time faced a number of obstacles. The opinion of society was that unless they were rich enough to have uninterrupted leisure time, women should treat writing as just a hobby and concetrate on their domestic duties as a wife, mother, daughter or sister. Another difficulity was the risk of spoiling a good reputation. Through the 18th century lots of women had joined 'Grub Street'- a term used to describe the world of London based hacks who scraped a living by writing for low-grade publishers and therefore increased the risk that women with literary ambitions would be judged in the same way as the

female authors who churned out 'bawdy romances' or wrote for the scandal sheets.

A woman's reputation was so important that female authors were judged by both critics and the public as much on how respectable they were as what they wrote. Whether or not they were writers, women were expected to live a modest and reserved life. Relatively new ideas about gender difference meant that women were now seen as'special creatures' whose naturel area of expertise was the home, the emotions and guiding moral conduct. Women who flexed their intellectual muscles by writing boks that dealt with ideas or Political themes rather than charming heroines and romantic intrigue were seen as a dangerous threat to the status quo.

Like many middle-class women, Jane Austen chose to balance her love of writing and the need to stick to moral codes by remaining anonymous throughout her career as an author-it was only just after she died that her name was made public. She also stayed in line with convention by writing about 'safe' subjects. Her stories focused on domestic and emotional matters: family, love and marriage, and her plots generally centred on young female characters learning (eventually) how to be beter person. But although Jane Austen used her talent in an extremely modest manner by nodern standarts, the point is that she ignored the prejudice against female authors and started to write. As an unmarried woman, she particulary enjoyed the chance to earn her own money-with careers closed to them, women in her position normally had to rely on male relatives for financial support.

Jane Austen started to write at a time when the Romantic Movement was expressing its passionate involvement with the landscape, in particular, the melancholic aspects of gothic ruins, and the natural world in general. She was one of the few writers to adopt an irreverent attitude to this obsession. Edward Ferrars, speaking to the impressionable

Marianne, in *Sense and Sensibility* admits his confussion when attempting to describe a picturesque landscape and when Henry Tilney decides to lecture on the picturesque to Catherine, in *Northanger Abbey*, she "was so hopeful a scholarthat when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape."

In many ways, Jane Austen's detached, ironic style was an antithesis of the Romantic ideal. Many people have commented on the modernity of her novels. Elizabeth Bowen in English Novelists (Collins,1946), suggests this comment is "an agreeable way of saying that she is stil some distance ahead of us."

She followed in the wake of the success of Fielding and Richardson and her sense of comedy and style has been likened to that of Fielding. She is noted for the precision of her observations. Her attention to detail is ameans to enlighten a subject. As Elizabeth Bowen notes "she applies big truths to little scenes".

CHAPTER I

3. ANALYSIS OF JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

3.1. INFLUENCE OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL IN *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

Most of Jane Austen's novels are based on the interaction between a character and his or her society. The novel Sense and Sensibility is no exception to this rule either. In this book austen shows the degradation of the Dashwoods in their own home by John Dashwood and his snobbish wife Fanny .In this situation , Austen proves that the rich and powerful have influence over those less fortunate.

When Mr Dashwood dies leaving a wife and three children Mr and Mrs John Dashwood waste no time in moving into her new home and degrading the Dashwood sisters and mother to the condition of visitors. Thus making the long time occupants of the house humiliated and disgraced. Although John Dashwood shows some signs of compassion for his stepsisters and mother, the main antagonist, Fanny Dashwood , shows no such kindness.

Fanny Dashwood, wife of John Dashwood has always been rich and powerful. She is also especially influential over her husband ,the new owner of Norland. She eventually convinces her husband that the three Dashwood sisters and mother really do not need as much money per year than the late Mr Dashwood allocated. Her argument in favor of keeping the money for herself was for the little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. However unselfish this argument might seem it is probable that Fanny Dashwood did this out of pure selfishness to get the money and be more powerful than she was before.

In the novel *Sense and Sensibility* Fanny and John Dashwood prove that the power of greed and selfishness can degrade people as good as the Dashwood sisters and mother to mere nothingness in their own home. Fanny Dashwood tries to support her actions of greed and selfishness by saying that the money should be for her son instead but really her reactions are for purely selfish reasons, not caring at all for the Dashwood sisters and mothers.

3.2. ANALYSIS OF *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

In Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, the two main characters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood represent sense and sensibility, respectively.Webster's Dictionary defines sense as practical intelligence; reasonable thought; something sensible or reasonable. Elinor Dashwood fits into the definition of the word perfectly. She is down-to-earth, sensible, practical, and rational. The dictionary defines sensibility as capacity for feeling; mental susceptibility; capacity for being affected emotionally or intellectually. Like her sister, Marianne Dashwood fits into this definition quite well. She is ruled by her emotions and has delicate and sensitive feelings. As sisters,the two girls are very close and sometimes very much alike but more often than not, as different as night and day .

Elinor Dashwood is the eldest of the two sisters. She fits the common stereotype of the eldest being the practical and rational sibling. She doesn't often let her emotions show and often has to make up for Marianne's shortcomings, caused by her overactive emotions. Marianne is a very emotional girl who has a dramatic opinion on everything. She lets her emotions and her heart lead her, instead of her mind. Upon leaving their dear home, Norland, Marianne exclaims

> "Oh!Happy house,could you know what I suffer in not viewing you from this spot, from whence perhaps I may view you no more!" (Page 23)

Although Elinor is also saddened at having to leave Norland, she quietly keeps it to herself, while her sister bursts forth a sorrowful goodbye.

The flighty emotionality of Marianne can be instantly seen upon the arrival of

John Willoughby. She instantly falls in love with him and becomes obsessed with everything that has anything to do with him. She has no qualms about expressing the fact that she very much enjoys spending time with him, for she "abhors all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve"(Page 45)

She heartlessly laughs at the affections of Colonel Brandon to which Elinor responds that he"is a sensible man; and sense will always have attractions for her"(Page 43). Here we see a sharp contrast between the two sisters. Marianne wildly loves the charming and handsome Willoughby, while Elinor likes the sensible, quiet Colonel Brandon.

So in love is Marianne that she abandons all her common sense. When Willoughby offers her a horse she immediately acceps not taking into account all that goes into the ownership of a horse. And even when the sensible Elinor points out the complications of accepting such a gift Marianne is "most unwilling .....to comprehend all the unhappy truths which attend the affair"(Page 49).

When Willoughby suddenly and abruptly leaves the Dashwoods and goes to London Marianne is heartbroken and shows her sorrowful emotions quite freely. Being the emotional girl that she is "Marianne is in all probability not merely giving way to .....violent sorrow...as a relief but feeding and encouraging it as a duty"(Page 66). She mopes around, doesn't eat much and cries a lot. She thinks it would be "very inexcusable had she been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby"(Page 71). Not only does she feel genuine sorrow on Willoughby's departure,but she also thinks it's her duty to feel that way.

Marianne knows how much her sister likes Edward Ferrars. But Elinor acts

differently around him than Marianne acts around Willoughby. She remains composed and keeps her thoughts and feelings to herself. She notices that when Edward comes to visit at Barton, he is not himself, but she says nothing and doesn't obsessand worry over it as Marianne would. And when Edward must take his leave of them, Elinor remains calm and(outwardly)unemotional. She busies herself with other matters and doesn't shut herself off from tou unhappy. But Marianne doesn't understand her sister's lack of concern, for"such behavior as this, so exactly the reverse of her own, appeared no more meritorious to Marianne, than her own had seemed faulty to her"(Page 90).

Elinor again shows her calm rationality when she hears of Edward's secret engagement to Lucy Steele. She is angry and saddened but quietly listens to all that Lucy tells her regarding the engagement. Afterwards, she carefully considers all that Lucy has told her, and she endeavors to discover more by engaging Lucy in private conversation once again. Elinor cleverly and carefully extracts from Lucy the information she wants to know. Unlike Marianne, she doesn't fly into a passion over the matter but ponders in her heart all that she has recently learned. Marianne can't stand Mrs Jennings, but when Mrs Jennings invites the Dashwood sisters to town with her, Marianne immediately declares she will go and that she can easily put up with the woman. However, her only desire and goal is to be closer to Willoughby. Elinor cannot ignore the "rapture of delightful expectation which fills the whole soul and beams in the eyes of Marianne"(Page 137). Marianne is very much excited about seeing Willoughby and doesn't try to hide it. But tremendousis her grief when Willoughby ignores her and then acts as if he

had never had any affection for her. His cold-hearted note to her breaks her heart and for many weeks she is sick with with grief. She, somewhat selfishly, refuses to participate in various affairs with Elinor and is sad and downtrodden.

She doesn't leave the house for several weeks, both because she has no desire to seek amusement and because she doesn't want to accidentally rub into Willougby. So sensitive is she that she wallows in her grief for a long period of time before beginning to return to herself.

When Elinor and Marianne meet Mrs Ferrars, she is quite rude to Elinor and very nice and polite to Lucy Steele. But Elinor refuses to be bothered by it, for it is not in "Mrs Ferrars power to distress her by it…and the difference of her manners to the Miss Steeles…only amuses her"(Page 203). However, Marianne will not stand for this and she honorably defends her sister against the subtle remarks against her. "Urged by a strong impulse of affectionate sensibility, she moved …to her sister's chair….and said 'Dear,dear Elinor ,don't mind them.Don't let them make you unhappy"(Page 207). At which point she burst into tears. If their roles had been reversed, Elinor would have sensibly defended her sister by steering the conversation to another point, instead of retorting back and then becoming overwhelmed with emotion. This is a perfect example of how the two sisters are so different. While Elinor bears the criticism silently and calmly, her sister must react passionately.

Fanny is quite distressed by the news that her brother Edward is going to marry Lucy. Being related to her, Elinor sees it her duty to go and see how she is doing, even though she can't stand the woman. This is typical, practical

Elinor, dutifully doing what is right. Marianne, however, who is "not contended with absolutely refusing to go herself, is very urgent to prevent her sister's going at all"(Page 256). Marianne doesn't see the point of visiting a woman whom she despises, be she relative or not. Again, Marianne is following her emotions and sensibilities rather than her duties and common sense.

At Cleveland, Marianne again abandons her senses by walking around in the damp and cold and then sitting around in wet clothes and shoes. As a result, she becomes quite ill. Elinor is very worried about her, but keeps her head and dutifully attends to her sister night and day. While Marianne is ill, Willoughby unexpectedly shows up. He tells Elinor all the particulars of why he broke Marianne's heart and how much he regrets what he had to do. He begs forgiveness and asks Elinor to tell Marianne the whole story. Elinor doesn't cry for her sister, as Marianne would have done, but she does feel a little more compassionate for Willoughby.

