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Jane Austen at play: Self-consciousness, beginnings, endings

Kuwahara, Kuldip Kaur, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1990

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JANE AUSTEN AT PLAY: SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, BEGINNINGS, ENDINGS

by

Kuldip Kaur Kuwahara

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APPROVAL PAGE

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KUWAHARA, KULDIP KAUR, Ph.D. Jane Austen at Play: Self-Consciousness, Beginnings, Endings. (1990) Directed by Dr. James E. Evans. 223 pp.

It is because Jane Austen takes her art seriously that she can play. A self-conscious novelist, she delights in playing with reality and illusion, and the conventions of fiction-making. Her ironic perspective on individual consciousness and social interaction explains a lively interest in the comedy of manners. Irony underlines the paradox between her self-consciousness as an artist and her impersonality and control of aesthetic distance.

Austen treats art as an expression of what her contemporary, Schiller, termed the "Spieltrieb" or "play drive." Schiller's argument for the need of the "play drive" to unite the "form drive" (associated with man's rational nature) with the "sense drive" (associated with man's sensuous nature) to express the ideal aesthetic experience, provides a useful framework for my study of Austen's playfulness.

She seems to make the ironic suggestion that life can be most fully experienced through art. I have focussed on Austen's self-consciousness, and the beginnings and endings of her six completed novels, to illustrate this. Each novel begins and ends with a journey and triumphantly celebrates a "happy ending." The heroines and heroes are growing, developing characters who, in achieving balance and harmony within themselves and in their relationship, learn to play.

In Persuasion, her last completed novel, Austen challenges her readers with a different kind of "happy ending." The hero and heroine leave the security and stability of life on land for the vast, threatening sea. They provide definitions of freedom and beauty.

Austen creates aesthetically satisfying works of art and reaches a point of perfect equilibrium to play with an ideal world. Yet her ideal world is clearly rooted in the finite world with its limitless possibilities. Her fiction enriches and enlarges our perception of the significance of play; it liberates those who fully respond to her art.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> The agreeable, the good, the perfect, with these man is merely in earnest; but with beauty he plays.
> Schiller: On the Aesthetic Education of Man

A novelist at play, Jane Austen delights in making fictions. She treats art as an expression of what her contemporary, Friedrich Von Schiller, termed the "play drive" (423). Seriously preoccupied with the nature of the aesthetic experience, Austen achieves an artistic poise through her ability to play. She delights the reader and raises her or him to a state of triumphant freedom and a possible world of harmony and beauty. The reader, so awakened, grasps the ideal, only to be more aware of the real and its limitless possibilities. Though in some ways a realistic novelist, Austen paradoxically presents the ideal through her ability to play. It is her ironic stance that gives her the freedom to play with opposites: the ideal and the real, the objective and the subjective. She is both involved in and removed from the action. She plays with the conventions of fiction-writing, and her self-conscious delight in her craft finds most triumphant expression in her use of irony.

Austen seems to make the ironic suggestion that life can be most fully experienced through art. She creates ideal patterns because she is most realistic. In Pride and Prejudice, for instance, the hero and heroine are growing, developing characters who achieve harmony (between reason and emotion) within themselves as well as in their relationship. In coming together, they perfect a pattern, and one can expect it to lead to perfection in marriage. Questions--such as "Are the endings of Jane Austen's novels really as perfect as she makes them out to be?" or "Will the lovers live happily ever after?"--help emphasize the fact that if these characters continue to transcend what Schiller calls "the form drive" (associated with man's rational nature) and the "sense drive" (associated with man's sensuous nature) to express the "play drive" (a synthesis of the "sense drive" and the "form drive"), such perfection is possible (423). In life, however, this result is less likely to happen. One can be tempted to read the "perfect" endings of these novels as being parodic in structure or as social and moral satire. However, these readings, by themselves, would lead to a limited interpretation of what Austen is trying to do.

She creates a perfect fictional world in response to a more philosophical issue--the nature of art as aesthetic experience. Her fiction suggests that a perfect aesthetic experience is possible and that one can experience life as a perfect whole only aesthetically; the implication being that

life as it is, is not perfect and so can never be completely satisfying. Thus, in making the ironic suggestion about the possibility of life being most fully experienced through art, Jane Austen, the novelist at play, triumphs in her freedom to shape ideal patterns.

Austen's playfulness includes but goes beyond the more usual uses of the word "play." She explores playfulness as an activity that expresses wholeness and balance in human beings and sets them free to realize their full potential. One is a happier, more playful person for having read Austen's novels. She expresses what Robert Alter calls a "joyful self-consciousness" in her ability to play with her fictional world (Fielding 202). She also shows her central characters developing to the point where they can free themselves from limitations and be capable of play. The reader--having observed Austen show her heroes and heroines finally emerge, beautiful and free--also learns to play through having experienced the ideal and perfect moment.

It is this ideal and perfect moment that constitutes the "perfect ending" of Austen's novels. At the close of each novel, the reader gets the sense of a completed whole that he can, as it were, hold in the palm of his hand. At the same time, like mercury, it eludes the touch. The harmony Austen achieves at the end of her novels is compelling. It has everything to do with her capacity to play.

This capacity to play is the key to the aesthetic experience she provides. Schiller, who was Austen's contemporary, expressed his views on play and the aesthetic mode in his Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man. His argument provides a useful framework for my study of Austen's playfulness.

Schiller argues for the need of the play drive to unite the form drive and sense drive to express the ideal aesthetic experience. His persuasive assertion of the value of the play drive is relevant to T.S. Eliot's despair over the "dissociation of sensibility." As Hazard Adams points out:

> Schiller proposes early in his Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man his own form of what has come to be called, in Eliot's phrase, the 'dissociation of sensibility.' Eliot locates the bifurcation of man's sensibility into sense and intellect some time in the seventeenth century. Schiller places it much earlier. (Critical Theory Since Plato 417)

In his Letters, Schiller states that as soon "as we recall" that man was deprived of his freedom

> by the one-sided constraint of nature in the field of sensation and by the exclusive authority of reason in the realm of thought, then we are bound to consider the power which is restored to him in the aesthetic mode as the highest of all bounties, as the gift of humanity itself. (427)

According to Schiller, the "aesthetic alone leads to the absence of all limitation" and this "magic circle of the

artist pure and perfect" ultimately becomes a definition of freedom and beauty. (Letters 427, 428).

Schiller's ideas on beauty and the "freedom" that art affords connect with Kant's aesthetic on "disinterest" and "purposiveness withought purpose." Schiller associates freedom and beauty with what he calls the Spieltrieb or play drive. He writes: "man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays" (426). We need to explore this assertion in some detail.

Schiller interprets play as the achievement of balance, poise, and harmony. In an interesting footnote to his "Twelfth Letter," he dwells on the linguistic usage of the expression "to be beside oneself, i.e., to be outside of one's own self." He argues that

> Although this turn of phrase is only used when sensation is intensified into passion, and the condition becomes more marked by being prolonged, it can nevertheless be said that everyone is beside himself as long as he does nothing but feel. To return from this condition to self-possession is termed, equally aptly: to be oneself again, i.e., to return into one's own self, to restore one's person. (On the Aesthetic 420)

Schiller is referring here to the loss of balance and the significance of achieving balance. Austen does this through her novels. All her heroes and heroines achieve a sense of balance and harmony, within themselves and with others, at the end of her novels. Ultimately they are happy because they

have learned to play.

According to Schiller, it is the play drive that restores man's sense of balance and harmony of being. The play drive has the power to reconcile the Stofftrieb or sense drive and the Formtrieb or form drive. The former Schiller associates with the "physical existence of man, or his sensuous nature," and the latter with his "rational nature" (419, 420). Wherever the sense drive

> functions exclusively, we inevitably find the highest degree of limitation...But although it is this drive alone which awakens and develops the potentialties of man, it is also this drive alone which makes their complete fulfilment impossible. (420)

Unlike the sense drive that "demands that there shall be change, that time shall have a content" (419), the form drive

> embraces the whole sequence of time, which is as much as to say: it annuls time and annuls change. It wants the real to be necessary and eternal, and the eternal and the necessary to be real. In other words, it insists on truth and on the right. (420)

Schiller poses the question,"How, then, are we to restore the unity of human nature which seems to be utterly destroyed by this primary and radical opposition?" (Letters 420) He emphasizes the opposing tendencies of the sensuous and the formal drives, "the one pressing for change, the other for changelessness" and concludes that "To watch over these, and

secure for each of these two drives its proper frontiers, is the task of culture" (420, 421). When both these drives are "conjoined, man will combine the greatest fullness of existence with the highest autonomy and freedom" (422). He elaborates:

> Both drives, therefore, need to have limits set to them and, inasmuch as they can be thought of as energies, need to be relaxed; the sense-drive so that it does not encroach upon the domain of law, the formal drive so that it does not encroach on that of feeling. (423)

It is in his "Fourteenth Letter" that Schiller develops his argument to include the central role of a new drive, the play drive. He states:

> That drive... in which both the others work in concert...the play drive, therefore, would be directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity. (424)

The sense drive limits man's psyche through "the laws of nature"; the formal drive, through the "laws of reason." But, as Schiller argues:

> The sense-drive wants to be determined, wants to receive its object; the form-drive wants itself to determine, wants to bring forth its object. The play-drive, therefore, will endeavor so to receive as if it had itself brought forth, and so to bring forth as the intuitive sense aspires to receive. (424)

In his "Fifteenth Letter," Schiller goes on to say:

> The object of the sense-drive, expressed in a general concept, we call life, in the widest sense of this term: a concept designating all material being and all that is immediately present to the senses. The object of the form-drive, expressed in a general concept, we call form, both in the figurative and in the literal sense of this word: a concept which includes all the formal qualities of things and all the relations of these to our thinking faculties. The object of the play drive, represented in a general schema, may therefore be called living form: a concept serving to designate all the aesthetic qualities of phenomena and, in a word, what in the widest sense of the term we call beauty. (425)

Elizabeth Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby point out that in Schiller's aesthetic, "beauty is defined as the objective correlative of this third drive," i.e. the play drive, "as a third quality resulting from the synthesis of life and form" (Introduction Li).

Austen fulfills Schiller's criteria of aesthetic excellence. She does this through her ability to play and create an "aesthetic reality" where beauty is indeed truth. As Schiller explains, "beauty is indeed form, because we contemplate it; but it is at the same time life, because we feel it. In a word: it is at once a state of our being and an activity we perform" (430). To experience the aesthetic mode at its best, man can thus "succeed in raising himself from the limited to the absolute" (431). This transcendence can be achieved

> since in the enjoyment of beauty, or aesthetic unity, an actual union and interchange between matter and form, passivity and activity, momentarily takes place, the compatibility of our two natures, the practicability of the infinite being realized in the finite, hence the possibility of sublimest humanity, is thereby actually proven. (430)

Schiller's argument thus underlines the aesthetic ideal. It is an ideal Austen achieves in her six completed novels. Each novel realizes an aesthetic unity, a harmony and balance that embraces the form drive and the sense drive to express the play drive. The reader is a more complete person after reading an Austen novel because the experience, at its best, leaves him or her a freer person, more capable of understanding truth and beauty and, therefore, more able to play. As Wilkinson and Willoughby point out in their commentary on Schiller's Letters, "A 'noble soul'...is, for Schiller, a man essentially at one with himself, 'free' because all his functions are working in harmony..." (272). Austen would agree.

In his "Fifteenth Letter" Schiller writes, "The agreeable, the good, the perfect, with these man is merely in earnest; but with beauty he plays" (425). Wilkinson and Willoughby see Schiller's definition of beauty as "a reconciliation of contraries...an equilibrium of forces normally resistant, but now held together in vibrant and fruitful tension" (282). They point out that, for Schiller, the "imperative of beauty...is the perfect fusion of thought

and feeling" (282).

Like Schiller, the twentieth-century scholar Johan Huizinga associates beauty with play. In Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture he asserts that "In play the beauty of the human body in motion reaches its zenith. In its more developed forms it is saturated with rhythm and harmony, the noblest gifts of aesthetic perception known to man" (7). Rhythm and harmony are most closely associated with dancing for Huizinga who sees it "as an integral part of play" (165). Huizinga refers to languages in which

> the manipulation of musical instruments is called 'playing', to wit, in the Arabic language on the one hand and the Germanic and Slavonic on the other. Since this semantic understanding between East and West can hardly be ascribed to borrowing or coincidence, we have to assume some deep-rooted psychological reason for so remarkable a symbol of the affinity between music and play. (158)

Gregory Bateson further develops Huizinga's views on play. His Steps to an Ecology of Mind: A Revolutionary Approach to Man's Understanding of Himself has an illuminating chapter, "Metalogue: About Games and Being Serious," in which a girl begins by asking her father, "Daddy, are these conversations serious?" He replies "Certainly they are." Then comes the question, "They're not a sort of game that you play with me?" To which her father replies, "God forbid...but they are a sort of game that we play together." He then tries to explain what he means by "playing":

> We talk about ideas. And I know that I play with the ideas in order to understand them and fit them together. It's 'play' in the same sense that a small child 'plays' with blocks...And a child with building blocks is mostly very serious about his 'play.' (17)

When the daughter asks,"But is it a game, Daddy? Do you play against me?" He replies,"No, I think of it as you and I playing together against the building blocks-the ideas" (17).

Austen plays with ideas as seriously as a child plays with his "building blocks"; the significant difference is that her play is self-conscious. She is wholly absorbed in the serious art of playing with life and art, with words and meanings, with patterns of action and character development that finally lead to comic insight and a clearer perspective on life. It is because she takes her art so seriously that she can play. Austen achieves what Rollo May refers to as "an integrated center." In "Gregory Bateson and Humanistic Psychology," he interprets Bateson's ideas:

> Art, he proposes, is 'part of man's quest for grace.' Grace, in turn, he defines as a level of integration, the person with grace being the one who speaks and feels out of an integrated center. (91)

Bateson's understanding of "artistic poise" is helpful in interpreting the notion of play in art. As May points out:

> The poetic way of looking at life is the union of feeling and thinking, when one grasps the whole with immediacy, when one trusts one's intuition as well as rationality; when the two hemispheres of one's brain work together rather than separately. Art speaks from the interface between conscious and unconscious. (93-4)

In other words, "The artist keeps his communications in this realm between conscious and unconscious without manhandling them or misplacing them. He participates in both and he transcends both" (94), in the same way that Schiller's play drive participates in the form drive and the sense drive and transcends both. As May explains:

> Bateson holds that the artist perceives neither "turbulence" nor "serenity" in his relation to his artistic inspiration. Rather he expresses the relation between the two and experiences the two simultaneously. Both serene and turbulent--that describes the artistic poise. (94)

Artistic poise, the attainment of a point of balance, is what I.A. Richards explores in Science and Poetry; he also does this through the notion of play. Daiches quotes Richards argument that

> if the mind is a system of interests, and if an experience is their play, the worth of any experience is a matter of the degree to which the mind, through this experience, attains a complete equilibrium. (Critical Approaches to Literature 139)

He considers the example of a person who has just one hour in which to lead "the fullest, keenest, most active and complete kind of life" (Critical Approaches 140). "Such a life," Richards observes

> is one which brings into play as many as possible of the positive interests. We can leave out the negative interests. It would be a pity for our friend to be frightened or disgusted even for a minute of his precious hour. (Critical Approaches 140)

Therefore, the interests

> must come into play with as little conflict among themselves as possible. In other words, the experience must be organized so as to give all the impulses of which it is composed the greatest possible degree of freedom. (140)

He points out that

> Only the rarest individuals hitherto have achieved this...order and never yet perhaps completely. But many have achieved it for a brief while, for a particular phase of experience, and many have recorded it for these phases. (140)

Austen's novels provide such a record; they demonstrate the value of her ability to play. The beginnings and endings of her novels come full circle in a final harmony. They are wholly satisfying aesthetic experiences in themselves.

The openings and conclusions frame Austen's novels and control plot patterns as well. My emphasis will therefore be on the nature of form--on how it shapes the action, develops character, provides resolution--and the related comic effects. In order to explore Austen's playful artifice, I plan to focus on her self-consciousness, beginnings and endings.

Through this analysis, I expect to discover a crucial clue to Austen's "performance" as a novelist. I plan to concentrate on her six major completed novels--Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion. Such a limitation is necessary to my purpose, which is to study how her openings relate to her conclusions. This relationship is unfinished in The Watsons and Sanditon and immature in her juvenalia or Lady Susan. Unlike open-ended novels, or novels like Tristram Shandy, that can begin and end at any point, Austen's novels follow a classical pattern, with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. The opening of each novel needs to be seen as part of a completed whole. Only the completed comic action can have the desired over-all effect on the reader. My critical aim will be to observe the openings and conclusions, while keeping in mind the effect of the whole.