At the end of the novel, there are two instances when the sisters reverse roles, when Marianne acts as Elinor would and vice versa. Upon finally returning home to Barton, Marianne tells Elinor that she is finally at peace with herself and can move on and forget Willoughby. After hearing what Willoughby told Elinor she can finally leave the past behind and forgive him for what he did. This is the kind of sensible action that we would normally see in Elinor. But just as we see a little sense in Marianne, we also see a little sensibility in Elinor. She had been struggling for quite sometime with the distress of Edward's engagement to Lucy. But Edward visits Barton and informs the Dashwoods that Lucy has married his

brother Robert and that he is no longer engaged. So incredibly happy is Elinor, that she runs out of the room, "and as soon as the door is closed, bursts into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease"(Page 316). This is just as Marianne would react in such a situation. This proves that though the two sisters are very much different in their thoughts and actions, they are also very much the same. Marianne Dashwood is a sensitive, emotional and compassionate girl. Elinor Dashwood is a practical, rational and sensible girl. These two sisters each have, their own personalities, all their own. As a result, the two girls are good complements to eachother. Elinor's sense balances Marianne's sensibility. And while Marianne will always be the sister with the strong sensibilities, and Elinor will always be the sister with the strong sense, they will always have a little bit of the other sisterin themselves.

3.3 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EMMA'S BEHAVIOUR IN THE NOVEL

Throughout *Emma* by Jane Austen, the main character, Emma Woodhouse, undergoes what has often been referred to as 'a journey of self-knowledge'. Whilst Miss Woodhouse may have had many flaws in her disposition at the beginning of the novel, these faults appear to fade into insignificance as Emma truly recognises and repents the rash actions that she has previously made. In many ways, this chance for the beter in Emma's character endears her to the reader, and, in general, leads one to be sympathetic towards her. However, the main traits in Emma's character and the fact that she"has rather too much her own way and a disposition to think a little too well of herself"can also lead one to be unsympathetic toward Emma – particularly when put in conjunction with her selfish attitudes towards those of lesser social standing than herself.

Austen's opening sentence appears to give the reader quite a clear description of Emma: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence…". Emma's "happy disposition" inclines the reader to think of her as neither spoilt nor smug, but as a friendly person. However, the central use of the word "seemed", tends to indicate that Miss Woodhouse's life may not be quite as wonderful under the surface. One is made aware of some of the faults and imperfections in Emma's character in the same chapter: "The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself "These faults are added to by

Emma's "doing just what she liked"and being, in all things, "directed chieflyby her own judgement".

Nevertheless, one must understand that one reason for Emma's strong-willed, dominant personality it that she has never really had to look at herself and her behaviour. "Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct rememberance of her caresses" so had no real input in her daughter's life-leaving her, since the age of twelve as "mistress of the house". Her governess, the "gentle"Miss Taylor, was "highly esteemed" by Emma-yet she never had any real power over Emma other than as a friend. Emma's doting father also liked only to think of his youngest daughter as "perfect". "Mr Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them". A clear example of this is in relation to Emma's 'matchmaking'of Miss Taylor and Mr Weston-she boasts, "I made the match myself"-yet Mr Knightley reprimands her, putting her 'skills' down to "a lucky guess".

Miss Woodhouse's persistence in matchmaking can be seen by the reader as an example of her need for a sense of power and control over others. Her reference to it "being the greatest amusement in the world" and saying to her father "I promise you to make none for myself...but I must, indeed, for other people", seems to show that Emma looks down on others _and feels that, being first in consequence in Highbry, she has some authority to direct their lives. However, in the first chapter, Austen offers some reasons for Emma's actions. One reads that Emma "was now in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude" after the

departure of Miss Taylor and that her "valetudinarian" father's talents "could not have recommended him at any time". Emma was therefore lonely_one is also told that "Her sister ....was much beyond her daily reach", and that "Highbury...affordedher no equals". It appears to be through her attempts at matchmaking that Emma tries to focus on the lives of others rather than concentrating on her own problems and frustrations.

Emma is very caring for her father, always contriving to "make up a card-table for him" and arranging for "the chosen and best to dine with him"_yet she appears to do this at her own expense. Whilst she is invaribly "delighted to see her father look comfortable", she describes the time as "the long evening that she had fearfully anticipated." However, it is at one of these evenings that Emma gets to now Harriet Smith-"the natural daughter somebody". Emma appears very taken with Miss Smith, "who she had long felt an interest in, on account of her beauty" –and begins to plan Harriet's future before even meeting her properly. This is an example of Emma's domineering personality. She realises that Harriet is vulnerable in her position as an illegitimate child, recognises that this factor (coupled with Miss Smith's social status and dubious upbringing) gives Emma clear authority and considerable influence over her. Emma is condescending toward Harriet, deciding that the "humble, grateful little girl" "deserves encouragement" and that "improving"Miss Smith "would be an interesting and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming Emma's own situation in life...."

Emma appears to the reader to think that she is higher and beter than everyone else is –and has very inflated views on herself. This snobbish attitude is clearly reflected in Emma's description of Harriet as a "useful"walking companion; implying that she sees Harriet almost as a commodity. She depersonalises her –"a Harriet Smith", "exactly the somethingwhich her home required"-almost makes her an object-there to serve Miss Woodhouse's needs. This considered however, Emma has rather contradicting and deluded views on Harriet Smith- calling her

"a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect". The selfish component in Emma's character comes across particularly clearly to the reader concerning Harriet. It is obvious that Emma wants Miss Smith all to herself, and to achieve this, attempts to alienate her from all her close friends for example, she describes the Martins as "coarse and unpolished" unfit society for Harriet to be seen in whilst Emma's particular friend. Emma also does everything in her power to try and put Harriet off Robert Martin she realises that if they should wed, Emma would again be alone and in the same position as after Miss Taylor left. Miss Woodhouse manipulates Harriet by getting to know all the information that she can about Mr Martin and then she turns the conversation around on its head by slyly putting Mr Martin down. In this way, Emma is using the scheming side of her character to achieve her own aims. Among other things, she says that Mr Martin, "a young farmer", is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity" that he "is too young to settle" and has an "awkward look and abrupt manner", which can in no way compare to the refined manners of Mr

Knightley. Insult upon social insult is heaped on the farmer's shoulders, with Emma rounding off by commenting that "his being illiterate and coarse….", "vulgar….and inattentive" "….need not disturb us".(A very similar situation occurs when Robert Martin later proposes to Harriet via letter). Emma exercises her keen desire for power again in this situation over Harriet's naivety and limited intelligence by hinting at the beginnings of a match between Harriet and Mr Elton. Emma muses to herself that "Mr Elton was the very person…..for driving the young farmer, Robert Martin, out of Harriet's head".

As has been already mentioned, Mr Knightley is the only person who openly criticises Emma. He particularly criticises the relationship that she has formed with Harriet Smith, saying that "I think they will neither of them do the other any good" and that she is "the very worst sort of companion that Emma could possibly have". Mr Knightley also dwells on the important question: "How can Emma imagine that she has anything to learn herself while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority?" This is a significant reflection on Emma's character, as Mr Knightley has known Emma well since birth and the reader can therefore rely upon his judgement.

In contriving the match between Mr Elton and Miss Smith, Emma (unknowingly at the time) increases the potential for emotional pain on Harriet's part. Emma becomes so wrapped up in her own fantasies for Harriet and Mr Elton, that she doesn't appear to realise how much she is deluding both herself and her friend. Emma "was quite convinced of Mr Elton's being in the fairest way of falling in love, if not in love already", even when the vicar had hardly ever seen let alone

knew Harriet.Emma decides to "take Harriet's likeness" in order to encourage Mr Elton's interest in her subject yet she fails to notice that she herself is the sole object of Mr Elton's attentions. He directly praises her art work with exaggerated compliments, "She (Harriet) was a beautiful creature when she came to you, but, in my opinion, the attractions you have added are infinitely superior to what she received from nature"etc... yet Emma somehow misunderstands these many compliments to be directed at Harriet. Emma even fails to realise that Mr Elton's offer to personally see to having her picture framed is to flatter herself rather than Miss Smith. By the end of the chpter six, Emma has deluded herself to the point where she truly believes that Mr Elton is in love with Harriet; "This man is almost too gallant to be in love....but I suppose there may be a hundred different ways of being in love. He is an excellent young man and will suit Harriet exactly..."
Chapter eight is the first point in the novel when Emma appears to reflect on her actions. She and Mr Knightley argue over Emma's treatment of Harriet and the suitability of Robert Martin to marry her. The reader realises that ,in truth, Emma was in the wrong, yet she is still too stubborn and headstrong to admit this either to herself or to Mr Knightley. However, one can perceivethat Emma is beginning to change beginning to actually listen and take in what Mr Knightley is telling her: "she did not repent what she had done ...but yet she had a sort of habitual respect for Mr Knightley's judgement in general, which made her dislike having it so loudly against her".

It is only when Mr Elton proposes To Emma insisting that he is only responding to encouragement given that Emma 'comes to her senses' from her own ambitions

positions are not all that makes up a person, and this theme, among others, develops in the second and third volumes of the novel.

3.4. ANALYSIS OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

It was published early in 1813, anonymously, though Austen's authorship soon became known beyond the family circle. It was very well received;for example,Byron's future wife,Anne Isabella Milbanke ,considered it to be "the fashionable novel" of the season.It seems to have been widely read and discussedin fashionable and literary society.

Pride and Prejudice takes another pair of sisters but puts the outgoing one, Elizabeth Bennet, more into the foreground,while keeping the silent suffering one,Jane,much more in the background.Property inheritance again becomes a major factor in the destiny of these two along with their three younger sisters Mary,Kitty and Lydia for their father's small estate is entailed to the nearest male relative,the Reverend William Collins.Entailmentwas the kind of injustice against women that Wollstonecraft and other Revolutionary feminists had criticized sharply,for it forced to make their fortune the only way open to them by speculating on the marriage market.Mr Bennet has also committed an error attacked by feminists of the time giving into the influence courtly erotic culture and marrying a woman who has merely beautiful and lacking in the intellectual and moral resources necessary to support her own social position with dignity and

for Harriet. It is only when this occurs that Emma realises that she has to take a serious look at herself and at what she has done to her friend. “Here have I’said she, “actually talked poor Harriet into being very much attached to this man. She might never have thought of him but for me….’”.Miss Woodhouse also begins to come to terms with the consequences of her matchmaking attempts: “It was foolish , it was wrong to take such an active part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more”. It is interesting to note here that this attitude to matchmaking is the opposite of Emma’s view at the beginning of the novel where she referrers to it as “the greatest amusement in the world” it was almost like a gamet o pass the time. This clearly shows that Emma has come a long way along her ‘journey of self-knowledge’ Miss Woodhouse however, has at this point yet to break the news of Mr Elton’s departure to Harriet. It is when she reflects on this that Emma seems to truly realise that even with all her money, social standing and accomplishments, she is really no better than Harriet after what she has put her friend through:

“….convinced that Harriet was the superior creature of the two and that to resemble her would be more for her own welfare and happiness than all that genius or intelligence could do”. It is clear to the reader how Emma’s attitudes toward others have changed especially her opinions of those of lower social standing than herself. She appears to realise that material possessions and social

discretion,to be a true friend and companion to her husband,and to raise children especially children themselves utterly dependent on such inner resources.Closed up in his gentleman's library for much of the time,Mr Bennet does not even pass on his own knowledge and discrimination to his children,except to his favorite,Elizabeth.Fortunately Elizabeth and Jane have also spent time with some cultivated relations,the Gardiners,who were formerly in the ungenteel mercantile middle class.Of the other sisters, Mary is a junior pedant, Kitty is impressionable, and Lydia is a mere ambitious coquette.