I plan to approach the nature of the aesthetic experience Austen provides through the notion of play. Play will be explored in two ways: first, in its association with liveliness, the "light, and bright, and sparkling" (Letters

299) quality of Austen's art; and, secondly, in its philosophical association with the concepts of freedom and beauty. Keeping Austen's sparkling liveliness in mind will enable me to see how she establishes a playful rapport with her reader in the "Once upon a time" and "so they lived happily ever after" framework of her novels. Her technique emphasizes the playful subtlety with which she typically sets out to tease her readers. Omniscient narration is skillfully combined with the dramatic method, and both "telling" and "showing" are necessary to her design.

My analysis of Austen's playfulness will also involve a careful look at her dramatic method and her lively interest in the comedy of manners where individuals relate mainly through conversation in a social world. I expect to show that direct and indirect speech presentation are a part of her dramatic method and also that communication is an essential theme of her fictional world. Consequently, she presents social interaction and social behavior at length.

As a novelist, Austen delights in watching the social game by glancing behind social masks and observing people at play with each other. As she does this, her alert eye picks out appearances and reality, hypocrisy and sincerity, vice and virtue. The manners Jane Austen so carefully depicts both reveal and conceal values that are of central interest to her as a novelist. She is a self-conscious artist at play absorbed in a discovery of the truth. Significantly, even as

she creates her fictions, she can dwell on the "fictions" her characters create. Her heroine, Emma, for instance, by giving full play to her imagination, illustrates the dangers of the imagination. Such seemingly innocent fictional indulgence turns out to be no less dangerous than the games characters play in the fictional social world.

I divide the disseration into five chapters. This introductory chapter, having set forth the theoretical issues, leads to a chapter discussing Austen's self-consciousness as an artist and her delight in shattering the so-called "illusion of reality." I will analyse her self-conscious delight in her craft that finds most triumphant expression in her use of irony. The purpose of this analysis will be to discover how she plays with the conventions of fiction-writing, the fiction-making within her fictional world, and how she reveals herself at play, as one both involved in and removed from the action. I will review scholarship pertaining to Austen's self-consciousness more fully in Chapter 2.

Having examined the irony, both as theme and technique, that underlies the fascinating paradox between her self-consciousness as an artist and her impersonality and control of aesthetic distance, in Chapter 3 I shall discuss the openings of her six completed novels as well as the reader's response to the initial development of the action. For the most part, this chapter will describe the sort of expectations set up, the amount of foreshadowing that occurs to determine

how far the ending of each novel is predicted, and how each opening stands in relation to the completed pattern. The kinds of verbal patterns and the connotative and denotative meanings of words in the opening chapters will add new perspective to her play with language in pursuit of the truth.

Having related Austen's plot patterns and the significance of key words to her technique of handling point of view, especially to her dramatic method of showing her characters relate socially as they converse with each other, in Chapter 4, I will focus on questions raised by her conclusions and the attempt to resolve them. Kermode's Sense of an Ending (1967) raises, among others, the question whether a story with a "predestined end respects our sense of reality" (18). In his essay, "The Comic Conclusion in Jane Austen's Novels" Lloyd Brown sees Austen's comic conclusions as "basically parodic in structure and theme" (1582). D. A. Miller, preoccupied with the "anxieties of closure," examines the opposition between the narratable and closure in Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel. I will argue, however, that Austen's happy endings go beyond parody, satire, and irony to demonstrate Schiller's aesthetic ideal.

Having examined the endings of these novels in Chapter 4, I will show, in the fifth, and final chapter, how Austen creates aesthetically satisfying works of art, and how she reaches a point of perfect equilibrium to play freely with an

ideal world. Yet her ideal world is clearly rooted in the finite world, a point which brings us back to Schiller. S.S. Kerry, in his Schiller's Writings on Aesthetics, comments that Schiller "communicates...his immediate awareness of the symbolizing power of art, its capacity to express the ideal with the means of the finite world" (131). Austen, as we shall see, achieves this through her capacity to play.

CHAPTER II

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN AUSTEN'S FICTION

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

Henry James's image of Jane Austen is that of an instinctive, unconscious novelist who "fell-a-musing" over her work basket, lapsed into "wool gathering" and later picked up her "dropped stitches" as "little masterstrokes of imagination." Booth, quoting James's viewpoint, makes a distinct change of direction, but doesn't go far enough. "Although we cannot hope to decide whether Jane Austen was entirely conscious of her own artistry," he writes, "a careful look at the technique of any of her novels reveals a rather different picture from that of the unconscious spinster with her knitting needles" (Rhetoric of Fiction 244). A recent review essay, by Barry Roth, concludes with this assertive statement: "Now approaching the end of their second century, Austen studies, if they do not take the issue of her conscious artistry for granted, have nothing meaningful to examine at all" (Roth 225). And Joel Weinsheimer, in "Jane Austen's

Anthropocentrism" asserts, "We should begin with the premise that Jane Austen is a conscious artist--conscious of the tradition in which she wrote and of her individual artistry" (130). Roth's and Weinsheimer's position is my starting point as well.

Austen is a novelist fully awake to, and in absolute control of, her fictional world. In it, as Weinsheimer observes, "each word is deliberately chosen to fulfill a precise rhetorical intention" (130). Her conscious artistry can be seen in her subtly, self-conscious narrative technique. As she playfully works the different strands of her narrative into a pattern, she draws the reader's attention to the verbal medium itself as well as to the events narrated. In doing this she writes in the tradition that Robert Alter describes in affirming that Don Quixote

> is avowedly the work of a book-writing narrator--in fact, a narrator presenting the material of still another narrator--and we are continually made aware of how the narrator imposes patterns on the stuff of reality, playing with the ambiguous status of his book as art-or-reality. (Fielding 101)

The word "playing" is significant in this quotation and very relevant to Austen's rhetoric.

In Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre, Alter points out that the self-conscious novel draws our "attention to fictional form as a consciously articulated

entity rather than a transparent container of 'real' contents" (x). According to him, such "flaunted artifice" is "the narrative technique that constantly comments on itself" (Motives 13). He adds that the self-conscious novelist "simultaneously, or alternately, creates the illusion of reality and shatters it. The realist novel, by contrast, seeks to maintain a relatively consistent illusion of reality" (13). Alter thus makes a distinction between the "intermittently illusionist and consistently illusionist" types of fiction. He defines a self-conscious novel as

> one in which from beginning to end, through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention. (Partial Magic xi)

Austen demonstrates these characteristics in her six completed novels. She playfully draws the reader's attention to the process of literary invention. As Booth observes in "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Fiction before Tristram Shandy,"

> the reader's attention must be centered on the self-conscious narrator who intrudes into his novel to comment on himself as writer, and on his book, not simply as a series of events with moral implications, but as a created literary product. (165)

Commenting on the conversation between writer and reader in Tristram Shandy, Booth points out that "they frequently extend to two or more pages during the reading of which the interest in the story is largely replaced by interest in its narration" (172). Of Fielding's playful chapter headings in Tom Jones and the "long introductory chapters, which perhaps run the most danger of being considered merely ornamental" Booth observes, that "Many of them are functional only in the sense that they contribute to the characterization of the narrator and the intimate comic relationship between him and the reader" (179). This reader-narrator rapport is also central to Austen's artifice.

Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy, and Tom Jones provide delightful examples of the novelists' self-consciousness. To turn from these novels to those written by Jane Austen is to be acutely aware of the comic possibilities of her technique. The kind of "intermittent realism" found in the novels of Cervantes, Sterne and Fielding, differs from Austen's in that she is more subtle by far. As John Preston points out, Austen's art

> calls on irony to render the narrative intelligence as a kind of third dimension to the action, or as a colour filter not visible itself but affecting all the tones in the scene. Thus the reader is more conscious of the play of mind rather as an enlargement of his own sensibility than as the mechanism of a narration. Nevertheless, though the story seems to be impersonal and free standing as an object, it is in reality a transaction between author and reader. (11-12)

Booth agrees that the good reader values "the sense of standing with the author," and that "we ordinary, less perceptive readers ...[are] raised to a level suited to grasp the ironies" (Rhetoric of Fiction 257).

Unlike the self-conscious narrator of Tristram Shandy, who "refuses to let us read straight through, frustrates and plays with our desire to learn, know, keep to the point, and come to a conclusion" (Hardy 34), Austen's novels provide a different world, more complete and harmonious, with a distinct beginning, middle and end. The fact that Austen constructs such a perfect world is an essential aspect of her ironic perspective and the consistent tone of playfulness. If Sterne, in Tristram Shandy, "plays with the complexities of authorial voice...omniscience, completion" (Hardy 30), Austen also plays with the narrative mode in her witty, teasing way. Like Fielding, her playful self-consciousness is not merely an expression of a point of view but an inextricable aspect of the "meaning" of her fictional world.

Despite her self-conscious playfulness, Austen, more often, has been included in F.R.Leavis's "Great Tradition" with its emphasis on "moral seriousness" rather than mastery of technique. Leavis overlooks the significance of Austen's playfulness. He observes that "her interest in 'composition' is not something to be put over against her interest in life" and that "Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a great novelist" (7). Her predecessor, Fielding,

Leavis dismisses on both counts, saying that "The conventional talk about the 'perfect construction' of Tom Jones.....is absurd" (3) and that "Fielding's attitudes and his concerns with human nature, are simple" (4).

Leavis's influential conception of fiction, as Alter points out, "precludes the possibility of a comic novel" (Fielding 17). Alter is critical of Leavis's casual dismissal of Joyce, Sterne, and Fielding, who "express their seriousness through playfulness," and he finds no difficulty in including Austen within his canon, just as Leavis had done, though for entirely different reasons. Alter argues that "one could easily trace a Great Tradition, with very different emphases from Mr. Leavis', from Cervantes to Fielding to Sterne and Diderot, and on to Joyce and Nabokov" (Fielding 101). Alter's defense of Fielding can be applied to Austen, who belongs to the same tradition of "joyful self-consciousness."

Ian Watt, though aware of Fielding's delightful self-consciousness, also denies him greatness. As Booth points out, Watt "finds himself forced to deny Fielding full marks on the sole ground of his deficiency in formal realism" (Rhetoric of Fiction 42). "Few readers," writes Watt, "would like to be without the prefatory chapters or Fielding's diverting asides, but they undoubtedly derogate from the reality of the narrative"; and "such authorial intrusion, of course, tends to diminish the authenticity of the narrative" (286, 285). Alter points out that Watt

> in his otherwise illuminating book on the beginnings of the novel, can find no significant--or genuinely novelistic--innovation of technique in Fielding's works; so that his desire to be fair-minded ultimately reduces him to praising Fielding in oddly nineteenth-century terms for his 'wisdom.' (6)

Alter makes the suggestion that "formal realism" is "not so dependable a measure of the novel at its distinctive best, as criticism after James has tended to assume. How does it help, after all, to explain the profound innovation of Don Quixote?" Or, for that matter, of Jane Austen, one might ask. Alter argues:

> Novelists in general have often called their readers' attention to the contrast between Literature, which is a mere representation of reality, and their own work, which the reader is encouraged to think of as life itself. It is hardly a coincidence that a number of important novelists--Cervantes, Fielding, Jane Austen, Thackeray--started out writing parodies, for the sense of realism in the novel often depends upon a parodist's awareness of the awkward disparity between things as they really are and things as they are conventionally represented in literature. (Fielding 101-102)

To explore this "relationship between literary creation and reality" in Austen's novels, let us first turn to Northanger Abbey (written early in her career, though published posthumously), in which she expresses a very self-conscious delight in her craft as she plays with the conventions of fiction-writing. The sentimental novel, the gothic romance, as well as the kind of parodying novel written

by Cervantes and Fielding, provide the literary traditions against which Austen sets her artifice in Northanger Abbey. Lloyd Brown refers to Austen's concept of parody "as a rhetorical relationship with the reader" (10). According to him, "she uses these parodic patterns to explore the internal problems of communications between a Catherine Morland, or an Emma Woodhouse, and the real world" (10). From beginning to end of Northanger Abbey, Austen draws attention to the fictional reality she constructs. "Watch me tell my story," she seems to say, "it is the kind of story you love to hear, only I'm telling it my way." She consciously exploits the readers' expectations to tell them their favorite "once upon a time" story with all its hopes and fears and horrors and hopelessness, but finally ends happily. Ironically, with the happy ending, which is a moment of pure play, she makes a serious point.

Northanger Abbey is an example of the kind of novel, that

> expresses its seriousness through playfulness, that is acutely aware of itself as a mere structure of words even as it tries to discover ways of going beyond words to the experiences words seek to indicate. (Partial Magic ix)

The opening paragraph of the novel lists the qualities of the "heroine," Catherine Morland, and then tells us:

> Such were the propensities--her abilities were quite as **extraordinary.** She never could learn or understand anything before she was taught; and sometimes not even

> then, for she was often inattentive and occasionally **stupid.** (14, my emphasis)

The words "extraordinary" and "stupid" are used in consecutive sentences to describe the same person to emphasize the extraordinary fact that the heroine of a novel should be so ordinary. The last sentence of the opening paragraph concludes with the exclamation, "What a strange unaccountable character!" (14). Austen exclaims at the sensational fact that the heroine of her novel should be so unheroic. Her handling of words parodies the novel readers' typical expectation of lofty notions of heroism as she self-consciously goes about the business of writing a different kind of novel.

The action of Northanger Abbey centers on the development of Catherine Morland's sensibility. Not only is she the heroine of a novel, but she is herself the reader of novels. In the opening chapter we are told that Catherine enjoys reading books provided they are "all story and no reflection" (15). She can even recall a list of moral sentiments "so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of...eventful lives" (15). Being a well-read heroine, Catherine can construct a story of such horror and suspense that even she starts at the "boldness of her own surmises" (188) while staying in Northanger Abbey. The Abbey turns out to be the perfect inspiration for her over-charged imagination. Playing

with the fiction-making within her fictional world, Austen exposes the ordinary heroine of her novel as a typical reader of novels, creating her own sensational fictional world.

In this world of her own making, Catherine imagines herself to be the terrified heroine who parallels the terrified reader of novels she is in "real" life. Lloyd Brown accurately points out that

> the parodic fluctuations of Jane Austen's narrative viewpoint coincide with the course of Catherine's subsequent development. Hence, immediately after dismissing the Gothic evaluation of her heroine's "deficiencies," Jane Austen returns to it with an ironical confirmation of its social relevance. Her expectations, or a yearning for the fantastic and the romantic are a fact of life. Consequently, however deficient her reading might be, Catherine does know 'all such works as heroines must read,' especially well-worn lines from Pope, Gray, Thomson, and Shakespeare. (Bits of Ivory 215-16)

Thus, due to her fascinated interest in reading, Catherine Morland's adventures are more imagined than real. Darrel Mansell observes that

> she has entered the world in a mental state something like Sir Walter Elliott's dressing room at Kellynch Hall [in Persuasion], surrounded by mirrors, and not so much receiving her surroundings as projecting them. In the course of the novel this self-created world must give way reluctantly and painfully to the real one. (15)

Catherine constructs a reality based on a heightened sensibility quite opposed to her creator's reality based on

sense. It is the ironic gap between two kinds of fiction--the author's and her heroine's--that most delights the reader.

As Julia Brown observes, Austen "delighted in the diversity and changefulness of reality" (29). She could best express this through her use of irony. Brown argues:

> In Jane Austen the diversity of "reality" is so extensive and interesting as to constitute an imaginative triumph. There is no schism between imagination and reality in the novels except what the deluded individual may see there. Catherine Morland first learns that the gothic imagination exaggerates reality, and then that reality is as inventive and surprising as any enthusiast of fiction could wish. (28-9)

Austen plays with the ambiguities inherent in reality and imagination, sense and sensibility, and triumphs over them; the apparent gap between Catherine's sensibility and her creator's sense delights because Austen self-consciously draws the reader's attention to the differences and similarities between the apparent and the real. As the action of Northanger Abbey develops, the reader sees the effects of the heroine's reading on her actions. She develops a sentimental friendship with Isabella Thorpe. Becoming inseperable, they meet regularly, even on rainy days and proceed to "shut themselves up, to read novels together" (37). At this point in Northanger Abbey, comes the novelist's emphatic self-conscious assertion:

> Yes, novels for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding--joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing their harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. (37)

Austen's unexpectedly long digression on the importance of novels ends with a claim for the superiority of novels over a collection of moral sentiments. The action of the novel comes to a stop as the author commends novels where

> The greatest powers of the mind are displayed, the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the most happiest **delineation** of its varieties, the liveliest **effusions** of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the **best chosen language.** (38, my emphasis)

The novelist who set out to write a burlesque on the sentimental novel and the gothic romance thus comes out with an explicit statement of what the novel should be and what it essentially is--not an exaggerated, improbable coloring of life evoking an emotional response but a work of art displaying the greatest powers of the mind and presenting a "thorough knowledge of human nature" (38). Austen aptly emphasizes words such as "delineation," "effusions," and "language." Catherine Morland, who had been ridiculed for the quality of her reading, is now ironically commended for her habit of reading novels. The self-conscious narrator seems to

smile at her heroine doing what in itself is a commendable thing, but the implication is that she could be reading better novels, such as the one in which she is herself the heroine.