When Mr Bingley, a wealthy young man also from an ungenteel background,rents a nearby manor and arrives with his sister and a friend.Mrs.Bennet's notion that well-managed intrigue will get her daughters husbands seems to have promise. Bingley seems to be falling in love with Jane, despite the condescending discouragement of his sister and the aloof disapproval of his friend, Mr Darcy. Elizabeth resents their intrusion, especially Mr Darcy's. The Reverend Mr Collins shows up determined to marry one of the Bennet girls and thereby make some recompense for the harsh terms of the entail. For their part, Lydiaand Kitty are delighted with the prospects offered by some officers quartered nearby. A young militia officer, Mr Wickham, seems especially attracted to Elizabeth and she is more disposed to return his regard after he tells her Darcy has treated him unjustly. When the recently arrived Mr Collins learns Jane is already in love he proposes immediately to Elizabeth, who refuses his offer because she cannot love him. Shortly thereafter, however,he is accepted by Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas, whom Elizabeth knows to have too much sense not to see that Collins is a

fool.Disillusioned, Elizabeth decides that Charlotte has merely sold herself on the marriage market. When Bingley and his party leave suddenly for London, she concludes that Darcy has talked Bingley out of proposing to Jane. Jane visits the Gardiners in London, where she is treated with mere formal politeness by Miss Bingley, who suggests that her brother is to marry Darcy's sister. Learning that Wickham is courting an heiress merely for her money, Elizabeth is completely disillusioned: all except her sister Jane seem mere courtly and self-interested intriguers, and she can only congratulate herself on not being taken in.

Elizabeth meets Darcy by accident, however, while visiting Charlotte and Mr Collins, who has a living on the estate of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a haughty snob ad Darcy's aunt. Elizabeth is dumbfounded when Darcy suddenly proposes to her and angrily rejects him, accusing him of seperating Bingley and Jane and of being unjust to Wickham. The next day he gives her a letter explaining and justifying his conduct; at first Elizabeth believes it must be false, but gradually she comes to accept the truth of everything Darcy says. Ashamed, she admits that until this moment she never knew herself, and she now sees all the characters and incidents to this point in the story in a new light. Structurally, this scene is the center of the novel. It is clear to the reader, if not entirely clear to Elizabeth, that she and Darcy would be a match, and the plot now turns to repairing the breach between them.

Against Elizabeth's advice, Mr Bennet allows Lydia to visit the family of one of the officers, who are at the fashionable resort of Brighton, somewhat notorious at that time as the preferred haunt of the Prince of Wales. Elizabeth herself goes on a

tour with the Gardiners through scenic Derbyshire. The Gardiners want to visit Darcy's estate of Pemberley, and when they learn that he is absent, Elizabeth agrees. They are shown over the house, and the house-keeper gives them a glowing report of it's master's character and conduct. The Gardiners are surprised, but Elizabeth has more reason than ever to regret her prejudice against the man. When Darcy returns unexpectedly he is all hospitality and prospects for a new understanding seem to be opening. But these possibilities seem dashed when Elizabeth hears that her sister Lydia has eloped from Brighton with Wickham, who is unlikely to marry someone with little money. By the social conventions of the time the "ruin" of Lydia will affect the marriageability of all her sisters. Distressed at this news, Elizabeth blurts it out to Darcy, and Mr Gardiner leaves to help Mr Bennet track down the couple. Later the Bennets learn that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia and surmise that he has been bribed to do so by Mr Gardiner. But Elizabeth learns that Darcy arranged everything. When the Bingleys and Darcy return to the neighborhood, Bingley and Jane quickly resume their love for one another and become angaged. To Elizabeth's surprise, however, Lady Catherine de Bourgh arrives and haughtily tries to extract a promise from Elizabeth that she will not marry Darcy. As happens to such domineering intriguers, her aim is undermined by her own actions: Darcy learns of Elizabeth's standing up to his aunt, and to Elizabeth's further surprise though not the reader's he comes to propose again. This time he is accepted. In a characteristic final comic touch, Mrs Bennet is ecstatic at the accomplishment of more than she could have imagined in her plans to marry off her daughters.

In its plot, incidents, and characters *Pride and Prejudice* is an interesting variation on the novel of manners and sentiment. But its originality more obviously than in Sense and Sensibility or Northanger Abbey is in its manipulation of the triangular relationship between narrator, protagonist and reader. As in the earlier novels, the omniscient narrator retains the power to withhold information from the reader and restrict access to the consciousness of characters other than the protagonist. By being let fully into Elizabeth's mind but virtually excluded from all others, the reader is meant to develop a sympathetic identification with Elizabeth's character and judgements. Thus when Elizabeth realizes in the middle of the novel that she, who prided herself on her perspicacity, has been mistaken about all the main points, her confidence in her ability to "read"her world is seriously shaken. Similarly, the reader, who might feel confidently able to decode the story correctly but who has fallen in with Elizabeth's reading, will feel an analogous humiliation. Chastened, though in different ways, Elizabeth and the reader continue their adventures in the text, but it becomes increasingly apparent to the reader that Elizabeth's abandonment of any hope for a return from Darcy is yet another mistake in her "reading"of him and herself. The narrator, too, who has been fairly non-committal about Elizabeth's "readings"in the early part of the novel, becomes more ironic in the later part. In short, the novel constructs an exercise in reading for both protagonist and reader, and manipulates narrative so as to make the reader conscious of the fallibility and precariousness of reading of any kind. Again, it would not be going too far to see this exercise in terms of

Austen's deeply held Anglican faith and its theologyof the imperfection yet improvability though not perfectibility of humankind.

3.5. ANALYSIS OF *MANSFIELD PARK*

In Mansfield Park Austen returns to a heroine who, like elinor Dashwood is right-thinking but socially disregarded from the outset. Fanny Price is one of a large and impecunious family at Portsmouth. Her mother is one of three once-famous beauties, though her sisters married beter than she one, Mrs Norris, to a country clergyman and the other, Lady Bertram, to a baronet, the owner of the large estate of Mansfield Park. After the death of her husband, Mrs Norris, who resides near the Bertrams, persuades Sir Thomas Bertram to take in their niece Fanny. Separated from her family and especially her beloved brother William, Fanny remains an outcast at Mansfield, condescended to by her cousins Tom, Maria, and Julia, though her kind cousin Edmund protects her and guides her education. Not surprisingly, she comes to love him for it. Her uncle Sir Thomas leaves to attend to his plantations in Antigua. In the absence of the father the others in the family soon drift into one folly or another, abetted by Mrs Norris, who dotes on her wealthy nieces and nephews while treating Fanny like a servant.

Maria becomes engaged to Mr Rushworth, a wealthy neighboring gentleman whose name accurately represents his moral and intellectual value. All the Bertrams become intrigued by Henry and Mary Crawford, a fashionable brother

and sister who are visiting their half sister Mrs Grant, wife of the local vicar, himself an old-style clergyman more interested in the pleasures of the tablet han in the cure of souls. Together the young people visit Rushworth's estate of Sotherton Court, the name of which, more "southern" or Mediterranean than English fashionableness(or ton)pervading the values of all but Fanny and Edmund. The outing is ostensibly to discuss Rushworth's planned "improvements"or ornamental additions to his estate but new love interests and flirtations develope quickly in the symbolically sultry weather. While the Bertram sisters become rivals in flirting with Henry, Edmund becomes fascinated by Mary, who is, however, dismayed to learn that as the second son he intends to take up a profession in the church. Fanny remains a silently suffering spectator. When Tom brings to Mansfield his vacuous friend Yates, the young people catch the contemporary fad for amateur theatricals and plan to perform Lovers'Vows,a translation of August von Kotzebue's Das Kind der Liebe(1791,The Love Child). The play is a dubious choice for several reasons. It represents illicit love; it celebrates romantic subjectivity in the face of social convention, in a way that had already given such "German plays" a bad reputation in respectable English society; and it will enable the young people at Mansfield to make love speeches to eachother that social convention would prohibit them from making in their real characters. Fanny, significantly, wishes to decline any part in it.

Sir Thomas's sudden return from the West Indies puts a stop to these follies though he allows Maria to marry Rushworth . The next movement of the story focuses on Fanny, who begins to be more noticed by everyone. Mary Crawford

tries to make her a confidante regarding Mary's infatuation for Edmund, which she feels is impeded by Edmund's determination to become a "mere"country clergyman. Fanny is treated with consideration by Sir Thomas and with friendly solicitude by Edmund, all to Mrs Norris's disgust. Even Henry Crawford now finds her interetsing enough to wish that he could make her fall in love with him. Fanny's only real delight, however, is in a visit from her beloved sailor brother, whose career is being promoted by Sir Thomas. To Henry's surprise, he finds himself actually falling in love with Fanny and persuades his uncle, an admiral, to arrange William's promotion to lieutenant. Henry then proposes to Fanny, and the connection between the two actions suggests the kind of leverage used in the patronage system rather than a disinterested courtship. To Sir
Thomas's anger and Mary's surprise fanny rejects Henry, whom she sees as merely a courtly seducer. To remind Fanny of the degrading life that awaits her if she does not change her mind and accept Henry, Sir Thomas sends her to her vulgar parents'home in Portsmouth. Henry visits her there and despite his apparent sincerity she finds she stil cannot love him, or will not.

The denouement now unfolds as the Bertram family seems to disintegrate. When Tom Bertram falls seriously ill Mary writes to Fanny and reveals her true character by expressing the hope that Tom's death will clear the way for Edmund to become heir to Mansfield and thus the kind of catch Mary wants. The recent bride Maria runs off with Henry and Julia elopes with Yates. Mary's inability to see Maria and Henry's adultery as morally serious, rather than just socially damaging, shocks Edmund out of his fascination for her. When Fanny returns to

Mansfield to lend what comfort she can, even the indolent Lady Bertram is relieved by her presence. Fanny is still the shyly feminine person she has always been, but now, amid so many crises, her steadiness of character and moral authority begin to be recognized by all she is indeed a woman of "price"in the sense of intrinsic value. Tom's brush with death sobers him into a greater sense of moral and social responsibility and Fanny marries Edmund. They will continue to sustain Mansfield Park and will spread their wedded virtues through-local society from the nearby, and again aptly named, vicarage of Thornton Lacey uniting the symbol of Christ's sacrifice with an ornament of upper-class dress.