As the heroine of this novel, she finally gains self-knowledge and is freed from her illusions. From that point onwards, her adventures are real, not fictions of her own making. In Chapter 10 (Vol. 2) we read, "The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened....The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance" (199, 201). Here romance contrasts with reality and, despite complications, there is, finally, the happy ending. Its reality completes the pattern of contrast with romance.

From beginning to end, we are aware of the self-conscious novelist shaping her novel. Mansell makes an interesting observation about this technique:

> Again and again her heroines are pulled down in a 'real' world, but her depiction of that world in the novels is so stylized, so much the product of a selective efficient and determined artistic consciousness, that the result does not very often even approximate the rich complexity of the world as we know it. (7)

This paradox is fully illustrated in Austen's self-conscious and comic handling of the novel's conclusion:

> The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend,

> I fear, to the bosom of my readers who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity. (250)

This is a "tight little fictional world" (Mansell 8), in which the characters, the passage of time and events, are all compressed within a few pages. Austen achieves this effect with a confident stroke and refers to the future "perfect felicity" as an absolute in her fictional world. The reader is included in the fast-paced, "perfect" happenings; "we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (250), she writes. The author, her readers, and the characters are all a part of the finale; all are included within the circle of form. Northanger Abbey mirrors the novelist as much as her readers and characters in action. With her eyes fixed playfully on herself in the act of writing, and on her readers, who, in the process of reading, must free themselves from limiting forces as much as the characters themselves, Austen treats art as an expression of play.

Lloyd Brown observes that in Northanger Abbey

> the obvious artifices of Jane Austen's denouement are really a final thrust at the finale of the typical Gothic novel. Having been assured of the 'perfect felicity' of the approaching end, the reader is pointedly reminded of the need for some 'probable circumstance' that will remove General Tilney's objections to his son's proposed marriage. (224)

This circumstance, as Brown points out, is Elinor Tilney's

marriage to "a man of fortune, an event so contrived that the anonymous bridegroom cannot be plausibly presented in person at this belated stage" (225); and so Austen self-consciously declares that "the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable" (251).

Having brought her story to a happy conclusion, Austen playfully leaves the pen in the reader's hand, "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (252). At the close of her novel, Austen seems to assert, "I've told you my story about story-telling and fictionalizing because you all enjoy reading stories; now draw what conclusions you like for the last stroke of the pen will be yours." Creative reading must balance creative writing, and so her readers are left to exercise their creativity to shape the final meaning of Northanger Abbey. Lloyd Brown sees in Austen's conclusions a "reaction to the didacticism and sentimentality of the 'happy ending.'" He points out that the "mocking self-consciousness of these essentially comic conclusions evokes a contrast between a literary convention and the good novelist's preoccupation with reality" (Bits of Ivory 224).

It is a contrast as evident in Sense and Sensibility, which, though published earlier, was composed after Northanger Abbey. As Brown points out, we see the "parody of a

mechanical 'happy ending'" in the "mocking contrast between Marianne's previous sentimental fantasies and her eventual fortunes" (Bits of Ivory 225) in this passage from the novel:

> But so it was. Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting--instead of remaining even for ever with her mother, and finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in her more calm and sober judgment she had determined on,--she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (378-79)

The conclusion of Sense and Sensibility takes us back to its opening chapters.

From the very beginning of Sense and Sensibility, the reader is involved in the dual experience of listening to, and watching Austen create her fictional world. She establishes intimacy with the reader through her self-consciousness. For instance, as Austen narrates the sequence of events that expose the selfishness of the John Dashwoods, her distinct voice comes through in the sentences:

> When he [John Dashwood] gave his promise to his father, he meditated within himself to increase the fortunes of his sisters by the present of a thousand pounds a-piece. He then **really** thought himself equal to it. (5, my emphasis)

The word "really" emphasizes the writer's insistence on the truth; it also echoes John Dashwood's thinking. It involves

the reader in the subtle experience of both believing and not believing in the truth of John Dashwood's good intentions. The reader is absorbed in listening to the narration of the sequence of events; at the same time, he can distance himself from the events to observe Austen's rhetorical strategy.

In Chapter 6 (Vol.1), as Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters settle in at Barton Cottage, we are given a description of Marianne's pianoforte being unpacked and Elinor's drawings being "affixed to the walls of their sitting room" (30); then comes the self-conscious narrative summary using the deictic "these": "In such employments as **these** they were interrupted soon after breakfast..." (30). Clauses such as "They were **of course** very anxious to see a person" (31) and "conversation **however** was not wanted" (31) further establish the intimate mood of communication between the writer and her readers. The speaking voice is very evident in "of course" and "however." Clearly, she is no disappearing narrator, for the novelist's controlled and conversational tone can be distinctly "heard" telling her story. The reader is even directly addressed, as in a moment of heightened intensity when Lucy tells Elinor of her engagement to Edward Ferrars. "What felt Elinor at that moment?" (129) asks the novelist before proceeding with her description of Elinor's disbelief.

In Chapter 3 (Vol.3), Austen hastens to clear up a misunderstanding that offended Mrs. Jennings regarding what passed between Col. Brandon and Elinor. "What had **really**

passed between them was to this effect," she writes and then gives details of what "really" happened (282). Such self-consciousness in telling her story gives Austen complete freedom to speak in the first person, as happens in Chapter 14 (Vol.2):

> I now come to the relation of a misfortune, which about this time befell Mrs. John Dashwood. It so happened that while her two sisters with Mrs. Jennings were first calling on her in Harley-street, another of her acquaintance had dropt in. (248)

The transition to the first person is hardly noticeable in the first sentence. Since the reader is always aware of the story-teller's voice, the sudden use of "I" comes as no interruption.

The novelist's method of temporarily and briefly halting the narrative to comment on it is another device Austen uses freely in Sense and Sensibility. For instance, in Chapter 21 (Vol.1), Elinor and Marianne are shown observing the Miss Steeles humour the Middleton children as well as their mother. Austen makes a very explicit comment on the action of the characters in her story:

> Fortunately for those who pay their court such foibles, a fond mother, though, in pursuit of praise for her children, the most rapacious of human beings, is likewise the most credulous; her demands are exorbitant; but she will swallow anything; and the excessive affection and endurance of the Miss Steeles towards her offspring were viewed therefore by Lady Middleton without the smallest surprise or distrust. She saw with maternal complacency

> all the impertinent incroachments and mischievous tricks to which her cousins submitted. (120)

In this scene, Austen stands with Marianne and Elinor observing and dissecting the scene she creates. Her direct style gives added meaning to the implications her tone carries. When the author's comment exposes the hypocrisy of the Miss Steeles that underlies their smooth social interchange, her tone takes on a mock urgency to narrate what happens after a pin slightly scratches the child's neck:

> The mother's consternation was excessive; but it could not surpass the alarm of the Miss Steeles, and everything was done by all three in so critical an emergency, which affection could suggest as likely to assuage the agonies of the little sufferer. (121)

Austen's use of very stylized language and choice of such words as "so critical an emergency" and "the agonies of the little sufferer" bring out the triviality of the incident as well as of those involved in it. On her part, the child, we are told, "was too wise to stop crying" (144). This last detail delights the reader with its triumphant irony.

Austen goes on to draw an ironic conclusion from the happenings in her story:

> The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in

> securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience. (376)

The tone is positive, as heard in "the prosperity which crowned it" and "a most encouraging instance," but Lucy's "behaviour" is not. There is a playful gap between subject matter and tone. Self-consciously, Austen examines the action with her logical "therefore" and leaves the reader with the ironic lesson learned from Lucy's behaviour.

The good reader is ever alert to the writer's ironic tone. D.J. Enright points out that

> The 'double take' is always part of our response to irony, as we move or are jolted from what was said to what is meant, or, as it may be, from what we understood to what (we remind ourselves) we have actually heard. (84)

He elaborates

> A short, sharp example, rather like a train steaming determinedly along the track which, without our noticing it happen, is suddenly seen to have reversed direction, occurs in Sense and Sensibility, when Robert Ferrars, observed in the protracted act of choosing a toothpick case for himself, gives the impression of 'a person and face, of strong, natural, sterling insignificance'. (84)

Through irony, Austen jolts us into seeing the gap between appearances and reality. For instance, as she self-consciously ties up the threads of Sense and Sensibility, Austen writes:

> Setting aside the jealousies and ill-will continually subsisting between Fanny and Lucy, in which their husbands of course took a part, as well as the frequent domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves, nothing could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together. (377)

Playfully, Austen reveals the disparity between apparent harmony and actual discord.

This gap between seeming and being, finds more subtle expression in Pride and Prejudice, written after Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey. Mark Schorer comments on Austen's development in Pride and Prejudice: "Where her girlish work had toyed with the blunt tools of burlesque, she had now become the absolute, inimitable mistress of the refinements of comic irony" (vii). In Northanger Abbey, the heroine, herself a reader of novels, is explicitly parodied by her creator; in Pride and Prejudice, the now more subtly self-conscious artist constructs an unforgettable scene in which Mr. Collins is handed a book from a circulating library and his response is given in:

> he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels. --Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed.--Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce's Sermons. (68)

The playful novelist places at the very center of this scene what she herself is writing--a novel. She does not digress, as in Northanger Abbey, explicitly to silence critics of novels and underline the value of reading novels, even as she parodies their worst variety. Instead, using a subtler technique, she makes the same point. The silly Kitty and Lydia, supporters of the novel, are set off against the solemn and stupid Collins; they are as empty-headed and giddy as the other is pompous and self-absorbed. Exposing both types, the novelist focuses on the novel, its ridiculous supporters and critics.

In doing this, Austen emphasizes the value and significance of the kind of novel she is writing. In Pride and Prejudice, she delights her reader with a self-consciously constructed fictional world. An unforgettable example of this is the scene in which Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth Bennet. Proposal scenes are in themselves highly conventionalized in fiction. Austen exposes both the convention itself and Mr. Collins's illusion of reality. The curtain seems to go up with the opening sentence of Chapter 19, "The next day opened a new scene at Longbourne" (104). Self-consciously, the novelist prepares the reader for the day's drama and then follows the central character Mr. Collins, into action: "On finding Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth, and one of the younger girls together, soon after breakfast, he addresses the mother in these words" (104); "these words" are

then given in detail. Some sentences later, the reader is told, "Mrs. Bennet and Kitty walked off, and as soon as they were gone Mr. Collins began" (104). Then follows the hilarious proposal scene in which Mr. Collins offers himself to Elizabeth. After showing Mr. Collins' five sentences entangled in a string of subordinate clauses, Austen fills up the short pause in his speech with an equally short observation and comment:

> The idea of Mr. Collins, with all his solemn composure, being run away with by his feelings, made Elizabeth so near laughing that she could not use the short pause he allowed in any attempt to stop him further, and he continued. (105)

He actually utters four hundred and ninety six words more before Austen skilfully combines Elizabeth's point of view with her own in this thought, "It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him now" (106). And so Mr. Collins's speech is brought to a temporary halt.

As a contrast to this scene, Mr. Collins's next proposal, this time to Charlotte, is reported thus:

> In as short a time as Mr. Collins long speeches would allow, everything was settled between them to the satisfaction of both; and as they entered the house, he earnestly entreated her to name the day that was to make him the happiest of men. (121-122)

Here Austen's stylized language gives the reader, in the words

of Alter, "a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention" (Partial Magic xi). No details of what actually happened are presented as Austen wraps up the proposal and its acceptance in one breathless sentence. The reader is hurriedly told about the "speedily" moving events that result in "The whole family in short" being "properly overjoyed on the occasion" (122). Austen parodies a fictional convention in this proposal scene. At the same time, Mr. Collins's inability to grasp the experience of love and romance is exposed for the second time. The fact that he does finally succeed, doubly emphasizes the irony in this scene.

Austen's self-consciously brisk style of narrating events does not change even when she reports turbulent and sincere feelings. She maintains a playful gap between what she is saying and how she is saying it. For instance, when Darcy hears Elizabeth express her love for him, his response is briefly described in these words:

> The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. (366)

The stock expression "a man violently in love," written in an even tone, points the reader to the extravagance of fictional convention. Ironically, it also picks up the language Mr.

Collins had used while proposing to Elizabeth, "And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection" (106).

Darcy is "violently in love," and his creator surmises he has "probably" never felt happier. Around these observations, the novelist constructs the essentials of a love scene, leaving the reader free to fill in the details. At the same time, the reader's response is carefully controlled, as is evident in the sentence that follows:

> Had Elizabeth been able to encounter his eye, she might have seen how well the expression of heart-felt delight, defused over his face, became him; but though she could not look, she could listen, and he told her of feelings, which, in proving of what importance she was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable. (366)

Austen's rational approach to the experience of love as a process of understanding requires a thoughtful reading of an essentially passionate experience. She makes an ironic comment on the violence of passion and the steadying power of love that is deeply felt. Within her apparently matter-of-fact style, Austen contains the intensity of feeling.

Though the novelist's control is evident throughout the novel, it is in the concluding chapters that she actually enters her fictional world and comments on it in the first person. The transition from the first two sentences of the last chapter to the third sentence, in which the authorial "I"

appears, is handled so skillfully, that it takes an alert reader to realize what has happened:

> Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters. With what delighted pride she afterwards visited Mrs. Bingley and talked of Mrs. Darcy may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake of her family, that the accomplishment of her earnest desire in the establishment of so many children, produced so happy an effect as to make her a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman for the rest of her life; though perhaps it was lucky for her husband, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that she still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly. (385)

One hardly notices Austen pull off her transparent fictional mask to speak in the first person as someone who knows her fictional characters in "real life." The tone of narration remains consistent throughout Pride and Prejudice, and the manner of narration is an indistinguishable part of what's being narrated. This consistency accounts for the manner in which Austen can make a transition from the third person to the first person and back again. After this unusual "intrusion," she goes on as before observing, describing, commenting on the action, "joyfully self-conscious" of herself as the creator of her fictional world.

A conventional theme of this fictional world is marriage. Mansfield Park, written after Pride and Prejudice, begins with this theme. In a self-conscious aside, Austen balances her fictional world against the real one. It is a skillful and

precarious balance. The reader is told of the marriage of Miss Maria Ward "with only seven thousand pounds" (3) to Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park; then comes the self-conscious aside expressing the antithesis of "men of large fortune" and "pretty women": "She had two sisters to be benefited by her elevation... But there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them" (3). If dreams come true, the novelist seems to assert, reality on the whole fails to measure up to even well-deserved dreams. Of course the word "deserve" is uttered here with an ironic awareness of people's tendency to think very well of themselves; only the rest of the novel will reveal whether or not each of the three sisters was deserving of a truly happy marriage.

The fictional world in which Maria Ward and Sir Thomas Bertram are to live "happily ever after" is, ironically, the imperfect world in which the theatricals are performed. It is Mr. Yates who brings to Mansfield Park "the idea that the party there should put on a play for their own amusement" (Mansell 125). This episode of the play, according to Mansell, dramatizes Austen's attitude toward play-acting, "Acting in a play is a means of being another self, of speaking with another voice" (127). Tony Tanner elaborates, "if you can play every part equally well, how can you know who you really are? And, if you can simulate all moods and affections, how can you know what you really feel?" (Jane

Austen 169). Of the actors, Tanner observes, "There is no one left except Fanny to uphold the claims and necessity of lucid moral consciousness. The others are lost in their roles; blind behind their masks" (165) till Sir Thomas' unexpected return puts an end to all the play-acting. Austen's self-conscious question sums up the critical moment of Sir Thomas' return, "How is the consternation of the party to be described?" (175).

As the curtain falls on the whole episode, the novelist seems unable to resist a playful comment on Mrs. Norris, so actively involved in the play-acting, and who now

> contrived to remove one article from his [Sir Thomas's] sight that might have distressed him. The curtain over which she had presided with such talent and such success, went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be particularly in want of green baize. (195)

The conversational narrative tone heard in the repeated "such" and the adverb "particularly" marks a comic contrast to the solemnity of the moment when Sir Thomas's sudden arrival completely alters the playful atmosphere of Mansfield Park.