Mansfield Park embodies the timeliest possible message for the novel-reading public of the early Regency and the late stages of the long struggle with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Mansfield Park is a figure for England or Britain as rural, leisured and cultivated but with heavy social, economic and imperial responsibilities that must be carefully tended and reinvigorated in each generation. It is also a "mansefield"a field for the inspiriting influence of the manse of domestic home of the established church and its theology of true faith, or ideological correctness and good works or social responsibility and leadership. This home is of course presided over by a woman, the heart of the nation according to an increasingly powerful ideology of domestic woman as repository and nurturer of the national soul, conscience, culture and destiny.

3.6. ANALYSIS OF *EMMA*

In Emma Austen again reverses the character of her heroine, for Emma Woodhouse is quite unlike Fanny Price, subjectively and socially. Emma is the belle of her neighborhood beautiful, young and wealthy, the younger and unmarried daughter of a querulous hypochondriac widower. Emma's education was supervised by a kindly governess, Miss Taylor, now married to a neighboring gentleman, Mr Weston. Miss Taylor was more of a friend than a preceptor, and Emma's mind is neither well stocked nor well trained. She has therefore become an "imaginist", a fictionist or romancer of real life, speculating incorrectly on the characters and intentions of others while presuming on her native talents and her social power to arrange their lives. She prides herself, for example, on having brought about the marriage of Miss Taylor and Mr Weston. Emma has been freer than ever to indulge in her brand of local patronage since the marriage of her older sister, Isabella, to John Knightley, aLondon lawyer and younger brother of a local landed gentleman. This gentleman as his name suggests-Knightley is the knight's ley, or field-epitomizes the best of the rural landed class and its modern chivalric, moral-and-ethical culture. Not surprisingly he is the only person who dares try to correct Emma's character and point out her errors.

He has his work cut out for him. Soon after the novel opens Emma is already planning another match, between the local clergyman Mr Elton and Emma's new protégéé, Harriet Smith. An impressionable boarding-school girl, Harriet is an illegitimate child of unknown parentage, and Emma imagines she must be the

love child of some nobleman. Harriet is attracted to Mr Martin, a yeoman farmer and tenant of Mr Knightleys. Knightley thinks Harriet and Martin would make a good couple, but Emma insists on a higher destiny for her client and discourages the match, to Knightley's chagrin.(Yet he and Emma do work well together in smoothing relations between her father and Knightley's brother.) Emma's plans for Harriet and Elton are disastrously though comically overset, however, when Elton mistakes Emma's interest as a sign of love for him. Emboldened by too much wine, he proposes. After Emma explains that she has intended him for the lowly Harriet, Elton is offended and goes off to Bath. Chastened, Emma resolves to give up matchmaking.

Yet her imagination is already at work on Frank Churchill, Weston's son by his previous marriage, long ago adopted by a wealthy, childless uncle and aunt. He is soon expected to pay a courtesy call to his father and new stepmother. Frank does not appear on schedule, apparently detained by his imperious aunt. Another visitor arrives, however-the beautiful and talented, but impecunious, Jane Fairfax, orphan granddaughter of a clergyman's widow, Mrs Bates, who lives in straitened circumstances with her unmarried daughter. While she recognizes her social and material superiority to Jane, Emma feels shamed by Jane's superiority of mind and evident discipline of character. When Frank arrives, Emma is attracted to him and realizes that the Westons hope she can be drawn into marriage with him, but Knightley finds Frank to be an extravagant and self-willed flirt. Emma is further chagrined when Elton returns with a bride who, as a married woman, takes social precedence over Emma. When Elton rudely snubs Harriet at a ball, Knightley

comes to the rescue and when Harriet is later harassed by some gypsies she is rescued by Frank. Emma now projects a match between Frank and Harriet and encourages her young friend not to be deterred from falling in love with a man above her socially, but Knightley suspects some secret between Frank and Jane. Meanwhile, Mrs Elton, a snobbish busybody, finds a situation as governess for Jane. When the company goes on an outing to Box Hill Frank flirts with Emma and, made careless by his attention, she insults Miss Bates, who dares not stand up to her. Knightley is shocked, and his reproof gives Emma real pain. She realizes she has abused her social position and responsibility, and in a characteristic act of self-abnegation calls on Miss Bates by way of apology.

The death of the dictatorial Mrs Churchill seems to free her nephew to follow his own wishes in marriage. Emma now expects Frank may propose to Harriet, but a few weeks later she is amazed to learn that he and Jane have been secretly engaged for some time. Emma now fears the ill consequences of having again encouraged Harriet to love a man beyond her reach, but she is stunned to learn that Harriet thought Emma was encouraging her to think of Knightley, not Frank, and she has taken Knightley's kindness to her as a sign of love. With a sickening shock, Emma realizes that she herself loves Knightley and fears that Harriet's surmise may be right. When Knightley calls to console Emma, in case she has allowed herself to be taken in by Frank's flirtation, she at first prevents him from speaking because she thinks he is about to confess his love for Harriet. Then, in another act of self-sacrifice, she invites him to say what he had intended. With a third an deven greater shock Austen was playfully fond of the fairy-tale pattern of

threes Knightley confesses his love for Emma and hopes she can return his feeling. Characteristically, the narrator draws away from Emma's joy with a sudden turn of amused irony. Emma now has the unpleasant duty of telling Harriet, but it soon transpires that Harriet has been seeing Martin, with Knightley's encouragement, and is to marry him. It later turns out that Harriet's father is not a dashing aristocrat but a solid and unromantic tradesman. Emma's "novelizing" of those around her is completely exposed. If this book were a sentimental tale or a Gothic novel the consequences would be tragic; but in Austen's comic novel no real harm has been done. In fact, Emma's errors have helped to educate others, as well as herself, to their human fallibility, as one might expect in a novelistic universe ruled by a benevolent deity much like the one supposed by Austen's Anglican theology to preside over the natural universe.

Like its predecessor, Emma shows the centrality of domestic woman to a renewed nation led by a reformed professionalized gentry. Emma resembles heroines in other novels of the time, representing the socially divisive and destabilizing effect of a woman who lacks intellectual resources and moral discipline appropriate to her station and thus misuses her social power. Yet Austen characteristically gives a comic rather than pathetic or tragic cast to this story and greatly diminishes what is too commonly treated melodramatically by other writers. She also denies that extensive social reform is necessary to end the social evil caused by such vitiated female characters. In Austen's benign novelistic universe reform on the individual level is enough to effect social change, provided that a character can practice, in however small and local a way, the virtues of self-correction and self-abnegation,

which are in fact, for Austen, Christian and Anglican virtues. Further, the value of marriage, which is a sacrament as well as a property arrangement and legal contract, is shown in the fact that Knightley's more practiced ethical character will support Emma's continued spiritual growth and consequent social usefulness a much subtler echo of the conclusion to Eaton Stannard Barrett's spoof The Heroine; or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader(1813)which Austen had read in March 1814.

3.7. ANALYSIS OF *PERSUASION*

In this novel Austen returns to the silently suffering, stoical heroine disregarded by everyone who applies merely social criteria in judging others. Austen also presents more directly than before the problem, underlying *Mansfield Park*, of reconstructing Britain and its social leadership in the Revolutionary aftermath. Austen and a host of other writers were representing this reconstruction as a progressive dialectic of gentry and professionals, especially the elite professions to which Austen's brothers belonged. In *Mansfield Park* the estate (and state) dangerously divided within is purged of courtly and vulgar elements or at least such elements are put in their place and reinvigorated with merit "from below". In *Persuasion* an estate dangerously overextended morally, socially and financially is not so much reinvigorated as superseded by an estate acquired entirely on merit and able to take into itself the neglected best of the older estate(or state). Not surprisingly the representatives of merit are, like two of Austen's brothers, navy men.

The novel opens with the vain and vacuous widower, Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall, contemplating retrenchment of his estate, which his proud extravagance has run into debt. Moreover the estate, like that of Mr Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, is entailed on the nearest male relative. It will not go to any of Sir Walter's three daughter's unless one of them marries the heir at law. Sir Walter's youngest daughter, Mary, who has inherited his merely social values, has married a neighboring gentleman, Charles Musgrove, son and heir of a wealthy

squire. Sir Walter's projects are only for the elder, Elizabeth, who is as vain and superficial as her father. The middle daughter, Anne, is taken for granted by everyone, though the narrator lets the reader see that she is the only one with real inner resources and character, partly thanks to her older friend and adviser, Lady Russell. Reluctantly accepting the advice of his estate agent, Sir Walter agrees to let Kellynch to Admiral Croft and his wife, who are looking for a home now that war with France is over. Sir Walter looks down on such mere men of merit, rushed to prominence and even wealth by the vicissitudes of war. In fact eight years earlier he had, with the help of Lady Russell, persuaded Anne not to marry Mrs Croft's brother, Frederick Wentworth, a man unsuitable in rank and prospects for a daughter of a baronet. Fortunately the matter was kept secret from other members of both families at the time.

Sir Walter plans to take his family to Bath, where he can maintain his social standing without great expense and where his daughters will have enhanced prospects of finding husbands. He and Elizabeth leave for Bath first, while Anne spends time with her sister Mary's family, the Musgroves, mediating the differences and difficulties of various family members. When Wentworth, now a successful and wealthy man thanks to the fortunes of war, arrives to see the Crofts he evidently harbors resentment against Anne and gaily joins the circle of the sociable flirts Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove as Anne suffers in silence. Wentworth does her several small kindnesses, but he seems determined to value in a woman what he thinks Anne lacked by rejecting him, namely firmness of purpose. The party visits the seacoast town of Lyme Regis, where they meet

Wentworth's friends Captains Harville and Benwick. Benwick, who is staying with Harville and his family, is despondent over the death of his fiancée, Harville's sister. Anne continues to act as healer and counselor of other characters'upsets, such as Benwick's romantic grief, and while at Lyme Regis she finds herself being admired by a stranger, who turns out to be the heir to Kellynch, William Walter Eliot. After the impetuous Louisa Musgrove, to whom Wentworth seems drawn, suffers a serious accident because of her own careless folly, it is Anne who takes charge of the situation.

The next movement of the novel opens with Anne's arrival in Bath with Lady Russell to join her father and sister. There she finds William Walter Elliot paying court to her father, who stil hopes a marriage between the heir and Elizabeth will keep Kellynch in his line. Anne also finds the insinuating Mrs Clay, a vulgar older woman who seems determined to marry Sir Walter. Anne visits an old friend, Mrs Smith, now ill and living at Bath in straitened circumstances. Mrs Smith seems to know a good deal about William Walter Eliot, whom Anne finds hard to read and suspects of having a double character. Then the Crofts and Wentworth arrive at Bath, and Anne hears with surprise that the apparently heartbroken Benwick has become engaged to Louisa Musgrove. In the great set piece of the novel the various principal characters encounter each other at a concert, where Anne as usual devotes herself to the comfort of others. Later she learns from Mrs Smith that William Walter Elliot has a vicious character. He has come to Bath to head off Mrs Clay's designs on Sir Walter because he fears that a marriage between them might result in the male heir needed to keep Kellynch in Sir Walter's line.

The Bath party is enlarged when the Musgroves and Harvilles arrive. During one meeting Wentworth appears to be writing a letter for Harville discusses with Anne the differing perseverance of men and women easily turn to new love, Anne protests that men with their public duties and professional interestshave greater aid in overcoming loss, while women can only silently suffer and endure. When the party leaves, Wentworth comes back and puts a letter in Anne's hand; overhearing her talk with Harville he has realized that he has to ask once mere for her love. Anne is afraid she will find no chance to reassure him, but a chance meeting in the street affords the opportunity. This time Sir Walter and Lady Russell approve of the match; William Walter Elliot and Mrs Clay leave Bath together. The novel closes not on a note of narratorial irony and detachment but with a sense that despite present happiness, with Anne having to fear only some future outbreak of war, some years of conjugal joy and social usefulness have already been needlessly lost because of social prejudice and a feminine weakness in face of merely social persuasion.

3.8. ANALYSIS OF *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

Northanger Abbey is clearly in the line of the Burney novel of a young woman's first entrance into the world or rather "World", the common self-designation of narrow fashionable society as if it were to be equated with the whole of society. This narrow world is in fact the "political nation" those of property or incomes sufficient to give them a voice in national affairs, however indirect. This world overlaps with the world of the "reading public" those who can afford to rent or buy novels. This overlap is what gave novels such as Northanger Abbey their importance. Like a Burney novel, though in much shorter compass, with far fewer characters, incidents, and complications of plot, Nortanger Abbey sets a young protagonist in society peopled by both the fashionable and the vulgar. It follows her trials and errors in "reading"this world and negotiating through it to successful "establishment"there, as a woman married or about to be married to a "proper"man and thus with her otherwise hidden intellectual and moral merit recognized by and instrumental in the "World". Though such novels usually have a female protagonist, she serves as a symbolic device rather than a representation of actual women. There is evidence that as many men as women read novels, and the socially inexperienced novel protagonist may stand for either a man or woman of merit faced with a seductive social relative dominated by considerations other than intellectual and moral merit especially inherited wealth, rank, and power and operating by courtly intrigue and patronage. Furthermore, this protagonist's situation must have been common to many novel readers at the time; thus such

their own situation in a society and culture dominated by what seemed an “alien”, semifeudal system of court government, a system operating not through brute force but through the invisible agency of ideology and culture. In the 1790s, “English Jacobin”novelists such as Godwin and Wollstonecraft made the analogy between Gothic romance and the real world more explicit, borrowing elements of such romances to argue that “Gothic”(that is, medieval and feudal) oppression and tyranny were neither in the past nor mere fictional devices but present political reality.

Austen’s novel rejects “English Jacobin”political Gothicism. In the unfamiliar setting of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine does make a mistake in interpretation. As often occurs with such protagonists, her inner strength becomes her weakness. Lacking the worldly experience to chasten and direct her subjective power, her “natural”sympathy and imagination, she relies on what she has learned in reading novels and “reads” her present world as if it were that of a Gothic romance. She sees General Tilney as a domestic tyrant and Northanger as a facade for secret horrors. Henry Tilney recognizes her error and reminds her of the present social and political reality:

> *Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probably, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities (as she has imagined)?Do our laws continue at them?*

novels spoke to their real material interests and had powerful significance for them.

The protagonist of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland, is typical in these respects. Still in her teens and taken from her childhood home to stay with relatives in the fashionable spa of Bath, she and her brother James are taken up by Isabella and John Thorpe, social climbers who affect the fashionable cultures of female sensibility and male gallantry respectively. The Thorpes represent familiar types of upper-middle-class social emulation of their betters, resorting to deception and intrique to advance their own interests. While Isabella sets her cap at James, John Thorpe hurries Catherine into a semblance of courtship. Catherine's genuine personal merit, despite her lack of worldly experience, is noticed by Henry Tilney, younger son of the socially ambitious General Tilney. John Thorpe's attempt to impress the general by greatly exaggerating Catherine's fortune induces the general to consider her a suitable match for his son and to invite her to his estate, Northanger Abbey. The name is suggestive in several ways. Most obviously it echoes the titles of "Gothic romances". These are novels of description and place, in which residues of medieval culture intrude secretly into the present to exert power over the protagonist. Middle-class readers found these romances intensely interesting. In the imaginary world of Gothic romance such readers could feel, if not consciously perceive, an analogy between the plight of the the protagonist. Middle-class readers found these romances intensely interesting. In the imaginary world of Gothic romance such readers could feel, if not consciously perceive, an analogy between the plight of the protagonist and

Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where evry man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open?

This speech asserts a particular view of the present constitution of Britain and thus of British society. It is characteristic of Austen's rejection of novelistic excess of all kinds that Henry's perception of Catherine's error does not diminish the value of her character in his eyes, let alone lead him to reject her as a prospective wife that would be too characteristic of a mere novel.

As Henry soon discovers, Catherine's imaginings about his father truth. If not a Gothic tyrant, General Tilney is a modern equivalent, an ambitious squire aiming to advance his position by courtly intrique and manipulation of the marriage market. When he learns that Catherine is not the great heiress John Thorpe has led him to believe, he sends her packing. Meanwhile, Catherine's brother has been thrown over by Isabella Thorpe in pursuit of the beter material prospects offered by Captain Tilney, the general's older son and heir to Northanger Abbey. Austen retains the reformist criticism of courtliness and emulation as real social evils while rejecting the reformist global condemnation of "things as they are. "This double move is characteristic of post-Revolutionary literature. The move is formalized in the novel's plot by Catherine's disillusionment with the Thorpes and dismay at the general's inhumanity, Henry Tilney's confrontation with his father and decision to choose Catherine as a wife, and Catherine's prospective

re-creation, with subjective merit intact and even enhanced, as wife of a man able both to school her further in the ways of the "World"and to confer on her, as married woman, social validation of her subjective merit.

Austen's social criticism in *Northanger Abbey* is executed not only in the novel's "story"or structured sequence of incidents and related characters, but also in its "discourse"or composition and manner of telling. As with her political argument, Austen links critical reflection on the novel as a genre to the development of the individual's critical thought in general and thus to strengthening of domestic relations and society at large. It is no accident that *Northanger Abbey* includes the best-known comment in English on the novel. Imagining a "miss" apologizing, when caught reading a book, that it is "only a novel" the narrator comments sarcastically that it is "only"Frances Burney's Cecilla (1782) or Camilla (1796) or Maria Edgeworth's Belinda (1801) "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. "This comment could in fact be a reply to Edgeworth's prefatory remarks in Belinda, notifying the reader that the work is called a "tale"because "novel" has come to be associated with extravagant and seductive forms of fiction. Readers in her day would probably think of two different forms of fiction on one hand the fashionable novel glamorously depicting courtly decadence and on the other "English Jacobin"especially Revolutionary feminist, novels depicting emotional extravagance and social and political transgression. Both these kinds of fiction, it

was increasingly felt, disseminated false ideology and impractical models, undermining individual morality and thus the "domestic affections", the foundation of the state. The fact that these false fictions were associated with either French courtliness or French Revolutionary culture indicates the importance of the novel as an instrument of political communication.

Austen's move to correct the excesses of the 1790s novel is similar to Edgeworth's. Austen reduces the scope and variety of incidents and characters, avoids narratorial expressivity in fact adopting narratorial irony eliminates characters that ar emere "humors"or caricatures, as well as any hint of melodrama in incident, and in plotting takes a middle course between mere novelistic coincidence and "English Jacobin necessitarianism"that is, the tight connection of "circumstances", individual character, and the character's ethical action. She aims for a plausible though not inevitable outcome, thereby suggesting that "destiny"is a result of free will operating in a particular social and material horizon of possibility. Not surprisingly, such plotting accords with an Anglican theology of salvation through both true faith (or understanding, in secular terms) and good works (or ethical action in accordance with informed and accurate moral judgement). Throughout her career, Austen followed this same pattern of correcting excessive novel conventions, at times alluding to specific bizarrenesses in particular novels of the day but otherwise cutting against generally well known novel devices. In *Northanger Abbey* this criticismby "rewriting"is especially obvious, as the narrator repeatedly draws the reader's attention to ways in which this novel is not like a common "novel of the day". In her later novels Austen's

narrators are less obtrusive in this respect, but the same work is carried on. Rewriting is to effect rereading-not just reading again but reading as a critical and reflective activity. This activity produces true knowledge, a secular version of that "true faith"that is the basis of ethical action necessary to win salvation. As much as her father or her clergymen brothers, Austen addresses a secular life in the light of eternity. Since women in her day could not do this from the pulpit they often chose to do so in the genre assigned to them by social, cultural, and literary convention.

Narrative method plays a central role in this process of reformative reading. The omniscient narrator represents a model consciousness, a figure for the "author"implicitly on the same level as the reader, representing the world of the novel from a superior position, whereas the protagonist is clearly fallible and limited, whether sympathetically or ironically treated by the narrator. As a character in the text, the narrator implicitly arranges all other characters in a hierarchical order over a grid whose coordinates are knowledge and moral judgement. Structurally the narrator represents a level of understanding toward which the protagonist is headed, somewhere beyond the end of the novel. The reader's interest in this progress is underpinned by Austen's use of free indirect discourse, or reported inward thought and feeling. Other novelists who use this device such as Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe and Maria Edgeworth, treat several or many characters this way; Austen focuses almost exclusively on her protagonist thereby giving a centrality and importance to a character that most other characters regard as unimportant. This device is one of Austen's favorites,

used in *Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion.* But Austen also uses free indirect discourse to encourage the reader to sympathize with the protagonist, to accept her interpretations and judgements of the world around her. In this way the reader is often tricked into going along with the protagonist's errors until brought up short by the narrator's irony or revelation of the "truth". This device creates an irony of reading by which the reader identifies with both narrator and protagonist. In experiencing this irony at certain moments of narratorial revelation the reader vicariously experiences the gap between the protagonist's imperfection and fallibility and the narrator's superior understanding. All human understanding, except the godlike narrator's, is conditional and relative. The narrator's irony reminds us of this mortal fallibility. This reading would be serious matter indeed were it not for the fact that it is presented in what is "only a novel". In political terms, the point does implicitly counter "English Jacobin" ideas of the "perfectibility of man".

Northanger Abbey, substantially completed by 1803, is thus very much a novel of its time, of a particular moment in the evolution in the novel as vehicle of ideological and cultural conflict.