Though her own role as an artist is self-conscious and free, Austen ironically presents the dangers inherent in the fictional world of play-acting within her own fictional world. Lovers' Vows, the play chosen to be enacted in Mansfield Park while Sir Thomas is away in the West Indies, comes to represent the absence of harmony and integrity. Tanner points

out that in enacting the play "in the absence of Sir Thomas...a whole range of hitherto restrained 'powers' and impulses start to press for expression and indulgence" ("Jane Austen and the 'Quiet Thing' 154) among the group led by Mr. Yates. Commenting on the fact that Henry Crawford is the "best actor of all," Tanner observes:

> The point is, of course, that these talents stray out of the theatre and into real life: off-stage he is 'at treacherous play' with the feelings of Julia and Maria--the latter being only too happy to indulge her illicit passions for Henry under the guise of 'acting.' (154)

Ultimately, as Tanner points out, "The disorder suggested by the theatricals, becomes a moral chaos in real life" (156).

We thus see life imitate art in Austen's fictional world. In Chapter 6 (Vol.2), when Crawford shows interest in Fanny, who is indifferent to him, the author self-consciously comments:

> Although there doubtless are such unconquerable young ladies (or one should not read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgment by all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do, I have no inclination to believe Fanny one of them, or to think that with so much tenderness of disposition, and so much taste as belonged to her, she could have escaped heart-whole from the courtship (though the courtship only of a fortnight) of such a man as Crawford, in spite of there being some previous ill-opinion to be overcome, had not her affection been engaged elsewhere. (231)

Literature reflects life's happenings, the self-conscious

novelist points out, "or we should not read about them." The authorial comment is made in one long, involved sentence that includes the first person. As is typical of Austen in Pride and Prejudice or Sense and Sensibility, the "I" does not draw attention to itself, but to the narrative as it is self-consciously shaped. Though she speaks in her own voice, Austen maintains a distance from her fictional world and thus demonstrates a skillful control of her medium.

The whole question of reality and the "illusion of art" is a complex one, for it is Austen's irony and wit that reveal her playful approach to it. Wayne Booth refutes critics who see Austen's intrusion into her novels as a shattering of the illusion of reality (Rhetoric of Fiction 264). Referring to a specific scene in Emma he questions

> But who has ever read this far in Emma under the delusion that he is reading a realistic portrayal which is suddenly shattered by the unnatural appearance of the narrator? If the narrator's superabundant wit is destructive of the kind of illusion proper to this work, the novel has been ruined long before. (Rhetoric of Fiction 264)

Here Booth is making a point Alter later develops in his description of the self-conscious novelist as one who "simultaneously or alternately, creates the illusion of reality and shatters it" (Motives 13).

In Emma, the last novel published during Austen's life, the novelist places Emma at the center of her fictional world;

the reader gets a double perspective--the narrator's and the character's. In Pride and Prejudice, as we saw during Collins' proposal to Elizabeth, Elizabeth's point of view parallels the narrator's. But such parallels are unusual in the first four novels. This method is developed more fully in Emma, where the action subtly shifts from Emma's point of view to the narrator's and includes both; then very subtly Austen comments on her heroine's viewpoint.

Once again, the author's conversation with her reader is clearly "heard" in the opening chapter of Emma where she uses words such as "indeed" and "however." The reader-narrator rapport is evident in sentences such as: "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" (5); "The danger, **however**, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her" (5-6). Referring to Emma's friend and companion Miss Taylor, recently married to Mr. Weston and deeply missed by Emma, Austen asks the reader, "How was she to bear the change?"(6) Self-consciously, she proceeds to answer her own question, "It was true that her friend was going half a mile from them, but Emma was aware that great must be the difference between a Mrs. Weston only half a mile from them and a Miss Taylor in the house" (6-7).

Emma, not content to sit and brood over her circumstances, finds it much "pleasanter to let her

imagination range and work at [her friend] Harriet's fortune" (69). In a mock tone, Austen demonstrates Emma's attempt to improve Harriet's mind through literary pursuits. In chapter 9 (Vol.1), the reader is made aware of Harriet's "Collecting and transcribing all the riddles of every sort that she could meet with, into a thin quarto of hot-pressed paper made up by her friend, and ornamented with cyphers and trophies" (69); then comes the novelist's self-conscious comment "In **this** age of literature such collections on a very grand scale are not uncommon" (69). The deictic "this" emphasizes Austen's ironic tone. Underlying the activity of collecting riddles is Emma's illusion that Mr. Elton is falling in love with Harriet, when, in fact, he is in love with Emma herself (or so he thinks). Meanwhile, Harriet is easily persuaded to believe in Emma's fictions.

In Chapter 9 (Vol.1), when Mr. Elton "composes" a charade for Harriet's and Emma's collection and leaves it with Emma, who passes it on to Harriet, it does not take long for Emma to persuade Harriet that the charade is actually Mr. Elton's "tribute of admiration" to her. As the chapter concludes, the self-conscious, narrative voice mockingly affirms how Mr. Elton "the hero of **this** inimitable charade walked in" (81). Once again, the deictic "this" underlines Austen's playful, critical attitude to the fiction-making within her fictional world.

Furthermore, in this chapter, the reader is not just told of, but shown different points of view. As Austen describes the scene in which Harriet's picture is brought in, her tone reveals her attitude toward Mr. Elton: the reader sees Harriet's opinion being shaped and Emma's imagination "indulging in" fantasizing as she creates her fictions within her creator's fictional world. In this scene, replete with irony, the reader is invited to take a close look at the picture and those who look at it. We read of how Mr. Elton

> got up to look at it, and sighed out his half-sentences of admiration just as he ought; and as for Harriet's feelings, they were visibly forming themselves into as strong and steady an attachment as her youth and sort of mind admitted. Emma was soon perfectly satisfied of Mr. Martin's being no otherwise remembered than as he furnished a contrast with Mr. Elton, of the utmost advantage to the latter. (69)

On these assumptions, Emma continues to act till she finally stumbles onto the truth and discovers the false and untrue in her fiction-making. As Booth points out, "We have been privileged to watch with her as she observes her favorite character..." (Rhetoric of Fiction 265).

Just as in Northanger Abbey Austen playfully exposes Catherine Morland's fiction-making and explicitly comments on the novelist's fiction-making as a serious art, in this scene of literary pursuits in Emma, we have fiction-making within the world of fiction. The chapter is a paradigm of one theme

of Emma--playing with reality, making up fictions, confusing reality with fiction--and, at the same time, the novelist self-consciously plays with the aesthetic possibilities of art and creates her fictional illusion of reality. The shaping hand of the self-conscious narrator is clearly visible, as is her mocking, playful tone.

Finally, we can examine the scene in Chapter 13 (Vol.3), in which Mr. Knightley proposes to Emma, and Austen self-consciously records Emma's reaction: "She spoke then, on being entreated. What did she say? --Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does" (431). Such smoothness of narration contains Austen's typical ironic tone. Here she is dealing with the expected pattern of behavior, the conventional social world against which the lovers' unique regard for each other is set off. She must get on with her story, so teases the reader with her question--"What did she say?"--and her answer--"--Just what she ought, of course" (431)--and then adds, "She said enough to show there need not be despair--and to invite him to say more himself" (431). Even though the reader is not told exactly what Emma said, Austen's comment skilfully parallels the brevity and conventional form of Emma's reply. She thus mocks her readers who might ask, "And then what happened? And then?" At the same time, as her summary of the scene parallels Emma's brief reply, she dwells on the nature of truth, when she writes:

> Seldom very seldom does complete Truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material. (431)

The narrator thus emphasizes not so much what is happening as the significance of the communication between Mr. Knightley and Emma. From a quick survey of external manners (how Mr. Knightley behaves as he proposes to Emma, how like a lady Emma responds, the polite and the gentlemanly and ladylike way they address each other), Austen attempts to grasp the essence of a unique experience, the truth that lies deep within the human mind and heart, that which must unite to make true love possible. It is her typical technique. Self-consciously she pulls her story tightly together. The reader may be left free to fill in the details of the experience, but Austen controls his or her response by reporting the scene in summary and then dwelling on its significance. She is getting at the essential meaning, significance, and pattern of her fictional world.

In her handling of this central love scene in Emma, Austen is also getting at the way in which novelists record such scenes. As Booth points out

> Like the author herself, we don't care about the love scene. We can find love scenes in almost any novelist's works, but only here can we find a mind and heart that can give us clarity without oversimplification, sympathy and romance without sentimentality, and biting irony without cynicism. (Rhetoric of Fiction 266)

Booth is elaborating on "The dramatic illusion of her presence as a character" which, he points out, is

> as important as any other element in the story. When she intrudes, the illusion is not shattered. The only illusion we care about, the illusion of travelling intimately with a hardy little band of readers whose heads are screwed on tight and whose hearts are in the right place, is actually strengthened when we are refused the romantic love scene. (266)

Booth appropriately contrasts Austen's technique of narration in Emma with that of Persuasion:

> In Emma there are many breaks in the point of view, because Emma's beclouded mind cannot do the whole job. In Persuasion where the heroine's viewpoint is faulty only in her ignorance of Captain Wentworth's love, there are very few. Anne Elliot's consciousness is sufficient, as Emma's is not, for most of the needs of the novel which she dominates. Once the ethical and intellectual framework has been established by the narrator's introduction, we enter Anne's consciousness and remain bound to it much more rigorously than we are bound to Emma's. (Rhetoric of Fiction 251-2)

The opening and concluding chapters of Persuasion are particularly significant for the skillfully playful way in which Austen asserts her self-conscious role. As Booth observes, "The only...important breaks in the angle of vision of Persuasion come at the beginning and at the end" (252).

In the opening chapter of Persuasion, as Austen goes about the novelist's business of introducing her characters,

she moves freely between literature and life in her observation

> That Lady Russell, of steady age and character, and extremely well provided for, should have no thought of a second marriage needs no apology to the public, which is rather apt to be reasonably discontented when a woman does marry again, than when she does not; but Sir Walter's continuing in singleness requires explanation. (5)

Here she self-consciously pauses to announce to the reader the real and apparent reasons for Sir Walter's not re-marrying:

> Be it known then, that Sir Walter, like a good father, (having met with one or two private disappointments in very unreasonable applications) prided himself on remaining single for his dear daughters' sake. (5)

In this sentence, Austen echoes Sir Walter Elliot's good opinion of himself, "a good father," and then playfully exposes the reality of "private disappointments in very unreasonable applications." The mocking narrative tone exposes Sir Walter Elliot's self-delusion and egoism. It provides a comic contrast between appearances and reality.

In her typical, self-conscious style, Austen can interrupt her narrative and give a quick summary. This happens in Chapter 7 (Vol.3), when the Musgrove girls, while visiting their nephew, Charles, who had broken his collar bone

> were able so far to digress from their nephew's state, as to give the information of Captain Wentworth's visit;--staying behind their father and mother, to endeavour to express how perfectly delighted they were with Mr. Wentworth,--how much handsomer, how infinitely more agreeable they thought him than any individual among their male acquaintance, who had been at all a favourite before--how glad they had been to hear papa invite him to stay to dinner--how sorry when he said it was quite out of his power--and how glad again, when he had promised, in reply to papa's and mama's farther pressing invitations, to come and dine with them on the morrow, actually on the morrow! (54)

They continue in this vein, till Austen self-consciously complements their enthusiasm with her own comment, "And, in short, he had looked and said every thing with such exquisite grace..." (54). The Musgrove girls' boundless enthusiasm, expressed in an unlimited flow of words, is set off against their creator's need to stop them self-consciously so she can get on with her story. Part of the reader's delight in reading the novel is that of watching its creator drawing attention to her fiction-making, to herself as a novelist at play.

Persuasion is replete with situations in which people narrate incidents and episodes to each other, and the reader is made aware of the shape of these stories within Austen's narrative. On one such occasion she writes:

> Mrs. Musgrove was giving Mrs. Croft the history of her eldest daughter's engagement, and just in that inconvenient tone of voice which was perfectly audible while it pretended to be a whisper. Anne felt that she did not belong to the conversation and yet, as Captain Harville seemed thoughtful and not disposed to talk, she could not avoid hearing many undesirable particulars, such as 'how Mr. Musgrove and my brother Hayter had met

> again and again to talk it over; what my brother Hayter had said one day, and what Mr. Musgrove had proposed the next'...and a great deal in the same style of open-hearted communication. (230)

This narrative interest, the delight in telling a tale, Austen is ever conscious of. The passage also highlights some of the novelist's problems in writing novels. We are all, after all, story tellers.

The concluding chapter of Persuasion begins with the narrator's rhetorical question, "Who can be in doubt of what happened?" and then asserts:

> When two people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be the truth.... (248)

Austen ironically undercuts such truth in conventional fiction as she self-consciously underlines the truth of her fictional world. These sentences complete what she has been doing at several stages in the narrative by stepping aside briefly to connect the action in her fictional world to real life experiences and observations.

As the novel draws to a conclusion, using the present tense, Austen brings the reader up to date on what happens beyond its action. She briefly narrates Mrs. Russell's, Mary's, Elizabeth's and Mr. Elliot's reactions to Anne's

engagement, and then playfully compares Anne's eldest sister Elizabeth's reactions with those of her younger sister Mary's:

> It would be well for the eldest sister if she were equally satisfied with her situation, for a change is not very probable there. She had soon the mortification of seeing Mr. Elliot withdraw; and no one of proper condition has since presented himself to raise even the unfounded hopes which sunk with him. (250)

Here fictional time connects with real time as Austen self-consciously asserts that "no one of proper condition has since presented himself."

This concluding chapter also picks up the central significance of Sir Walter Elliot's favorite book, the Baronetage, which included his family history. Not his love for Anne, but his acknowledgement of Captain Wentworth's superiority of appearance enables "Sir Walter at last to prepare his pen with a very good grace for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honor" (248-9). This volume of honour is the same book with which the novel begins:

> Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage...this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened: 'ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH-HALL'....(3)

Self-consciously, Austen uses a mock style that parallels Sir Walter's elevated conception of himself as he reads his

favourite book, which, it turns out, is a book about himself. Tony Tanner points out that Persuasion begins with

> the description of a man looking at a book in which he reads the same words as her [Austen's] book begins with--'Elliot of Kellynch-Hall.'...This opening situation poses someone fixed in an ultimate solipsism gazing with inexhaustible pleasure into the textual mirror which simply gives him back his name. ("In Between--Anne Elliot Marries a Sailor" 182)

This book also figures at the end, and that is where we last see him. As Mudrick writes, "Sir Walter...we leave, appropriately making the latest entry in his Baronetage" (215). In this concluding chapter, as always, the novelist is triumphantly in control of her material, and the reader watches her give the final tug to complete the pattern of her fictional world.

As I have shown, the pattern of Austen's typical fictional world is ironic. The narrative tone can be simultaneously ambiguous and direct, distant and involved. Julia Brown points out that Austen's "irony can always be read in several ways, her voice heard in several tones" (Jane Austen's Novels 27). The novelist at play skillfully links her technique with her intention. Brown observes:

> Over and over, the narrative voice thwarts a particular character's tendency--finally, the reader's tendency--to simplify his world in order to live in it, to regard conclusions that have only temporary validity as permanent. No one viewpoint is adequate or conclusive. (35)

She adds that in Austen's novels

> The dismissal of the unrealities people prefer is relentless and bracing. And when we consider that this unrelieved attention attaches itself to the present, to day-to-day existence, we can understand why irony was the only mode proper to the handling of Austen's subject. (36)

Austen writes self-consciously and, through her ironic tone, maintains aesthetic distance. "Distance," as Edward Bullough points out in "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," "provides the much needed criterion of the beautiful as distinct from the merely agreeable" (784). He elaborates:

> Distance...is obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one's own self, by putting it out of gear with practical needs and ends. Thereby the 'contemplation' of the object becomes alone possible. But it does not mean that the relation between the self and the object is broken to the extent of becoming 'impersonal'. Of the alternatives 'personal' and 'impersonal' the latter surely comes nearer to the truth; but here, as elsewhere, we meet the difficulty of having to express certain facts in terms coined for entirely different uses. To do so usually results in paradoxes, which are nowhere more inevitable than in discussions upon Art. (785)

Booth, who agrees with Bullough, refers to the "power of artifice to keep us at a certain distance from reality." He argues that "distance is never an end in itself; distance along one axis is sought for the sake of increasing the

reader's involvement on some other axis." Further, he continues:

> Every literary work of any power... is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along various lines of interest. The author is limited only by the range of human interests. (123)

And so it is with Jane Austen, whose Emma for instance, Booth sees as a "triumph in the control of distance" since the reader is able to both love and judge the heroine (Rhetoric of Fiction 240).

Where Booth sees Austen's triumph in "the control of distance" through effective use of irony, Marvin Mudrick inaccurately sees Austen's irony as a defense. He asserts:

> To events, literary and actual, she allowed herself no public response except the socially conventional or ironic: for neither of these endangered her reserve, both put off self-commitment and feeling, both maintained the distance between author and reader, or author and subject: both were primarily defenses. (Irony 1)

Donald Greene rightly objects to this viewpoint in "Jane Austen and the Peerage":

> This seems to me a fundamentally mistaken line of approach to any supremely great artist like Jane Austen. I do not think great art is ever compatible with a deficiency of a desire to commit oneself, with the deliberate abdication, 'putting off', of the capacity to feel. Control, perhaps, of the expression of powerful feeling by the artistic perception, the sensitivity to

> form; but not suppression or attenuation of the feeling itself. Possibly much ironic expression, both in literature and day-to-day living stems rather from the converse of the kind of sensibility postulated--from a tendency to feel too deeply, to feel as it were on both sides of a question. (164)

Lloyd Brown also rejects Mudrick's assumption. He argues:

> Jane Austen's ironic diction and insights are rooted in a strong commitment to traditional moral ideals which are represented in the philosophical conventions that shape such diction, and which are always realistically counterbalanced in her novels with behavioral traditions that subvert ideals. (Bits of Ivory 11)

Typically, Austen plays with multiple meanings. Her ironic playfulness and self-consciousness can be seen in each of her novels. According to Lloyd Brown, among the "most crucial aspects of her meaning" is Austen's ironic diction (9). He refers to the "degree to which her writing is pervaded by the conscious formulation of style and structure as parts of the moral or psychological process," as well as "her ability to integrate completely any one mode of communication... within the total framework of each novel" (9). Brown points out that Austen's

> intelligent self-awareness is centered on the mechanics of her art as a whole. And whenever she reflects on the process of composition she tends to envisage her style as communication and meaning. (7)

Austen's rhetorical relationship with her reader is thus based on her self-consciousness.

According to Alter, "The joyful self-consciousness of art offers, after all a kind of play" that "richly affirms the autonomy of the creative spirit of man" (Fielding 202). Referring to Fielding in a way that is suggestive about Austen, Alter points out that

> Literary works may pretend that they are reality itself, but from Fielding's point of view, this is in a way a very foolish pretense, for, with his Aristotelian background, he was very conscious that any fiction is inevitably a made thing, an imitation of a human action that has been given order and wholeness and structural solidity by the craft of the maker. (102)

As the maker of her fictional world, Austen delights in her craft. It is, as we have seen in this chapter, a very self-conscious delight expressed most triumphantly in her use of irony. She plays with the conventions of fiction-writing as well as the fiction-making within her fictional world; she plays with fiction as much as with life, with words and situations, and self-consciously, transparently, reveals herself at play at once involved in and removed from the action. Her irony, which is both a theme and a technique, underlines her self-consciousness as an artist as well as her impersonality and control of aesthetic distance.

Just as Jane Austen is both involved in and detached from her fictional world, her readers too find themselves involved

in the action, and the making of it, yet distant enough to view it objectively. Alter points out:

> .....some of the greatest novelists--Cervantes, Jane Austen, Flaubert, Joyce--have resembled Fielding in maintaining a careful ironic distance between them and the life they recorded. The perspective of irony is invaluable to the novel because of a danger inherent in the basic impulse of the genre to immerse us in contemporary reality; for reality seen from so close is likely to be a shapeless mass of clamorous particulars which can easily subvert both moral intelligence and aesthetic lucidity. This is clearly one of the bases for Fielding's objections to the whole method of Pamela, for his repeated insistence 'contra' Richardson, that a novelist must exercise the highest degree of selectivity and the finest narrative tact. (Fielding 40)

Austen's use of language is highly selective, and she uses the "finest narrative tact" to play with her fictional world as well as with her reader.

CHAPTER III

ON AUSTEN'S BEGINNINGS

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.
>
> --Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice

In Chapter XIV of his Biographia Literaria Coleridge observes:

> In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts...But having so done, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist. (324)

David Daiches, commenting on Coleridge's views, adds, "Philosophy begins by making just distinctions and ends by discovering how these distinguished characteristics form a unity among themselves" (Critical Approaches 100-101). The beginnings and endings of Austen's six completed novels, once separated, can be restored with a more complete understanding of their beauty.

In her construction of fictional form, Austen plays with the concepts of beauty and freedom. Schiller sees the "lofty equanimity and freedom of the spirit, combined with power and

vigor," as "the mood in which a genuine work of art should release us, and there is no more certain touchstone of true aesthetic excellence" (Letters 428). Schiller's aesthetic ideal is applicable to Austen's art. Each of her novels realizes an aesthetic unity, a harmony and balance that embraces the form drive and the sense drive to express the play drive. The aesthetic experience Austen provides leaves the reader a freer person, more able to play.

Beginnings, like endings, provide a framework for fictional patterns. They establish the tone, atmosphere and conflict of each novel. The over-all balance Austen achieves in her fiction is evident at the beginning of each novel. The first sentence of Pride and Prejudice, for instance, reads: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3). Austen's playful tone triumphantly crystallizes her attitude toward the fictional experience about to unfold. Every word in the opening statement points to larger structures of meaning. Like the image of a stone thrown into a stream, it creates ever increasing ripples of meaning that connect with the rest of the text.

The beginning can thus be defined as that which sets words and ideas into motion. Austen plays with these words and ideas throughout the course of her novels, though never more triumphantly than at the beginning. Like the river that merges with the sea, her beginnings finally lead to happy

endings. Together the beginnings and endings provide material that shapes her fictional world into a circle of pure play.

At the beginning of each novel, the hero and heroine reveal flaws that must be overcome if they are to achieve happiness at the end. The beginnings of four--Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park-- terminate in the meeting of the hero and heroine while two do not. Emma resembles Persuasion in the prior relationship of the hero and heroine, Emma and Knightley, Anne and Wentworth respectively. In Northanger Abbey and Pride Prejudice, the hero and heroine meet in Chapter 3, whereas in Sense and Sensibility, this meeting does not take place till Chapter 7. The scene in which the hero and heroine come together for the first time completes the beginning of these novels because it establishes the central pattern of human relationships that must undergo change and re-definition before the happy ending.

Like the first meeting of the hero and heroine, a journey is also a beginning motif that sets the plot in motion. In Chapter 1 of Northanger Abbey, Catherine Morland leaves for Bath with her aunt and uncle; in Chapter 2 of Sense and Sensibility, Marianne Dashwood departs from Norland Place to Barton Cottage with her mother and sister, and in Mansfield Park, Fanny leaves her parents' house to live with her aunt in Mansfield Park. In each instance, the journey to another place results in the heroine meeting the hero. This journey

motif comes full circle at the end with Catherine Morland's return to her parents' house, Marianne Dashwood's return to Barton Cottage and Fanny's return to her parents' house. A changed heroine returning home marks the beginning of the happy ending.

In Pride and Prejudice, it is not the heroine who journeys to another place, but a close friend of the hero moves into the neighborhood. This change provides a setting for the meeting of the hero and heroine, their conflicts, and, finally, a resolution of all conflict. In Emma, on the other hand, a change of circumstances, not a change of locale, marks the beginning of the novel. Emma's friend and confidante, Miss Taylor, leaves Hartfield to marry Mr. Weston. In Emma's changed circumstances the focus is on her first meeting with her friend, Harriet Smith, which is significant because their friendship eventually leads to Emma's awareness of her love for Mr. Knightley. In Persuasion, Anne leaves Kellynch Hall because her father is unable to maintain it. Thus, like Sense and Sensibility and Mansfield Park, Persuasion also begins with a change in circumstances that causes a journey.

Beginnings foreshadow endings in Austen's novels. Edward Said sees the beginning as "basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition" (Beginnings: Intention and Method xiii). In this sense endings relate to beginnings and frame the fictional world. As Said affirms:

> The beginning is always a first step from which (except on rare occasions) something follows. So beginnings play a role...middles and ends, continuity, development--all these imply beginnings before them. (xii)

Said further argues that "Without a sense of a beginning, nothing can really be done... A beginning...compensates us for the tumbling disorder of...reality that will not settle down" (50). And so it is with the beginnings of Austen's novels. Said points out that a "'beginning' is designated in order to indicate, clarify, or define a later time, place, or action." He elaborates:

> When we point to the beginning of a novel, for example, we mean that from that beginning in principle follows this novel. Or, we see that the beginning is the first point (in time, space, or action) of an accomplishment or process that has duration and meaning. The beginning then, is the first step in the intentional production of meaning. (5)

Indeed, the "notion of beginning is...tied up in a whole complex of relations" (Said 5). This fact makes an analysis of beginnings particularly useful to my study of Austen's playfulness, her balancing of parts with the whole, reason with emotion, and the real with the ideal. Austen appeals to the reader's sense and sensibility. From the beginning of each novel, she self-consciously establishes a tone of triumph and authority. The artistic poise of the novelist at play is compelling.

A. Northanger Abbey:

As the curtain goes up on the first scene of Northanger Abbey, the reader's expectations of the heroic and the sensational are quickly upset by Austen's common sense, apparently matter-of-fact account of her "plain heroine." Julia Brown points out that

> the language of Northanger Abbey is always darting outward to the reader. The opening description of Catherine seems to have no life of its own, but gains its effect exclusively by bouncing off the reader's expectations. (51)

The reader "is a consistent target throughout the novel; it is against his exaggerated fancy, as well as the heroine's, that the true proportion of life or reality are defined" (52).

Essentially, Austen is parodying the readers' enjoyment of the conventional techniques of the sentimental novel and the Gothic romance. Suggesting such an implied reader, Wayne Booth points out that "the implied author of each novel is someone with whose beliefs on all subjects I must largely agree if I am to enjoy his work" (Rhetoric of Fiction 137). The statement can be applied to Northanger Abbey, which is still enjoyed by people far removed in time and place from the original readers. That the novel has lasted beyond its time, has, perhaps, something to do with what Everett Zimmerman has to say in "The Function of Parody." He points out that Austen's novel mocks "conventional elements of sentimental

fiction, but at the same time it creates and satisfies an interest in those conventions" (19). Zimmerman argues that

> references to the hackneyed devices of the sentimental novel are amusing, to be sure, but this is not to say that the reader of Northanger Abbey is to gain satisfaction from the heroine's not meeting the hero. Quietly and unobtrusively the narrator explains that shortly after the ball, Henry Tilney was introduced to Catherine by the master of ceremonies in the Lower Rooms. (25)

Austen thus plays with the conventions of Gothic and sentimental fiction. She mocks these conventions, and, at the same time, creates a new interest in them.

Art completes life, Austen seems to say. The aesthetic experience can free man. According to Schiller, "the aesthetic alone leads to the absence of all limitation. Every other state into which we can enter refers us back to a preceding one, and requires for its termination a subsequent one; the aesthetic alone is a whole in itself" (Letters 428). Because the "aesthetic alone is a whole in itself," its magic circle can engage the reader in true play. Austen seeks to do this in Northanger Abbey as much as in her other completed novels.

Self-consciously involved in her fictional world and at the same time detached from it, Austen plays with the ironic mode. The first sentence of chapter 1 begins with a pattern of reversal, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine"

(13). This negative structure establishes the pattern of the clauses used to introduce the central character: "She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features;--so much for her person;--and not less propitious for heroism seemed her mind" (13); "she had no taste for a garden" (13); "she never could learn or understand anything before she was taught" (14); "her taste for drawing was not superior (14); yet "she had neither a bad heart nor a bad temper" (14). More extensively Austen writes:

> It was not very wonderful that Catherine, who had by nature nothing heroic about her, should prefer cricket, baseball, riding on horseback, and running about the country at the age of 14, to books--or at least books of information--for, provided they were all story and no reflection, she had never any objection to books at all. (15)

Zimmerman aptly argues that the rhetorical function of the "list of conventions" that Austen's heroine

> does not fulfill is to engage the reader in the attempt to comprehend those qualities that will eventually fit her to be a heroine. Thus the comedy lies in the juxtaposition of the mundane Catherine of childhood with the sentimental heroine, not in a catalogue of sentimental absurdities. (56-7)

Having introduced the heroine through a pattern of negatives, Austen keeps a firm grip on the reader's response in this sentence:

> But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives. (15)

The use of "all" and the repetition of "so" establish Austen's ironic attitude toward her heroine, even as she mimics Catherine's attitude toward herself. The reader is ever conscious of the narrator's mischievous, ironic tone. Austen reveals not only the gap between how Catherine sees herself and who she really is but also that between how readers see heroines of novels and what this one is really like.

The narrative voice, both mocking and serious, goes on to assert, "But when a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way" (17). Having said that, the action of the novel is set in motion with the closing paragraph of Chapter 1. The Allens invite Catherine to go with them to Bath, and Catherine is--here Austen uses another conventional hyperbole--"all happiness" (17) at the prospect of adventures new.

A.N. Kaul refers to the advantage of "an omniscient point of view for a comic novel; a point of view that can surround the consciousness of a character with a larger consciousness, aware from the beginning of more than is the character himself" (208). In Northanger Abbey

> We are shown Catherine Morland in the process of deluding herself, being made witness at the same time to her normalcy in other ways, so that for us her self-deception carries at each stage its own seeds of final undeception. (Kaul 208)

Catherine's adventures, and the way they are narrated, shape the form, meaning and comic response to the novel.

In style and content, her parting from her parents turns out to be plain, matter of fact and realistic. The reader learns that

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

Austen thus consistently plays with the reader's notions of a heroine and heroic action by presenting exactly the opposite, or certainly much less, "the common feelings of common life." As Kearful points out:

> The opening chapters of Northanger Abbey are neither burlesque nor parody in any usual simple sense of those terms, for in them we are always keenly aware of a critical narrator who, far from exaggeratedly or incongruously imitating literary conventions or formulae, cynically denies their relevance to her story. She is aware of popular literary-sentimentalist conventions, but repeatedly points out how miserably her characters fail to live up to them. (514)

Austen constantly pokes fun at the romantic reader and develops her playful look at the "irony of fate" as Catherine's adventures get underway with "suitable quietness and uneventful safety" and not even "one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero" (19). The reader, of course, has been forewarned two paragraphs earlier that this novel's heroine is "about to be launched into all the difficulties and dangers of a six weeks' residence in Bath" (18).

Chapter 2 of the novel "turns after the irony of the first, from the gothic to the comic world, to the Bath milieu where the relationships have their existence" (Gallon 808). Kaul sees in this the "double purpose of Jane Austen's comedy," which is to "dispell the illusory ecstasies and difficulties which formed the stock-in-trade of popular fiction, and to substitute in their place some of the real problems and possibiities of bourgeois culture" (206). Peter L. De Rose points out that

> complementing the broad parody of the imagination in Northanger Abbey is Jane Austen's comic representation of real life, which boldly draws attention to the way character and behaviour actually or commonly appear, and not the way they are imagined in fictional romances. Running counter to the reader's expectations, the comic-realistic narrative of Catherine Morland's life is an anti-romance.... (28)

When the scene shifts to the fashionable city of Bath, the ball provides the ideal background for the reader to watch the comedy of manners unfold. Austen first raises the reader's expectations by placing Catherine in a romantic setting and then teasingly disappoints him or her with the words "...no whisper of eager enquiry ran round the room, nor was she once called a divinity by anybody" (23). Yet we are told that "two gentlemen pronounced her to be a pretty girl" (24), and that "she felt more obliged to the two young men for this simple praise than a true quality heroine would have been for fifteen sonnets in celebration of her charms" (24). Having met no hero at the ball, Catherine remains contented, though not a "true quality heroine," at the close of Chapter 2. Once again, as in the opening chapter, Austen defines her heroine against the typical heroine of popular fiction.

We can see how Austen's parodic design prevails even as she develops her comedy of manners. Though Catherine is not called a "divinity" by anyone, we soon learn that her "humble vanity" (which is vanity nevertheless), is "contented." Thus Austen lightly touches a real human weakness as she continues to deflate her reader's unreal expectations of a lover writing sonnets for his beloved. There is also a comic gap between Catherine's modest and easily satisfied expectations and those of the typical reader of sentimental novels and gothic romances.