CHAPTER II

4. EDUCATION, WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND "ACCOMPLISHMENTS"

In Jane Austen's day, there was no centrally-organized system of state supported education. There were local charity or church- run day schools (such as the one set up by St.John Rivers in Charlotte Brontë's later novel Jane Eyre) but these were not attended by the children of the "genteel"social levels that Jane Austen writes about. More or less the same is true of apprenticeships, another relatively less "respectable" mode of education thus in *Sense and Sensibility* the character Mrs Jennings thinks that the young woman whom she imagines is Colonel Brandon's illegitimate child can be gotten out of the way by being "prenticed out at a small cost". (However in Jane Austen's fragment of a novel The Watsons, about a family on the lower financial fringes of gentility, Sam Watson is a "surgeon" a less exalted profession in Jane Austen's day then now and so probably would have been apprenticed). And "Dame Schools", of the type satirized in Dicken's *Great Expectations*, were even less respectable (thus a character in one of Jane Austen's Juvenilia "knew nothing more at the age of 18 than what a twopenny Dame's School in the village could teach him"). Instead, "genteel"children might be educated at home by their parents, particularly when young (as the Morland children are in Northanger Abbey); or by live-in governesses (such as Miss Taylor in Emma) or tutors; or by going off to a private boarding school or to live with a tutor (as Edward Ferrars went to Mr Pratt's in *Sense and Sensibility*; several boys went to Steventon to be tutored with Jane Austen's

father). There might also be lessons with outside "masters"(specialists such as piano teachers,etc.) Some local "Grammar"schools did exist, teaching the educational basics (including Greek and Latin) to higher-class or upwardly mobile boys but did not admit girls. The type of education depended on the preferences and financial resources of the parents in each family (thus without Darcy's father's help, Wickham's father "would have been unable to give him a gentleman's education")
Of course, women were not allowed to attend the institutionalized rungs on the educational ladder: "public"schools such as Eton (which Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* attends) and the universities (Oxford and Cambridge). The (somewhat dubious) prime symbol of academic knowledge, and more-or-less exclusively masculine educational attainments, was the Classical languages Grek and Latin, to which a great deal of time was devoted in "genteel"boys education, but which few women studied. Jane Austen never refers to Classical literature, except in a joking way in some of the Juvenilia, such as Love and Friendship (in one of her letters to Mr Clarke, Jane Austen cities her ignorance of the Classical languages as one of the factors which would prevent her from writing a novel on a subject suggested by Mr Clarke).

Since women did not usually have careers as such, and were not "citizens in the sense of being directly involved in politics", there was little generally-perceived need for such higher education for them, and most writers on the subject of "female education" preferred that women receive a practical (and religious) training for their domestic role thus Byron once spouted off the remark that women should

“read neither poetry nor politics nothing but books of piety and cookery”(leavened with the conventional “accomplishments”of “music-drawing-dancing”).

As for domestic trainning, in those days before sewing machines, a relatively large amount of girls’ and women’s time was spent on sewing or needlework (often just abbreviated to “work”); this is not incompatible with “gentility”(as long as it is not done for money, of course)and even such a high-ranking woman as Lady Bertram, the baronet’s wife in *Mansfield Park*, occupies herself this way. The sheer amount of sewing done by gentlewomen in those days sometimes takes us moderns aback, but it would probably generally be a mistake to view it either as merely constant joyless toiling, or as young ladies turning out highly embroidered ornamental knicknacks to show off their elegant but meaningless accomplishments. Sewinh was something to do (during the long hours at home) that often had great practical utility and that wasn’t greatly mentally taxing and could be done sitting down while engaging in light conversation, or listening to a novel being read.

But much of the household work was actually done by servants thus Mrs Bennet prides herself on her family’s being too genteel for her daughters to be involved in the cooking unlike the Lucas family.

For women of the “genteel” classes the goal of non-domestic education was thus often the acquisition of “accomplishments” such as the ability to draw, sing, play music or speak modern languages (generally French and Italian). Though it was not usually stated with such open cynicism, the purpose of such accomplishments was often only to attract a husband; so that these skills then tended to be neglected after marriage (Lady Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility* “had celebrated her marriage by

giving up music, although by her mother's account she had played extremely well, and by her own was very fond of it", while Mrs Elton in *Emma* fears that her musical skills will deteriorate as have those of several married women she knows). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet displays her relatively detached attitude towards the more trivial aspects of this conventional game by adopting a somewhat careless attitude towards her "accomplishments" of playing the piano, and not practicing it diligently. Several quotes from Jane Austen's Juvenilia, summarize this well; the first is from Catharine or the Bower, where Catharine sums up a new acquaintance:

Miss Stanley had been attended by the most capital masters from the time of her being six years old to the last spring, which, comprehending a period twelve years, had been dedicated to the acquirement of accomplishments which were now to be displayed and in a few years to be entirely neglected. She was not....naturally deficient in abilities; but those years which ought to have been spent in the attainment of useful knowledge and mental improvement had all been bestowed in learning drawing, Italian and music.

And in Lady Susan, the title character takes the entirely cynical view that the only purpose of her teenaged daughter Frederica's education is to increase her attractiveness in husband-hunting, and even thinks that some of the conventional "female accomplishments" are entirely superfluous for this purpose:

> *I wish her education to be attendedto while she remains with Miss Summers. I want her to play and sing with some portion of taste and a good deal of assurance... those accomplishments which are now necessary to finish a pretty woman. Not that I am an advocate for the prevailing fashion of*

> *acquiring a perfect knowledge in all the languages, arts and sciences-it is throwing time away; to be mistress of French, Italian, German, music, singing, drawing etc. will gain a woman some applause, but will not add one lover to her list....I do not mean,therefore,that Frederica's acquirements will be more than superficial, and I flatter myself that she will not remain long enough at school to understand anything thoroughy. I hope to see her the wife of Sir James within a twelve month."*

All this is not to say, by any means, that all women were ignorant; only that, since there was no requirement for academic education for women, and very little opportunity for women to use such knowledge (so that for women learning is only for "the improvement of her mind")-therefore it depended very strongly on what kind of instruction each woman's parents offered her in childhood, and on the individual inclinations of the woman herself (as in the Bennet family)-intelligent girls could even have an advantage over boys in being able to more or less choose their own studies, and in not being subject to the rather mixed blessings of a more uniform Classical curriculum.

In the novel Darcy makes the remark that besides the accomplishments, a woman "must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading". And Jane Austen makes fun of the opposite opinion in *Northanger Abbey* with her mock-editorial comment (on Catherine Morland during the walk from Bath to Beechen Cliff) that:

Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind as to come with an inability of administring to the vanity of others which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can. The advantages of folly in a beautiful girl have already been set forth by the capital pen of a sister author (Fanny Burney in Camilla)-and to her treatment of the subject, I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well-informed themselves to desire anything more in woman than ignorance."

Jane Austen's more serious opinion as to the desirability of ignorance is probably expressed when Emma, in the novel of the same name, teases the sensible Mr Knightley by professing sentiments similar to the above and he decidedly rejects them. And in any case, the conventional "accomplishments" were not totally to be despised in the days before phonographs and radio, the only music available was that which amateur or professional performers could produce on the spot, so that the ability to play music did have a practical social value. Similarly painting, drawing and the ability to write a good long informative letter (itsel falso something of a "female accomplishment") were valued in the age before photographs and cheap fast transportation.

Lady Catherine effervesces about herself and her daughter Anne: "There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a beter natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient. And so would Anne, if her health had allowed her to apply. I am confident that she would have performed delightfully."

Lady Catherine : "I have told Miss Bennet several times, that she will never play really well, unless she practises more."

Elizabeth to Darcy: "My fingers do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault because I would not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."

Lady Catherine again: "Miss Bennet would not play at all amiss, if she practised more, and could have the advantage of a London master. She has a very good notion of fingering, though her taste is not equal to Anne's. Anne would have been a delightful performer, had her health allowed her to learn."

The following is a list of passages in *Pride and Prejudice* referring to "accomplishments" , or to women's education:

Mary is pleased with the Meryton assembly because she "had heard herself mentioned to Miss Bingley as the most accomplished girl in the neighborhood."; "in consequence of being the only plain one in the family", she "worked hard for kowledge and accomplishments", and "was always impatient for display".

Elizabeth does not play half so well, but had been listened to with much more pleasure than the pedantic and affected Mary.

Discussion between the Bingleys, Darcy and Elizabeth at Netherfield. Bingley: "It is amazing to me, how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are"; "I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished".

This discussion develops a minimal list of accomplishments :

Bingley: "They all paint tables,cover skreens,and net purses".

……and also a maximal list of accomplishments:

Caroline: "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages, to deserve the word".

Darcy's addendum:

"To all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."

Lady Catherine inquires after Elizabeth's accomplishments, and thinks the Bennet sisters' education has been insufficiently systematic.

CHAPTER III

5. FEMINISM IN JANE AUSTEN

"I often wonder how you can find time for what you do, in addition to the care of the house; and how good Mrs West could have written such books and collected so many hard works, with all her family cares, is still more a matter of astonishment! Composition seems to me impossible with a head full of joints of mutton and doses of rhubarb."(Jane Austen, letter of September 8 1816 to Cassandra)

"I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire anything more in woman than ignorance."(Northanger Abbey)

Is Jane Austen a feminist? That has not been the traditional view (in 1870, Anthony Trollope declared that "Throughout all her works, a sweet lesson of homely household womanly virtue is ever being taught") but once the question has been asked (which it was not, until relatively recently) it is not hard to see some feminist tendencies.

Of course, Jane Austen is not a simple ideologue when a character in a Jane Austen novel makes a broad statement that seems to stand up for women in general, this is actually usually done by an unsympathetic character (such as Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* or Mrs Elton in *Emma*)and is not meant to be taken seriously. In *Pride and Prejudice* the main example is Caroline Bingley's statement to Darcy that

“Eliza Bennet is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own, and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art. ”Here Caroline Bingley is “undervaluing” Elizabeth and Darcy sees through her easily. Conversely, Henry Tilney’s teasing remarks on the subject of women during the walk from Bath to Beechen Cliff in *Northanger Abbey* are not really meant to invalidate his character. On the other hand, however, Jane Austen presents a rather cool and objective view of the limited options open to women (in *Pride and Prejudice* this is done through the character Charlotte Lucas).

And it has been pointed out that Jane Austen makes an implicit statement by simply disregarding certain structures of her erat hat may not be obvious to modern readers. For example, most of Jane Austen’s heroines (Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, Anne Eliot in *Persuasion*, and even Emma Woodhouse in *Emma*) don’t have anyone whom they can confide in, or whose advice they can rely on, about certain delicate matters. Thus they must make their own decisions more or less independently (for example, Elizabeth Bennet doesn’t reveal to Jane, her sister and closest confidante, her changed feelings about Darcy until he has actually proposed again, and she has accepted). Similarly, in a letter of November 30th 1814 to her niece Fanny Knight, discussing whether Fanny should engage herself to one Mr Plumtre, Jane Austen wrote: “….you must not let anything depend on my own opinion .Your own feelings and none but your own,should determine such an important point”.