Mrs. Allen, "Catherine's chaperone to the ball," plays an active role in this comedy as it begins to unfold in Chapter 2. Austen ironically describes her being "admirably fitted to introduce a young lady into public, being as fond of going everywhere and seeing everything as any young lady could be" (20). She moves through the crowded ball-room with "more care for the safety of her new gown than for the comfort of her protégée" (21). This ironic contrast between Mrs. Allen's role as chaperone and her self-absorption emerges when Austen self-consciously introduces Mrs. Allen:

> It is now expedient to give some description of Mrs. Allen, that the reader may be able to judge, in what manner her actions will hereafter tend to promote the general distress of the work, and how she will, probably, contribute to reduce poor Catherine to all the desperate wretchedness of which a last volume is capable. (20)

Austen parodies the sentimental reader's expectations of the role played by the heroine's chaperone. Ironically, as it turns out at the close of the novel, the heroine does indeed get turned out of doors; Mrs. Allen is indirectly the cause of this since it is in Bath where the Allens take Catherine that she first meets Gen. Tilney. He first invites her to Northanger Abbey and then turns her out of doors. Mrs. Allen figures prominently in this opening section because she is indispensable to Austen's design of a comedy of manners.

The fictional pattern continues to unfold in Chapter 3. There is mockery in the language: "fortune was more favorable to our heroine" (25) when she is introduced to Mr. Tilney, who has an "archness and pleasantry in his manner which interested, though it was hardly understood by her" (25). Austen playfully presents Tilney's consciously amused social tone followed by his natural voice. The reader, like the heroine, finds herself quite involved in the lively conversation that lasts for the next two pages. It centers on Tilney's good-natured ridicule of women so accustomed to recording their day-to-day thoughts in journals. His teasing question contains the essence of his meaning: "How are your various dresses to be remembered, and the particular state of your complexion, and curl of your hair to be described in all their diversities, without having constant recourse to a journal?" (27). In the essay "'The pen of the contriver': the four fictions of Northanger Abbey" Burlin points out that Henry's

> extravagant praise of 'journalizing' as leading 'to the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated' is Catherine's introduction to irony. For the first time she perceives that words may be used to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. (93)

Mudrick refers to Henry Tilney as a "spectator-character" who unifies the action of the novel, and "with the advantage over the author of being within it, by examining it totally"

(Jane Austen 50). Mudrick elaborates:

> In an overtly double action like that of Northanger Abbey since the novel's unity depends upon our sharp discrimination, simultaneously with our awareness of correspondence and symmetry, between two self- consistent worlds, a character like Henry Tilney--familiar with both worlds, and aware of all their correspondences and differences--helps to unify the novel from within, to fortify the author's own observations and implications, which are likely in themselves to have an air of imposition. (85)

Like his creator, Tilney, the hero, more aware of reality as opposed to appearances, is made to stand a little above the action, amused by Catherine's over-eager imagination and her confusion of literature and life, and perceptive of the personal vanities and manners of characters like Mrs. Allen. When Tilney steps into the fictional world of Northanger Abbey, the stage is set for love, the typical theme of Austen's novels. Tilney's rational outlook and Catherine's heightened sensibility set up a pattern of expectations quite unlike those created in a Gothic romance.

In fact Tilney is, as Mudrick points out, the "Gothic hero reversed: he does not treat the heroine with solemn respect, he fails to fall in love with her at first sight..." (48). Though he is the only "perceptive person in the book" and helps "to unify the novel from within" (50), he cannot be a substitute for the author-narrator as she includes him in her irony even as he casts an ironic glance on the other

characters.

Tilney's lively conversation with Catherine is interrupted by Mrs. Allen as Austen continues to develop her comedy of manners. In Bits of Ivory, Lloyd Brown comments that Mrs. Allen is "incapable of penetrating the benign design of his mimicry when he joins her on his hobby horse" (174). Fussing over a gown ruined by a pin, Mrs. Allen talks on, saying, "....this is a favourite gown, though it cost but nine shillings a yard." To the reader's surprise, comes Tilney's response: "That is exactly what I should have guessed it, madam." As he examines the muslin with interest, Mrs. Allen "was quite struck by his genius 'Men commonly take so little notice of those things,' said she" (28). Tilney's social criticism is totally lost on Mrs. Allen, who actually takes his attention to her as a compliment. Austen's ironic stance allows her to maintain a distance from the social scene.

That Austen parodies expected fictional patterns is quite evident in the first three chapters of Northanger Abbey, which I have considered here as the opening section of the novel. The Gothic/sentimental and the comic world are introduced in the first and second chapters, and the hero and heroine meet for the first time in the third. Julia Brown points out that "the first encounters with her future husband mark the beginning of the heroine's moral growth, and her marriage is a stage in this growth" (7). I have considered these first three chapters as the opening section of the novel because

they introduce the main themes and set the fictional action in motion. As has been illustrated, Austen's technique of reversing the expectations of her readers echo her over-all parodic design. The use of contrast between the imagined and the real, both on the part of the reader and the heroine, further manifests her comic themes and techniques. She begins this novel at play.

B. Sense and Sensibility:

B. C. Southam points out that Austen's novels

> are so very readable, so entertaining, that we tend to take them for granted, and the act of criticism has to be a self-conscious distancing, a pause in our imaginative communication with the reality of their fictional world. (Introduction 9)

The opening paragraph of Sense and Sensibility is absorbing in this way as it draws the reader completely into the fictional world:

> The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance.... (3)

Austen begins this novel with little self-consciousness in her tone. In the passage quoted above, the sentences seem

to slide into each other; it takes an effort to step back and see the "highly conscious technical effects" (Southam 10) that Austen achieves. Some key words--"family," "estate," "property," "respectable"--are introduced at the very outset, as is the relationship between a family and its neighborhood. Austen plainly states the facts of the situation in a short opening sentence followed by a string of subordinate clauses in the next. The "general good opinion" of the "surrounding acquaintance" (3), which is stressed, is central to Austen's comedy of manners and technique of irony. Here, however, the narrator appears to steer clear of irony; the narrative tone is engaging, saying exactly what it means.

Not till the latter part of the third paragraph does Austen's teasing irony appear. The lucky inheritor of the large Norland estate as it turns out, is "a child of four" who has

> gained on the affections of his uncle, by such attractions as...an imperfect articulation, an earnest desire of having his own way, many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise, as to outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received from his niece and her daughters. (4)

On this central fact, the story revolves. Thus a four-year-old's playfulness results in his inheriting a large estate. The old gentleman's death, followed by his son's, leads to prompt action by the mother of this four-year-old, who,

"without sending any notice of her intentions to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants. No one could dispute her right to come" (5).

Austen develops her irony with a matching description of the new owners of the Norland estate. Mr.John Dashwood was "not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed: but he was, in general, well respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of his ordinary duties" (5, my emphasis). Austen picks up the word "respectable," first used in the second sentence of the opening paragraph, and develops its meaning in this context. The descriptive adjective "ill-disposed" contrasts with "well respected." This brings out the irony in the fact that Mr. Dashwood wins positive respect despite his negative qualities. Thus social propriety, the maintenance of appearances, wins social admiration.

The reality of Mr. Dashwood's character, we are told, is subtly evident in his wife's character, "a strong caricature of himself;--more narrow-minded and selfish" (5). From this narrative utterrance, the reader is brought closer to Mrs. John Dashwood's character in Chapter 2. Austen explores her disapproval of what her husband intends to do for his sisters: "To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject" (8). Here the narrative voice, which includes Mrs. Dashwood's

thoughts and utterrances, slides into reported speech. After three more sentences, the narrator withdraws, leaving the stage to the Dashwoods, who now "speak for themselves." Austen, having already prepared her reader to interpret the "meaning" of what the Dashwoods say to each other, thus places him in a position to enjoy the situation more fully.

The conversation between the Dashwoods lasts a little over four pages and is presented wholly in direct speech. The process of talking, and, at the same time, influencing each other's behavior, is fascinating. The dialogue reveals as much about the character of each as of their relationship with each other.

However, Austen is not content to leave the reader to his own interpretation for too long. As the scene ends, she comments on Mrs. Dashwood's ability to argue persuasively:

> This argument was irresistible. It gave to his intentions whatever of decision was wanting before; and he finally resolved, that it would be absolutely unnecessary, if not highly indecorous, to do more for the widow and children of his father, than such neighbourly acts as his own wife pointed out. (13)

Austen achieves the effect of irony through her stylistic technique of playing with points of view.

It is through these shifting points of view, from the utterances of the narrator to the utterances of the characters and back again, that Austen is able to communicate her

"meaning." Narration, description and commentary combine with direct speech and numerous varieties of indirect speech to reveal character, further plot and provide lexical and syntactic contrast. Through these varied perspectives Austen communicates her attitude of detached amusement.

Her technique is to let the reader experience the scene first hand, and, at the same time, get a sense of distance the scene provides. The use of direct speech skilfully reveals the tone and attitudes of the John Dashwoods. John Dashwood is quickly persuaded to cut the amount he had planned to give his three half-sisters in half and exclaim: "Five hundred pounds would be a prodigious increase in their fortunes!" (9). His wife, not content with her victory, goes on to attempt an interpretation of the promise her husband had made. She argues:

> Indeed, **to say the truth**, I am convinced within myself that your father had no idea of your giving them any money at all. The assistance he thought of, **I dare say**, was only such as might be reasonably expected of you; **for instance**, such as looking out for a comfortable small house for them, helping them to move their things.... (12, my emphasis)

In this scene Austen is making Mrs. John Dashwood somewhat self-dramatizing in the way Alter describes characters like Lady Booby in Fielding's novels as "deliberately stylized" (Fielding 74). What Alter says of Fielding can be applied to Austen as well:

> Language, as Fielding understands it and works with it, is both the necessary instrument for any moral analysis and one of the principal means through which we justify our institutionalized hypocrisies, deceive others and ourselves as well. (36)

Tanner describes the scene depicting the Dashwoods as illustrative of an "incomparable rationalization of meanness and selfishness" (23). In his essay, "Sense Triumphantly Introduced to Sensibility" Ian Watt aptly argues:

> The opening scene, with the John Dashwoods' coolly disengaging themselves from their solemn family obligations to support Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters, begins the book, it must be noted, with an attack on the abuses, not of sensibility, but of sense, in its prudential economic meaning. (124)

This brilliant scene reveals, not just Mrs. Dashwood's greed and her husband's indecisiveness at the outset, but makes an ironic commentary on a "respectable" and "happily married couple" as well.

Commenting on the title of the novel, Watt observes that "John Dashwood is much more a caricature of a narrow view of sense than Marianne is of sensibility" (124). But Mudrick observes that "the immediate target" in the novel is the "sensibility of Marianne Dashwood" (60). He points out that "The parody, as the title suggests, returns us to one of Jane Austen's earliest targets, the novel of sensibility" (89). Even before we see Marianne act, Austen self-consciously

passes judgement and "at the outset there is no representation, only summary and judgement. The object of parody must now be explicitly condemned before we see it in action" (Mudrick 60). Watt sees evidence that Sense and Sensibility was originally prompted by a primarily satiric, as opposed to novelistic, impulse" (122). Yet, he adds:

> Austen takes Marianne more seriously, and makes her a study of a person who lives according to the general tenets of the Moral Sense philosophers, with their idea of an innate and spontaneous ethical sense. (123)

On the other hand, Marianne and her sister, Elinor, do not clearly represent sense and sensibility respectively; however, each does have a predominant trait. The opening chapter prepares the reader for Austen's examination of the two terms and their underlying significance. As the novel progresses, it is evident that

> just as...Marianne has sense, has an excellent 'understanding both natural and improved,' so Elinor is by no means deficient in sensibility. She shares all the tastes of her sister, if with a lesser intensity, but, perhaps because she is older, she consistently tries to relate her imagination and her feelings to her judgement and to the moral and social tradition on which the order of society is based. (Watt 127)

As Tanner points out, Austen clearly "establishes a vocabulary adequate to describe and assess the various qualities and attendant excesses or possible weaknesses of Marianne and

Elinor" in the opening chapter (Introduction 23). Austen is self-consciously rehearsing an inherited vocabulary.

As the curtain goes up on Chapter 3 (vol.1) of Sense and Sensibility, the reader gets a playful contrast between the heroine's mother's capacity to heighten her mind's "affliction by melancholy remembrances" (14), and her daughter Elinor's "prudence" and "steadier judgement" (14). Of Mrs. Dashwood Austen writes that she

> remained at Norland several months; not from any disinclination to move when the sight of every well known spot ceased to raise the violent emotion which it produced for a while; for when her spirits began to revive, and her mind became capable of some other exertion than that of heightening its affliction by melancholy remembrances, she was impatient to be gone.... (14)

As the circumstances of "a growing attachment" between Elinor and Edward Ferrars (the brother of Mrs. John Dashwood), are described by the narrator, the reader is kept at a distance from the experience of actually seeing the lovers' first meeting. However, Mrs. Dashwood's reaction is speedily given: "No sooner did she perceive any symptom of love in his behaviour to Elinor, than she considered their serious attachment, and looked forward to their marriage as rapidly approaching" (17).

Marianne, whose excessive sensibility matches her mother's, expresses immense irony in her ideas on marriage and her reaction to Edward as a possible brother-in-law:

> I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my **feelings**; the same books, the same music must charm us both. Oh! mama how **spiritless** was Edward's manner in reading to us last night! I **felt** for my sister most severely...Elinor has not my **feelings**, and therefore she may overlook it, and be happy with him. But it would have broke my **heart** had I **loved** him, to hear him read with so little **sensibility**. Mama, the more I know of the world, the more am I convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really **love**. I require too much! (17-18, my emphasis)

These ideas on marriage undergo an ironic change at the end of the novel. Marianne ultimately marries, of all people, Colonel Brandon; his "spiritless" appearance, as Marianne sees it, in reality stands for balance and good sense. Because Marianne's excessive sensibility is to play a significant part in the conflict, and finally, the resolution of that conflict in the novel Austen goes to great lengths to describe its nature and imply the potential for danger that lies within it.

Austen plays with the notions of sense and sensibility in Chapter 4, in which Edward Ferrars is the topic of conversation between Elinor and Marianne. That "rapturous delight which" in Marianne's opinion "could alone be called taste" appears to be lacking in Edward Ferrars, though she hastens to add:

> I have not had so many opportunities of estimating the minuter propensities of his mind, his inclinations and tastes as you have; but I have the highest opinion in the world of his goodness and sense. (20)

In listing Ferrars' good qualities, Elinor provides her assessment of his sense and sensibility: "...his mind is well-informed...his imagination lively, his observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure" (20).

Marianne is soon "astonished to find how much the imagination of her mother and herself had outstripped the truth" when she hears Elinor say "there would be many difficulties in his [Edward's] way, if he were to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great fortune or high rank" (22). Thus in this conversation, Marianne's excessive sensibility is set off against Elinor's sense; at the same time the sense of the material wealth, and, subsequently, value of an individual, is set off against the individual sensibility capable of true love--the Ferrars family's expectations of great fortune and rank versus Elinor Dashwood's ability to love.

This sense of material worth is emphasized once again in the next chapter, which also prepares us for the journey motif. Mrs. John Dashwood's explicit reference to "Mrs. Ferrars resolution that both her sons should marry well, and of the danger attending any young woman who attempted to <u>draw him in</u>" (23) leads to Mrs. Dashwood's resolution to leave Norland Park as soon as possible. The well-timed offer of a small house, Barton Cottage, is therefore eagerly accepted. The report of Mrs. Ferrars's insistence on wealth in marriage for her son, Edward, is contrasted with Mrs. Dashwood's

understanding of love as a pure emotion, a sensibility not associated with any sense of the material or the practical. Austen plays with the significance of money and property versus the significance of love; she plays with the practical sense of the material versus the deeper sensibility of love.

A variation of the sensibility of love is Marianne's excessive indulgence in emotion for its own sake. Bidding adieu to Norland Park, she cries out:

> Oh! happy house, could you know what I suffer in now viewing you from this spot, from whence perhaps I may view you no more!--but you will continue the same.--No leaf will decay because we are removed...you will continue the same; unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade!--But who will remain to enjoy you? (27)

Thus ridiculed by her creator, Marianne sets off for Barton Cottage where new adventures await her. Like Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility also begins with a journey.

As the Dashwood family settles in at Barton Cottage in Chapter 6 (Vol.1), Sir John and Lady Middleton, their new neighbours, are introduced; the latter's manners, we are told, "had all the elegance which her husband's wanted. But they would have been improved by some share of his frankness and warmth" (31). It is at the Middleton's dinner party in Chapter 7, that Col. Brandon first appears. Austen uses reported speech to present a not very attractive picture of

the Colonel, a friend of Sir John Middleton's, "who was staying at the park, but who was neither very young nor very gay" (33). Yet his "appearance...was not unpleasing, in spite of his being in the opinion of Marianne and Margaret an absolute bachelor, for he was on the wrong side of five and thirty" (34). Austen continues to develop her comedy of manners in this dinner party scene: "In the evening, as Marianne was discovered to be musical, she was invited to play. The instrument was unlocked, everybody prepared to be charmed" (35). The mocking narrative tone parallels the typical pattern of social behaviour on such occasions; all the guests are apparently "prepared to be charmed," when, in fact, each is too preoccupied with his or her own charm to notice that of others. The social hypocrisy of the "highly applauded" performance brings out the contrast between the manners of Sir John and Lady Middleton, on the one hand, and of Colonel Brandon, on the other:

> Colonel Brandon alone, of all the party, heard her[Marianne] without being in raptures. He paid her only the compliment of attention; and she felt a respect for him on the occasion, which the others had reasonably forfeited by their shameless want of taste. His pleasure in music, though it amounted not to that ecstatic delight which alone could sympathize with her own, was estimable when contrasted against the horrible insensibility of the others; and she was reasonable enough to allow that a man of five and thirty might well have outlived all acuteness of feeling and every exquisite power of enjoyment. (35)

Playfully, Austen uses "reasonable" twice in this context;

first to mock at the "shameless want of taste" of those who hypocritically applaud Marianne's performance, and then to mock Marianne's reasonableness in allowing "that a man of five and thirty might well have outlived all acuteness of feeling." Excessive feeling is what marks Marianne's sensibility. In this scene, though critical of the Colonel's spiritless response to her performance--"it amounted not to that ecstatic delight which alone could sympathize with her own"--Marianne's sensibility can contrast his behavior and manners "against the horrible insensibility of the others." Thus her so-called "reasonable" attitude leads her to "make every allowance for the Colonel's advanced state of life which humanity required" (35). Colonel Brandon's countenance was "sensible," we are told by the narrator, and Marianne finds him not lacking in sensibility.

Austen's "ironic structure of multiple meanings" thus plays with "Marianne's youthful exuberance and Brandon's mature stability" (Brown, Bits of Ivory 30). Brown observes that when Marianne plays the piano at the Middleton's home, it "excites a variety of responses...indicative of the disparate intellects in her audience":

> The generous and well-bred Colonel Brandon presents an ideal balance of sense and sensibility. At one extreme, Sir John's coarse narrowness and Lady Middleton's specious sense represents 'want of taste'. And at the other extreme, Marianne's unrestrained sensibility produces, not an absence of taste, but a defective one. (28)

Austen plays with words and with social worlds to create and present her fictional world. In this scene, Marianne and Colonel Brandon meet for the first time. It is a very unpromising meeting, filled with irony, for Marianne cannot imagine herself married to Brandon; yet, their marriage will mark the "happy ending" of the novel.

Chapter 7 (Vol.1) of Sense and Sensibility is in some ways the final chapter of the novel's beginning, because, in it, Marianne, whom I have considered as the heroine, and Colonel Brandon, the hero, come together for the first time. Into this ironic meeting of the hero and heroine, Austen weaves in her essential theme of sense and sensibility. Unlike the beginning of Northanger Abbey, where the hero and heroine are introduced to each other in the third chapter, in Sense and Sensibility, it is not till the seventh chapter that this occurs. The preceding chapters prepare the reader for Marianne's first meeting with Brandon; the reader can thus participate in the irony and significance of the scene and compare it with the last time we see them together in the novel.

Ian Watt observes that:

> Sense and Sensibility is certainly a narrative form of what Meredith called 'High Comedy'--the kind of comedy which arouses 'thoughtful laughter' at human weakness, folly, and affectation, usually presented in their more sophisticated forms. Our attitude to such comedy must be appropriately sophisticated and thoughtful, we must try to see all the characters sufficiently objectively to be able to build up from their follies and mistakes

> a coherent pattern of the positive norms from which the characters have deviated. (119)

The beginning of Sense and Sensibility prepares us for such an approach to the comic.

C. Pride and Prejudice:

In Pride and Prejudice, the reader hears a distinct authorial voice from the outset. The mocking tone of Northanger Abbey changes to a teasing tone in Pride and Prejudice. The opening sentence, laid out with a triumphant conclusiveness, provides an ironic perspective on Austen's fictional world: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3). The tone is arresting, and Austen quickly involves her readers in a self-consciously created world.

Austen uses considerable hyperbole for an author associated in the popular mind with understatement. She seems to be enjoying her narrative role as she begins the novel. The "truth universally acknowledged" underlines the narrator's mock tone, for it is no earthshaking truth, but one dealing with the commonplace, the assumption that a single man of fortune must be in "want" of a wife. The neighborhood, the reader is told in the second sentence, operates on that "truth," and, with a shift in perspective, "this truth" quickly reverses itself--the neighborhood considers a young

man of good fortune to be the "rightful property of someone or other of their daughters" (3); the young man of fortune does not pursue but is pursued, and not for what he is but for what he has--property. The key words, "truth," "fortune," "property," "single man," "daughters," "neighbourhood," in the first two sentences suggest the novel's theme; the order in which they are placed within the sentences emphasize the author's ironic attitude toward her subject.

The "truth universally acknowledged" is thus reduced to a neighborhood matter; but then, perhaps truth is more local than we like to think in our sublimer moments. What we read in the opening sentence is the opposite of what it states. Dorothy Van Ghent comments on a predatory view of the young man:

> A single woman must be in want of fortune...--and at once we are inducted into the Austen language, the ironical Austen attack, and the energy, peculiar to an Austen novel, that arises from the compression between a barbaric subsurface marital warfare and a surface of polite manners and civilized conventions ...The tale is that of a man hunt, with the female the pursuer and the male a shy and elusive prey. (101)

All this "barbaric subsurface marital warfare" takes place in society with its shining surface of elegant manners and dress. The comic gap between appearances and reality is placed within the larger ironic context of Austen's fictional world. Her narrative tone mocks, teases, obliquely suggests and states

the opposite of her intended meaning. The opening sentence appears to be declarative and pontifical, but is actually written in a mock heroic style to suggest the commonplace; in the same way, society appears to be polished, sophisticated and elegant, but is actually crude, vicious, and filled with curiosity and vanity.

If marriage is one theme of Pride and Prejudice, Austen begins by giving the reader a very poor opinion of it. When she shows the Bennets' marriage closely, it is to emphasize the crude association of property with marriage, rather than love. Yet the negative is underlined to develop the positive, and this opening foreshadows the conclusion of a happy marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy. The conclusion will negate the beginning by placing value not on property and pursuit but on love and mutual affection.

Referring to the exaggeration of the opening statement, A. Walton Litz points out:

> The irony is directed at economic motives for marriage, but as the action develops the implications of the opening sentence are modified and extended, until by the end of the novel we are willing to acknowledge that both Bingley and Darcy were 'in want of a wife.' Thus the sentence is simultaneously a source for irony and a flat statement of the social and personal necessities which dominate the world of Pride and Prejudice. (107)

E.M. Halliday observes that in the famous opening sentence of Pride and Prejudice, "the narrator seems to be standing

outside the story, not yet observing the characters but gazing off into the middle distance for some reflections on life in general" (77-8). But as Mr. and Mrs. Bennet begin their dialogue

> it rapidly becomes clear that the story teller had them both in view when that opening generalization was made...we see from the beginning that her observations are likely to bear an ironic relation to the views, and points of view, of her characters. This is our introduction to the quality of tough yet gentle irony that will control every page of the novel, making us feel a wonderful balance between sense and sensibility. (78)

The dialogue that follows this narrative commentary delightfully illustrates Austen's ironic perspective. No description of setting, physical features or details of dress seem necessary to bring out the lack of communication in this conversation between husband and wife. Austen uses direct speech and reported speech to contrast Mrs. Bennet's enthusiasm with Mr. Bennet's indifference, both real and feigned. The two are shown to be equally comic, and Austen is distanced from both in this conversation:

> "My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?" Mr. Bennet replied that he had not. (3)

This entire scene contains no reporting verbs. Mrs. Bennet's constant use of exclamations and Mr. Bennet's abrupt questions

convey the comic gap between husband's and wife's attitudes. Reuben Brower describes Austen's "blend of ironic wit and drama" in this dialogue, in which "Every remark which each makes, Mrs. Bennet petulantly, and Mr. Bennet perversely, bounces off the magnificent opening sentence" (32).

As in Northanger Abbey, we encounter a male ironist almost at the outset. The conversation between the Bennets provides an introduction to the nature of their marriage and, against this context of a less than perfect marriage, Austen ironically introduces the theme of marriage. The conversation develops amusingly enough with Mrs. Bennet envisioning one of her daughters marrying the single man of fortune who has just moved into the neighborhood. As this does actually happen in the end, the reader can see how the opening of Pride and Prejudice foreshadows its happy conclusion, though not in exactly the way the mother intends.

In Chapter 1, Mrs. Bennet's determination to be acquainted with the eligible new neighbor, Mr. Bingley, contrasts with Mr. Bennet's feigned indifference. But Chapter 2 begins with the surprising sentence, "Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley" (6). The statement mocks the opening sentence of the novel. It also picks up the pattern of the concluding sentence of the first chapter, "The business of her [Mrs. Bennet's] life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news" (5). There is irony in the fact that Mr. Bennet had assured his

wife "that he should not go," although "he had always intended to visit" Mr. Bingley (6).

Austen uses dramatic irony skillfully to create a comic scene in Chapter 2. The reader alone, and none of the other characters, is aware that Mr. Bennet has actually called on the rich new neighbor when Mr. Bennet addresses his daughter, who is busy trimming a hat: "I hope Mr. Bingley will like it Lizzy" (6). In this manner Mr. Bennet teases his family, till Mrs. Bennet explodes, "I am sick of Mr. Bingley" (7). Feigning seriousness, Mr. Bennet replies:

> "I am sorry to hear <u>that</u>; but why did not you tell me so before? If I had known as much this morning, I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now." (7)

In this context, the word "escape" underlines the ironic theme of the pursuer and the pursued, the hunter and the hunted. Who needs to escape from whom, the reader might ask at this point.

Mr. Bennet's surprising disclosure leads to a "tumult of joy," and Mr. Bennet finally leaves the room "fatigued with the raptures of his wife" (8). Mrs. Bennet and the girls spend the rest of the evening "conjecturing how soon he [Mr. Bingley] would return Mr. Bennet's visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner" (8). It is not an unexpected response to the arrival of a single man of fortune in the

neighborhood.

Chapter 3 opens on the ironic note that though Mr. Bennet had done exactly the opposite of what he had said, by visiting Mr. Bingley, he remains in character by refusing to divulge more details about their neighbor. The heightened curiosity of Mrs. Bennet and the girls provides a comic contrast to Mr. Bennet's persistent silence. Again, the chapter explores the theme of women as the pursuers and man as the victim, this time from a slightly different angle in a mock battle:

> Not all that Mrs. Bennet, however, with the assistance of her five daughters, could ask on the subject was sufficient to draw from her husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Bingley. They attacked him in various ways; with bare-faced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the skill of them all. (9)

The verb "attacked" matches the epic scale of the novel's opening sentence. Mr. Bennet must defend himself against the vigorous attacks of his wife and daughters. To be sure, he is skillful at this, but they do not give up their pursuit either until they are "obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbour Lady Lucas. Her report was highly favourable. Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party" (9). The use of hyperbole, as in "wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable," continues the

pattern of exaggerated reactions seen in the earlier mock-battle.

Since "Nothing could be more delightful" (9) to Mrs. Bennet than news of Mr. Bingley's intentions to attend the next ball, she immediately jumps to happy conclusions, "To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley's heart were entertained" (9) by her. This sentence foreshadows the first meeting of Mr. Bingley and Jane and of Elizabeth and Darcy at the forthcoming ball.

The ball provides a perfect setting for the development of Austen's comedy of manners. In this society, appearances are important. As we learn that "Mr. Bingley was good looking and gentlemanlike" (10) and his sisters were "fine women," the reader delights in the undercutting words used to describe Bingley's sisters as having "an air of decided fashion" (10). Mr. Darcy's instant popularity rests on the good impression he creates by his handsome looks and material possessions. He soon draws

> the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. (10)

Austen's ironic tone reveals society's values and its shifting impressions of Mr. Darcy who

> was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance.... (10)

Immediately thereafter, the reader learns that "His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" and among "the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet, whose dislike of his general behaviour, was sharpened into particular resentment, by his having slighted one of her daughters" (11), Elizabeth Bennet, who had formed her own prejudiced first impressions of the "proud" Mr. Darcy.

First impressions are important in Pride and Prejudice. Tony Tanner draws our attention to the fact that "the first title Jane Austen chose for the work which was finally called Pride and Prejudice was First Impressions, and [it]...provides an important clue to a central concern of the final version" (Jane Austen 106). According to him, "the reminder that first impressions, indeed all impressions, may need subsequent revision is only to say that full human life is a complex affair, and Jane Austen makes us well aware of this complexity (Jane Austen 110-11).

Lloyd Brown refers to "the themes of communication and judgement that Jane Austen links to the ambiguities of her title," Pride and Prejudice. He points out that

> the process permits the dramatization of the perceptual and attitudinal conflicts in the novel. The reader now sees the individual both as he is and as he is assessed by others. Our "first impressions," and those of the characters, are aroused and then transformed in order to confirm the multiple connotations of "pride" and "prejudice." (Bits of Ivory 38)

Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice are set off against the backdrop of people who are for "the most part as fixed and repetitive as the linked routines and established social rituals which dominate their lives" (Tanner, Jane Austen 104). By contrast, Darcy and Elizabeth learn to change their minds in the course of the novel. As Tanner argues:

> Pride and Prejudice is, most importantly about prejudging and rejudging. It is a drama of recognition - re-cognition, that act by which the mind can look again at a thing and if necessary make revisions and amendments until it sees the thing as it really is. (Jane Austen 105)

However, in Chapter 3, the meeting of the hero and heroine, Darcy and Elizabeth (unlike the first meeting of the hero and heroine of Northanger Abbey), begins on a negative note. The comic gap between appearances and reality, as seen in this first meeting, thus focuses on basic conflicts that must be resolved. In this chapter, though Mrs. Bennet resents Darcy's slighting "one of her daughters" (11), Elizabeth is able to tell the story of being slighted by Darcy "with great

spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition which delighted in anything ridiculous" (12). This initial characterization of Elizabeth's playfulness prepares the reader for the comic action about to unfold.

The chapter concludes with another look at the Bennets' marriage and at the comic gap between their interests and values and the absence of any real conversation between them. Though Mr. Bennet is curious enough to listen to Mrs. Bennet's account of their rich, new neighbour, he constantly interrupts her run-on sentences. From exclamations on Bingley's charming manners, she goes on to describe his sisters as "charming women. I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their dresses" (13). Her description of elegance is thus limited to description of dress. Mr. Bennet's response to what has impressed his wife is reported briefly: "Mr. Bennet protested against any description of finery" (13) on hearing which, his wife quickly finds another topic--Darcy's "shocking rudeness." The chapter concludes with her final sentence "I quite detest the man" (13).

The first three chapters of Pride and Prejudice thus comprise its beginning. The journey motif, with which Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility begin, is seen here as well, though it is more subtly introduced. Rather than a character's departure, it is Mr. Bingley's arrival that causes such a stir in the neighbourhood. The excitement caused connects directly with the typical theme of marriage

in Austen's novels. As in Northanger Abbey, the hero and heroine meet for the first time at a ball, a setting that is delightfully appropriate for the development of Austen's comedy of manners.