Such moral autonomy on the part of young women would by no means have been universally approved in Jane Austen's day, as can be seen from Sir Thomas's diatribes in *Mansfield Park*, when Fanny Price is resisting his advice to marry Henry Crawford. Thus another novel writer, (Fanny Burney) had her heroine Evelina write the following non-Austenian sentiments to her adoptive father: "I know not what to wish: think form e, therefore, my dearest Sir, and suffer my doubting mind, that knows not what way to direct its hopes, to be guided by your wisdom and counsel". In her Plan of a Novel, Jane Austen makes fun of the novel-heroine who "receives repeated offers of marriage which she refers wholly to her Father, exceedingly angry that he should not be first applied to".

Jane Austen also makes a positive statement by having Elizabeth Bennet insist on being treated as a "rational creature", rather than as an "elegant female", when trying to make her "No"be understood as "No"to Mr Collins.

Here's a brief summary (taken from Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies by Julia Cherry Spruill) of an early 18th century etiquette book. The Lady's Preceptor, which was not out of the ordinary in conventional advice books for women in Jane Austen's period:

"It admonished her to abstain from gossip and a spirit of contradiction, which, while disagreeable in everyone, was especially so in the "fair sex"; to be careful not to be too quick and passionate in conversation, or too inquisitive"; and to "endeavour that cheerfulness, sweetness, and modesty be always blended in your countenance and air". It gave special directions for her conduct when with men, advising: "Be careful of maintaining that strict watch over your eyes, words and heart, that they may not in

the least perceive you have any special regard for them." Men, it warned, took great pleasure in being thought irresistable lovers and in gaining victories over "the most rigid virtue"; therefore, the young lady should put little confidence in what they promised, and when fine things were said to her, should "acquit yourself by a gentle smile accompanied with a blush, to show that you are neither a prude or a coquette." When questioned on the subject of matrimony, without betraying any personal inclination, she should reply that she was not the person to be consulted "upon such a head", but rather her father and mother, whose will she would always make her own."

It is interesting that the most explicit feminist protests by Jane Austen in her six novels all have to do with literature. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot debates Captain Harville on who loves longest, women or men :

Captain Harville:

"I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy....But perhaps you will say,these were all written by men."

Anne Elliot:

"Perhaps I shall..Yes,yes,if you please,no reference to examples in books.Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story.Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree;the pen has been in their hands,I will not allow books to prove anything."

Northanger Abbey not only contains the "Defence of the Novel", but what has seemed to me to be a strong statement Catherine Morland's declaration:

"But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in....I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me.The quarrels of popes and

kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men so good-for-nothing, and hardly any women at all it is very tiresome."

Here the last sentence is as succint a summary as one could wish of the objections of feminist historiography, social history, and the Annales school to the traditional "Great Man" theory of history.

5.1. FEMINIST APPROACHES TO AUSTEN

In exploring issues related to the silencing of women in narratives, Leightonis in the company of many feminist writers and academics who explore literature from a female perspective.

Feminist criticism is a diverse and ecletic field of study. Its origing can be traced back to the women's movements of the 1960's and beyond. Early feminist criticism was polemical and combative, fighting against a dominant ideology that placed men hierarchically above women.

Gilbert and Gubar

As novels both written by a woman and concerned almost exclusively with the affairs of women, Jane Austen's work has been of obvious attraction to feminist criticism. One of the foremost Works in this area is the extensive study of 19th century women's writing, *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979). It ia an example

of what has come to be termed gynocriticism. Gilbert and Gubar see the whole concept of literary authority in Western culture as exclusively male and ask the question: where does this leave woman writers? Not only have woman been excluded from authorship, but they have also become the 'subjects to (and sobjects of) male authurity' (p.11). They are reduced to characters seen as 'mere properities' imprisoned within male texts. Women denied 'authorship' instead can become only objects of male representation. Where, then, does leave Jane Austen? One way they suggest that Austen was able to write from within such a male-dominated culture was by defining a small space separate from the world at large (it's the little bit of iviry again). Austen, they argue, admits and accepts the discomforts of a patriarchal culture yet manages to both use and subvert the limitations that it imposes. One way this is achived is through Austen's use of what they characterize as a duplicitous female language. This appears to be docile and restrained but is actually at the same time assertive and rebellious. Austen's ironic narratotial voiceis frequently found to be expressing a view that opposes a superficial reading of the text. The over--hasty conclusions to the novels with their unlikely coincidences is another example of this undercutting:

> *...the implication remains that a girl without the aid of a benevolent narrator would never find a way out of either her mortifications or her parent's house. (op.cit.,p.169)*

Another example of Austen duplicity is seen in the presentation of the powerful unpleasant woman who play a small but significant role in each of the novels: Mrs Norris in *Mansfield Park,* Mrs Ferras in *Sense and Sensibility,* and Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* are just three examples. They see Mrs Norris as a 'dark parody' of

Mary Crawford, her lively materialism degenerated into 'meddlesome, officious, penny-pinching' (p.170). Yet they also see her as a contrast to the ineffectual and passive Lady Bertram, like other 'good' mothers in Austen's fiction epitomizes the necessity of submition if a woman is to successfuly marry and achive a life free from financial worries. Mrs Norris may be condemned to penury but not to submissive acquiescence. For Gilbert and Gubar, 'the figure of bad aunt Norris implies that female strenght, exertion and passion are necessary for survival and plesure'(p.171). Similarly, the dredful Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* is seen in Madwoman as subverting the apparent meaning of the text. She is seen as very similar to Elizabeth Bennet (authoritative, judgemental, stubborn, courageous). Both are the only characters in the novel capable of expressing real anger. They both, too, share similar views. Lady Catherine's strong feelings about the unsuitability of Mrs Bennet only articulate Elizabeth's own thoughts; Lady Catherine's view on entailment cannot be different from Elizabeth's, given the restrictions it places on her and her sisters. Lady Catherine is a prime example of what Gilbert and Gubar term 'bitchy women'(p.170) who act as doubles for both the heroines of the novel and for the author herself.

Gilbert and Gubar have been frequently criticized for the stance they take. For example, the way they privilege gender as opposed to class, religion or politics is seen as unnecessarily restrictive. Their dismissal of all women's writing earlier that Austen is seen as somewhat account of its presentation of 'women's writing' as containing a single and unified value system which it patently did not.

Margaret Kirkham

A different feminist viewpoint can be found in Margaret Kirkham's Jane Austen, *Feminism and Fiction.* She sees Austen as highly sympathetic to the rational feminism movement of the Enlightenment particulary influenced by the contraversial figure of Mary Wollstonecraft.

This detailed study is presented as a series of short essays each looking at an aspect of Austen's work as well as giving an overview of feminism and fiction in the period 1694-1798. Kirkham takes what is sometimes a contraversial line. For example, she suggests that the portrayal of Fanny Price in Mansfield Park is an ironic one. She equates Fanny's saintliness with her ağabeylity to excite men's sexual passion:

> *Fanny's apparent innocence and religiosity is an aspect of her sexiness, a veneer of the 'angelic' which makes her sexually exciting to men like Crawford, who wish to find in their wives such vulnerable 'virtue' as well as excite both sexual passion and manly protectiveness.*
>
> *(First published 1982, reprinted 1997 Athlone Pres, p.102)*

Whilst Fanny may appear on the surface to be a highly conforming and conventional woman, Kirkham belives that discerning readers will see through this facade and see in Fanny a figure much more the fictionalized embodiment of Wollstonecraft's 'Enlightenment feminism'. For Fanny is ultimately shown to be strong, resolute and moreover morally right in her rejection of Henry Crawford. For Kirkham, Austen is an anti-romantic, liberal writer: a position wholly and almost neatly opposed to that of Marilyn Butler and different again from that of Gilbert and Gubar.

Other Feminist Insights

Judith Lowder Newton, in a study called *Women, Power and Subversion*: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860 (1981, University of Georgia Pres), looks at the way women's fiction deals with the problems of writing from within a patriarchal ideology. In writing about *Pride and Prejudice* she argues that although men are shown to have all the power and all the privilege, they nonetheless are shown to be both 'bungling and absurd'. In contrast to women, despite their lack of power, are not depicited as victims of their position. She also notes that, 'the most authentically powerful figure in the novel is an unmarried, middle-class woman without a fortune' (reprinted in Clark, R., ibid,p.124).

CHAPTER IV

6. THE SOCIAL SCENE

Jane Austen wrote her novels during the first two decades of the 19th century. George III had been on the throne since 1760. He was to regin until 1820, although for the last ten years of his life, he was insane and so his son, later King George IV, was declered Prince Regent. Hence the period is known as the regency period.

It was also the time that saw the end of the Agricultural Revolution and the begining of the Industrial Revolution. It was the period of the great astates owned by wealthy families, fictionalized forms of which made up the backdrop to almost all Austen's novels: *Pemberley (Pride and Prejudice); Mansfield Park, Norland Park and Barton Park (Sense and Sesibility), Donwell Abbey (Emma).*

6.1. THE SENSE OF EMPIRE AND COLONIALISM

Among a lot of different approaches to Austen and her works, there is an approach based on the sense of the view of empire and colonialism that Edward Said evaluates in his book *Culture and Imperialism.* He describes Fanny and Sir Thomas from *Mansfield Park* , the story of Fanny's being taken into Sir Thomas' life, where she eventually adjusts into the role of mistress of the estate. Edward Said notes that Jane Austen devotes little time to the colonies or the menagement thereof. But he identifies throughout the novel, her

proclivity to accept the colonies as a proper means of maintaining the wealth of England. Said also notes that England, unlike Spanishand to some extent the French, was more focussed on long-term subjugation of the colonies, on managing the colonized peoples to cultivete sugar and other commodities for the E nglish. Said uses the literature of that period to illustrate the extent to which acceptance that subjugated peoples should in fact engage in such labor, and that the proceeds from that labor should support the English. Said quotes the following passage describing Fanny's visit to the home she left at 10:

> *Fanny was almost stunned. The smallness of the house, and thiness of the walls, brought every thing so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, and all her recent agitation, she hardly knew how to bear it. Within the rom all was tranquil enough, for Susan (Fanny's younger sister) having disappeared with the others, there were soon only her father and herself remaining; and he taking out a newspaper –the accustomary loan of neighbour, applied himself to studying it, without seeming to recollect her existance. The solitary candle was held between himself and the paper, without any reference to her possible convenience, but she had nothing to do, and was glad to have the light screened from her aching head, as she sat in bewildered, broken, sorrowful contemplation.*
>
> *She was at home. But alas! It was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as--- she checked herself; she was unreasonable... A day or two might shew the difference. She only was to blame. Yes, she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of*

times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body which there was not here. (pp. 88, *Culture and Imperialism*)

Said's comment on this passage highlights the extent to which he sees in Austen's writing the reflection of empire:

> *In too small a space, you cannot see clearly, you cannot think clearly, you cannot have regulation or attention of the proper sort. The fineness of Austen's detail (the solitary candle was held between himself and the paper, without any reference to her possible convenience) renders very precisely the dangers of unsociability, of lonely insularity, of diminished awareness that are rectivied in larger and beter administered spaces.*

Through the Said's description, we're confounded with Spivak's insistence that suffering from racism is not the same as suffering colonialism. We can understand her inistence that the colonized are objectified as inevitably unworthy of enjoying the product of their own labor, and that te colonized have essentially nothing to gain. But when she suggests that those suffering from racism, or any form of ethnocentrism or sexism, shoul rely on the access they have to the presentation of validity claims in the dominant discourse. Said points out the importance of this deeper and complex criticism he has offered us of Austen's *Mansfield Park.* Most criticism, from whatever it's theoretical perspective, does not go into what Said calls "the structure of attitude and reference". (pp.95) And Said does not intend this post-colonial perspective to replace other perspectives. He expects such criticism to be used in addition to traditional literary criticism. His emphasis is on how much more there is of importance to the slight references to the colonial world made in great literature. He suggests that it is precisely in great literature that we are able to see

the internal structure of conflict over a morality that, though not acceptable in the polite society of the empire, has permeated the thinking of those for whom the great literature was written. Jane Austen's sensibility could not deal with the issue of the "slave trade", which, in *Mansfield Park*, was met with "dead silence". Edward Said's comment:"In time there would no longer be a dead silence when slavery was spoken of, and the subject became central in a new understanding of what Europe was". (pp.96)

6.2. SOCIAL CLASSES

Jane Austen's England was very class conscious. Indeed the whole social structure was stil based on a class system that had been in existance in England for hundreds years. It was begining to change as the new middle classes, those who made their wealth in manifacturing and industry, began to seek (and at times demand) a higher social status, but in Austen's time theirs was a genteel voice. It was also a long time before political change began to enfranchize the ordinary man, let alone the ordinary woman.

At the top of the social pile were the royal family. Below them were the people known as 'the peerage' who were properly addressed as 'Lord' or 'Lady'. These were the dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts and barons. Some way below these there were the knights and baronets whose formal address was 'Sir'. The vast majority peerages at the time were hereditary. They were passed from father down to eldest son. Families where there was no eldest son could pass the title sideways to another male member or the family. If there was no male descendent then the title would become extinct. Baronetcies were also

hereditary whereas knighthoods (as is stil the case) were only for life and could not be inherited. Members of the peerage had the right, along with the bishops and archbishops of the Church of England, to sit and vote in the House of Lords. Sir Walter Eliot in *Persuasion* is a baronet, a title which dates back to the first year of the reign of Charles II. Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* is another, although it is likely that his peerage is more recent, given his enthusiasm for marrying his daughters into more established families.

There were also what have been variously referred to as the 'middle-class aristocracy' or 'pseudo-gentry'. These were those who had made their Money from trade and the professions but who aspired to the lifestyles of the traditional gentry. The Bingleys in *Pride and Prejudice* would fall into this class.

One means of of raising your rank within the class system was by joining the Navy. Two of Austen's brothers, for example, rose to the rank of admiral and one recived a knighthood in the process. The Navy also offered the possibility of considerable wealth in terms of prize Money gained from captured vessels. Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* returns considerably richer by 'successive captures' that he had been when he first proposed to Anne Elliot.

6.3. PRIMOGENITURE AND ENTAILING

Mr. Bennet's problem in *Pride and Prejudice* is that when he dies his estate will not pass to his daughters, instead it is entailed to the obsequious Mr Collins. Entailing was a mean of protecting the estate from being split up into smaller parcels of land. The great families who had so dominated English life for centuries could continue to do so only if their estates were not divided up when the wealth was passed from one generation to the next. The right of primoeniture meant that all the land in a family was left only to the eldest son. Entailing was a mean of restricting what that son could do with it by insisting that when he died only his eldest son could inherit. An entailed estate could be neither sold nor mortgaged which meant that the heir could only continueto get income from the land. An estate could be entailed only across two generations so a grandfather could entail his estate to his grandson but not beyond. Thus the son could not sell any of it during his lifetime. The grandson, however, could do what he liked. In reality of course, a little gentle persuasion (or failing that a little coercion) usually forced the grandson. And so the great estates passed unchanged from one generation to the next.

6.4. SOCIETY BALLS

The ball in Jane Austen novels is the most favoured, most eagerly awaited social event that a young lady could hope for. It was of infinitely more significance than today's club, disco or rave. The ball in Emma, for example, is long anticipated, much prepared for and, as Austen reports, is dwelled on lovingly even before it is over:

> *The ball proceeded pleasantly. The anxious cares, the incessant attentions of Mrs Weston, were not thrown away. Everybody seemed happy; and the praise of being a delightful ball, which is seldom bestowed till after a ball has ceased to be, was repeatedly given in the very beginning of the existance of this.*
>
> *(Emma, Chapter 2)*

6.5. MARRIAGE

The importance of balls, of course, was the opportunity they afforded to meet members of the opposite sex. A common criticism of Austen is the emphasis she places in her novels on marriage and Money. The aim of every young woman, it would seem, is to marry and marry well. The laws of primogeniture effectively excluded women from inheriting property. The Bennet girls in *Pride and Prejudice* face the kind of stark choice of many during the period: marry a wealthy man and live comfortably or don't marry and live in penury. Marriage in reality was not necessarily good news for a woman, despite the 'happily ever after' endings of Austen's novels. Upon marriage all a woman's wealth

Mr Elliot is a man without heart of conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; whom for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruetly, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. (Persuasion, Chapter 21)

In these words, spoken by Mrs Smith whom Elliot has defrauded, there is no irony, no satire, just plain nad pithy condemnation. Elliot is condemned as is Willoughby and Wickham. There is in the Austen novel a reassuring sense of right and wrong, although as you might expect, modern criticism has questioned whether everything is always quite as straight forward as it seems!

went to her husband. The only way she could retain wealth in her own right was by remaining single.

6.6. MANNERS AND ETIQUETTE

The codes of behaviour in Regency England were very different from those which we follow today. Part of the enjoymnet of reading an Austen novel is in exploring the customs of a much more formal, more rigid society than that of Western Europe today. Much of the scandal in Austen's novels is associated with those who get it wrong.
Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, speaks to Mr Darcy before he has been formally introduced, thus showing both Darcy and ourselves that he is no gentelman! Preparations for the play in *Mansfield Park* are considered as an unsuitable activity in general, but particularly as certain scenes involve her touching a man who is not her fiancé. The disastrous matchmaking by the eponymous *Emma* is viwed, in part, with great horror by Mr Knightley because Harriet Smith is one of the wrong social class to be matched with either Mr Elton or Mr Churchill.
As to the behaviour of Austen's scoundrels, for example, Willoughby (*Sense and Sensibility*) and Wickham (*Pride and Prejudice*) the scurrilous nature of it shocked and offended readers in the 19th century as it does now. Willoughby, particulary in his seduction and abandonment of the 16-years old ward of Colonel Brandon, both deserves and gets our condemnation as soundly as he gets that of Elinor. As for the heartless William Elliot in *Persuasion*, he is presented without mercy:

7. CONCLUSION

In Austen's own time her works were praised by the few critics to review them, but not so as to distinguish them in any extraordinary way from other novels of that time. Yet Walter Scott recognized Austen's achivement. He wrote approvingly of her novels in the *Quarterly Review* (October 1815), and ten years later he reread *Pride and Prejudice* "for the third time at least" and confided to his journal: "That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The Big Bow won strain I can do myself like any now going but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary common-place things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me. What a pity such a gifted creature died so early. (14 March 1826)

Mary Mitford at first found Austen's novels lacking in "elegance" and "taste", but by the early 1820's she enlisted them, along with Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* (1789), for her book *Our Village* (1824-1832), her own middle class appropriation of rural England- one of the most powerful influences on the cultural imagination of the 19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, for much of the 19th century Austen remained, in Brian C. Southam's words, "a critic's novelist". The modern construction of Austen as a literary and popular classic-popular with the educated middle-class reading public-was spurred by the publication in 1870 of James Edward Austen- Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*. It's portrayal of Austen as a feminine and domestic stage simply recording a real world of rural felicity clearly had considerable cultural and political use in an age of ever deeper social, national and imperial conflicts, of horrific industrial blight and social

problems that seemed or were made out to be beyond the power of the state to remedy. Austen, like Marry Mitford, Gilbert White and many other earlier writers, was brought to serve what Martin Wiener has describe as the attack of an upper-middle-class English culture against the industrial spirit, an attack only decisively rebutted, according to Wiener, by Margaret Thatcher.

The late 19th and early 20th century "Janeites", the uncritical devotees of Austen and the world she was thought to represent, saw Austen's supposed limitations of social scope and psychological depth to be strenghts, something peculiary "English". More important, such devotees often held important positions in governmental, cultural and educational institutions. They found in Austen a vision of "Englishness" they were looking for and applied to Britain and its empire. Reaction against this complacent late-imperial, anti-industrial culture generated new approaches to and understanding of Austen, especially after the unprecedented horror of World War I and with the rise of professionalized, university-based criticism. In broad terms social historians were exploding the popular myth of an idyllic, preindustrial, Austenian world. R.W. Chapman's critical editions of Austen's novels, early writings and and letters made avaible materials for beter understanding Austen in her own time as well as critical analysis that was more searching than the "appreciations" characteristic of earlier, "Janeite" criticism. J. David Grey and Deirdre La Faye's forthcoming, revised and explaned editionof Austen's letters will make still more information available. Mary Lascelles, Q.D. Leavis, D.W. Harding, and others showed Austen as a determined, conscious artist and social critic.

After World War II and the further democratization of education, especially at the higher levels, Austen and her work were intepreted in the light of new social issues, including

novelist to have a concordance to her works. Meanwhile, Austen's fiction had served for sometime as one model for an emergent form of popular novel known as the "Regency romance". Enteprising writers undertook to "complete" Austen's unfinished Works such as *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*. It is true that Austen has not yet been fully accepted as a "Romantic" writer, and as recently as 1975 Alistair M. Duckworth could write, "In spite of a staggering amount of critical attention Jane Austen can hardly be said, in her bicentennial year, to be understood beter than she understood herself"("Prospects and Retrospects" in *Jane Austen Today*). At the same time, as Duckworth goes on to illustrate, Austen's work has been profitably explored in light of recent critical and literary theory, and determined exploration of Austen's relation to her contemporary novelists and contemporary issues is makin possible new understanding of her and her work in her time, thus providing new ways of understanding her importance in the present.

Studied in English classes around the world, yet stil read by thousands just for plesure, Austen is now one of the world's most widely read authors.

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