D. Mansfield Park:

Austen once again introduces the social world, with its comic gap between appearances and reality, in Mansfield Park. The once-upon-a-time tone of story-telling is also apparent in the opening sentence:

> About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income.(3)

References to money and rank which go against the grain of "once upon a time" are a part of Austen's ironic technique of juxtaposing the joy of story-telling with the reality of truth. In this passage, the verb "captivate" calls to mind the playful image of woman as the pursuer and man as the victim with which Pride and Prejudice begins. Miss Maria Ward's conquest is set off against her two sisters' less successful efforts. And in a tone of decided irony, Austen asserts:

> But there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them. Miss Ward, at the end of half a dozen years, found herself obliged to be attached to the Reverend Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune, and Miss Frances fared yet worse. (3)

Mansfield Park thus begins with a look at three sharply contrasting marriages. In his essay, "Mansfield Park: Jane Austen's Bleak House," Robert A. Draffan observes that

> Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and Mrs. Price are sisters. Jane Austen was interested in marriages and their respective deserts (She was more interested in marriages than in marriage), and we perceive why Miss Maria Ward married Sir Thomas Bertram 'all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income' (Ch.1) were an unexpected harvest. But what also deserves consideration is why Sir Thomas should have married Miss Maria Ward. The answer is that he married her for her looks--there is nothing else after all--and he is almost as limited as she is. She likes the look of the establishment and he likes the look of her; there is nothing to choose between them. They are both pompous fools. But where does that leave Mrs. Price? Ay, there's the rub, for she has married so badly that the situation is beyond repair. Division between the sisters, is the 'natural result' (Ch. 1). Such an effect of ordination--'ordering, arranging, or disposing in ranks'--warns us against entertaining extravagant hopes for Fanny. (373)

When Fanny, the ten-year-old daughter of Mrs. Price, comes to live with her aunts, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, at Mansfield Park, we see the marriages of the three sisters represented under one roof. At the very outset, happiness is equated by society with marriage that brings wealth and social status. It is a major theme of Mansfield Park and carries

much irony. The marriage between Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon and Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park, at which "All Huntingdon" had "exclaimed on the greatness of the match" (3), leads to less perfect results when three of the Bertram children disappoint their parents by actions which reflect their upbringing. Mansfield Park, the symbol of happiness and comfort, turns out to be a less than perfect place.

But the unhappy course of events are not foreshadowed at the beginning of Mansfield Park. Instead, Austen self-consciously approves the socially acclaimed match between Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram. Not only is Sir Thomas a man "of large fortune" (3), but he has a "general wish of doing right, a desire of seeing all that were connected with him in situations of respectability" (4). "Respectability" is the word Austen plays with in this context. Despite Sir Bertram's best intentions, at the end of the novel, it is the Bertram name that will lose its "respectability."

However, at this point in the novel, the unsuspecting reader is aware only of Sir Bertram's generous attitude, which ultimately leads to the ten-year-old Fanny's being welcomed to Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas Bertram expresses concern about Fanny's situation when he tells Mrs. Norris at the outset:

> "There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris" observed Sir Thomas, "as to the distinctions proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too

> far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram. I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different. It is a point of great delicacy, and you must assist us in our endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct." (10-1)

Not only do the events of the novel prove Sir Bertram wrong (Maria and Julia disgrace the Bertram name while Fanny does become a Bertram), but Sir Thomas asks Mrs. Norris, of all persons, to "assist" in their "endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct" (11). He is blind to her true nature.

The reader, however, has already caught a glimpse of the comic gap between Mrs. Norris' apparent and real selves in the way she is shown handling Fanny's arrival at Mansfield Park:

> Mrs. Norris had not the least intention of being at any expense in her maintenance. As far as walking, talking, and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others: but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends. (8)

In this passage, Austen's playful artifice includes extravagant parallelism to develop the essence of Mrs. Norris' character. Extremely busy making arrangements for "so expensive a charity" as her ten-year-old niece, Fanny, Mrs. Norris has not "the <u>least</u> intention of being at <u>any expense</u>"

(8, my emphasis) in the maintenance of Fanny. Her "love of money" equals "her love of directing," and she is as capable of saving "her own money" as spending that "of her friends" (8), in this case, her sister's. Not only does Mrs. Norris successfully deceive others but possibly herself as well. Austen discloses that since she has

> no real affection for her sister, it was impossible for her to aim at more than the credit of projecting and arranging so expensive a charity; though perhaps she might so little know herself, as to walk home to the Parsonage...in the happy belief of being the most liberal-minded sister and aunt in the world. (8-9)

Sir Thomas is left in the dark about Mrs. Norris' real nature. Only after several untoward events have run their course in the novel are Sir Thomas' eyes finally opened; then Mrs. Norris is banished from Mansfield Park to facilitate the happy ending.

The opening of Mansfield Park is thus rich in irony at several levels, not least of which are Sir Thomas' fears about the future possibility of "cousins in love" (6). Mrs. Norris persuasively puts such fears to rest, by saying:

> "Do not you know that of all things upon earth that is the least likely to happen; brought up, as they would be, always together, like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible. I never knew an instance of it. It is, in fact, the only sure way of providing against the connection." (6)

But in the course of the novel, the cousins Fanny and Edmund do fall in love, and marry. Not only are Sir Thomas's early fears realized at the novel's end, but he also begins to see that what comes to pass is actually the highest good.

Irony shapes the novel's central meaning from the beginning. Refuting the generally held view that Mansfield Park is not ironic in the same way as Austen's other novels, Janet Burroway, in "The Irony of the Insufferable Prig," contends that Mansfield Park's irony

> ...is to be found where we would least expect it, in the character of the heroine and her moral situation. The contradiction is this: Fanny Price, who is totally committed to preserving the repose, stability and order of Mansfield Park against the restless self-assertive and independent forces that threaten it, is required to express this commitment by active, independent self-assertion. She is the embodiment of submission in a hierarchy in which Sir Thomas Bertram is embodied authority, and she defies him. (128)

This ironic fact is not foreshadowed in the opening chapters of the novel. It was Fanny's mother who had "married, in the common phrase, to disoblige her family, and by fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections, did it very thoroughly. She could hardly have made a more untoward choice" (3). Now, when the ten-year-old Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, she is seen by the reader for the first time "exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice" (12). Her background and personality clearly do not

prepare the reader for her final challenge to Sir Bertram's authority. Austen, of course, triumphs in later disclosing the fact that Fanny's moral superiority rests ironically on her less than fortunate beginnings.

In Chapter 2, emphasizing the comic gap between Fanny's feelings with those of others who lived in Mansfield Park, Austen playfully observes,"..the little girl who was spoken of in the drawing room when she left it at night, as seeming so desirably sensible of her peculiar good fortune, ended every day's sorrows by sobbing herself to sleep" (15). The truth of course was that the little girl could not be consoled by "the grandeur of the house." For the timid, home-sick Fanny, the rooms of Mansfield Park were, symbolically and actually, "too large to move in with ease; whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry" (14-15). The adult viewpoint (as in Mrs. Norris' constant reminder of her "wonderful good fortune") thus contradicts the reality of a child's natural and simple longing to be with her parents, brothers and sisters, with whom she has spent the last ten years of her life. It is Austen's playful commentary on the limited understanding of the apparently wise adults, who are in reality so far removed from what is natural and true.

At one such low moment Fanny, the future heroine, is found "sitting crying on the attic stairs" (15) by her cousin,

Edmund, who, because he is closer to innocence himself, understands the truth about human nature better than his parents and aunt Norris. This first close-up of the hero and heroine is, interestingly enough, a melancholy scene that sharply contrasts with the sparkling ball room settings for the meetings of the heroine and hero of Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice. Yet Edmund's and Fanny's meeting marks a turning point and signals a movement from melancholy to hope. We read, "From this day Fannny grew more comfortable" (17). And, with Edmund's awareness of Fanny's feelings, comes the realization:

> He had never knowingly given her pain, but he now felt that she required more positive kindness, and with that view endeavoured, in the first place, to lessen her fears of them all, and gave her especially a great deal of good advice as to playing with Maria and Julia, and being as merry as possible. (17)

Edmund's advice to Fanny is playfully set off against Mrs. Norris' advice to Julia and Maria, which runs quite contrary to Edmund's:

> "...though you know (owing to me) your papa and mamma are so good as to bring her up with you, it is not at all necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are; on the contrary, it is much more desirable that there should be a difference." (19)

To such direct speech, Austen adds her ironic commentary:

> Such were the counsels by which Mrs. Norris assisted to form her nieces' minds; and it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity and humility. (19)

Here the word "assisted" conspicously echoes Sir Thomas Bertram's appeal to Mrs. Norris at the close of Chapter 1, "you must assist us in our endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct" (11). We now get a glimpse of Mrs. Norris being "quite at his service" (11) in her own mischievous manner.

As for Sir Thomas Bertram's own endeavours in this regard, Austen observes that he did not know what was wanting, because, "though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of" his childrens' "spirits before him" (19). Lady Bertram, the picture of indolence and ease

> paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needle-work, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. (20)

The remarkable concentration and balance of this sentence embodies what D. W. Harding calls "regulated hatred." This portrayal of Lady Bertram is an example of the type of

character that, Harding argues, would claim "the sort of readers who sometimes miss her--those who would turn to her not for relief and escape but as a formidable ally against things and people which were to her, and still are, hateful" (179). Austen's further description of Lady Bertram underlines this argument: "Had she possessed greater leisure for the service of her girls, she would probably have supposed it unnecessary, for they were under the care of a governess..."(20). In this context, the key word "leisure" turns on itself to express Austen's meaning. We see the picture of a lady of leisure stretched out on a sofa with no time to attend to more important things such as the education of her children.

Ironically, it is Fanny who gets a better education than her cousins, Maria and Julia. Time alone proves the difference in their development. She was

> Kept back...by everybody else; therefore her cousin Edmund's "support could not bring her forward, but his attentions were otherwise of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures...he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgement. (22)

Such assistance contrasts with the kind of assistance given by Mrs. Norris to Maria and Julia, and, before that, the assistance Sir Thomas Bertram sought of Mrs. Norris when preparing for Fanny's arrival at Mansfield Park.

Like Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park also begins with a journey, and the hero and heroine meet for the first time in the opening chapters. But, unlike the earlier novels, Mansfield Park is not usually considered to be comic. Darrel Mansell refers to the "scourging of irony" in Mansfield Park. He points out that Austen

> has been uneasy about the propriety of her irony and wit; and toward the end of Pride and Prejudice she begins to reveal uneasiness about their moral respectability as well. Her most obvious response to all this has been to invest her wit in characters toward whom she is not altogether sympathetic...she seems to have scourged part of herself--the light and bright and sparkling Jane Austen we have known has been expelled for a time. (123-4)

Mansell certainly draws attention to the fact that Mansfield Park is a different kind of novel as compared with the earlier novels. Fanny, the heroine, has not the sparkle of an Elizabeth Bennet, or the excessive enthusiasm of a Marianne Dashwood, or even the over-charged imagination of a Catherine Morland. However, Mansell misinterprets the nature and significance of the difference. Fanny's apparent stillness and timidity are later contrasted with the wit and sparkle of Mary Crawford, toward whom Edmund is drawn till he discovers her false glitter and learns to appreciate Fanny's true worth. Mansell inaccurately argues that "Mary is made the receptacle for virtually all her author's playful

cleverness in the novel, and then is expelled from the park" (122). He goes on to state that "What happens to her seems not far from an outright condemnation of irony and wit as a controlling attitude toward the world's ills" (122). He concludes:

> In banishing Mary Crawford, Jane Austen seems therefore to be banishing at least for the time being that aspect of her rich intelligence which guiltily produced the lightness and brightness of the previous novels. (122)

Mansell's argument overlooks the extent to which Austen's technique of playful irony is integrated with her fabric of meaning and self-consciousness. He sees the technique as a decorative device, not an essential aspect of the whole. Mary Crawford's playfulness is rejected precisely because it has nothing to do with the concepts of freedom and beauty, which are concepts associated with Austen's own capacity to play. Mary is able to create the illusion of playfulness, but her wit and liveliness are superficial and are therefore finally rejected in favor of true wit and true play. Mansell fails to recognize the concept of play at a deeper, more philosophical level.

Austen's concern is with what lies beneath the surface sparkle; she grasps that which orders, harmonizes, frees the individual to enable him or her to reach the point of balance so he or she can freely play. Fanny and Edmund achieve this

at the end of Mansfield Park. Austen, who sets out to define true wit and true play, thus gives us a glimpse of Edmund's and Fanny's potential to form patterns of beauty and freedom in the opening section.

In this section, the reader is already aware of an upward movement from Fanny's unpromising beginnings in Chapter 1 to her arrival at Mansfield Park, with all its oportunities for growth and development, and of Edmund's interest in her as a person. Chapter 2 concludes on a happy note leaving the reader with a clue to the joy to come. Fanny loved Edmund "better than any body in the world except [her brother] William; her heart was divided between the two" (22).

E. Emma:

Unlike Mansfield Park, Emma begins with a hint of dangers lurking in the distance for the heroine. The novel, as the title indicates, is about a character just as Mansfield Park is about the atmosphere and values of a place. In the course of that novel, Fanny comes to represent the values of Mansfield Park at their best just as Emma gradually comes to discover, and therefore represent, her best self.

The opening paragraph of Emma contains the descriptive sentence:

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, **seemed** to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex

her. (5, my emphasis)

Here a distinct rhythm can be heard and an interesting variation as well; Emma has everything, and, yet, she **seems** to have everything. From her own point of view, and of those who judge from appearances, Emma "seemed" perfectly happy. But appearances are deceptive; Emma, as the reader soon discovers, has a flawed imagination. Thus Austen introduces her less than perfect heroine. The reader is prepared at the very outset to look for the comic gap between what is and what appears to be.

Two paragraphs later, Emma is seen doing "just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own" (5). And then comes an explicit explanation that is nicely balanced with another phrase and followed by an apt metaphor "alloy":

> The real evils of Emma's situation were the power of rather having too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her. (6)

Austen playfully elaborates on the comic gap between appearances and reality that was first signalled in the opening sentence with the verb "seemed." The lurking danger in Emma's exaggerated opinion of herself and her unrestrained

freedom, "the power of rather having too much her own way," (5) set the stage for the comic action that follows.

Unlike the preceding four novels which begin with a change of locale, Emma begins with a change of circumstances. Austen replaces the external journey motif of the earlier novels with the more subtle inner process of change and self-discovery. Miss Taylor, Emma's friend and confidante of sixteen years, leaves Hartfield to marry Mr. Weston and Emma is left to her own devices.

Litz points out that there is "a constant ironic qualification of the heroine, much of it dependent upon the language used to record Emma's reactions" (Jane Austen 147). In this chapter, Austen, maintaining her playful stance, writes very rhythmically of the change in Emma's life:

> sorrow came--a gentle sorrow--but not at all in the shape of any disagreeable consciousness--Miss Taylor married. It was Miss Taylor's loss which first brought grief. It was on the wedding day of this beloved friend that Emma first sat in mournful thought of any continuance .... (6)

Repetition of the "it was" pattern, with which the last two sentences begin, conveys Emma's mood, which Austen continues to develop in these sentences:

> The want of Miss Taylor would be felt every hour of every day. She recalled her past kindness--the kindness, the affection of sixteen years--how she had taught and and how she had played with her from five years old--how she had devoted all her powers to attach and amuse her in health--and how nursed her through the various illnesses

of childhood. (6)

The repetition of "how" clauses emphasizes Emma's attachment to Miss Taylor; at the same time, it leads to the most difficult question of all from Emma's point of view: "How was she to bear the change?" At this point, the reader is playfully reminded of Emma's "power of having rather too much her own way," (5). Though the reader catches Emma's sincere tone of regret, Austen's more complex tone, which includes both sincerity and playfulness, evokes an apt response. The reader can both sympathize with Emma in her sorrow, and, with a smile, await the consequences of her flawed consciousness.

Reginald Ferrar points out:

> No one who carefully reads the first three opening paragraphs of the book can entertain a doubt...of what we are to see...the gradual humiliation of self-conceit, through a long self-wrought succession of disasters, serious in effect, but keyed in comedy throughout. (381)

He adds "To conciliate affection for a character not because of its charms, but in defiance of its defects, is the loftiest aim of the comic spirit" (381). Elaborating on this, Ferrar continues:

> ...to attain success in creating a being whom you both love and laugh at, the author must attempt a task of complicated difficulty. He must...treat his creation at once objectively and subjectively, get inside it to inspire it with sympathy, and yet stay outside it to direct laughter on its comic aspects. (381)

Wayne Booth observes that throughout the first three chapters of Emma

> we learn much of what we must know from the narrator, but she turns over more and more of the job of summary to Emma as she feels more and more sure of our seeing precisely to what degree Emma is to be trusted. (257)

Booth illustrates his point:

> The beautiful irony of the first description of Harriet, given through Emma's eyes (Chap.iii) could no doubt be grasped intellectually by many readers without all of the preliminary commentary. But even for the most perceptive its effect is heightened, surely, by the sense of standing with the author and observing with her precisely how Emma's judgment is going astray. (Rhetoric of Fiction 257)

Litz points out that Austen "made certain that we would understand and criticize every aspect of Emma's self-deception by establishing a context of ironic qualifications and explicit judgments." He argues:

> We appreciate the largeness of Emma's spirit precisely because we know her social and psychological errors, and are able to relate them to a world beyond the novel. Thus we can say that the general form of Emma reflects the novel's deepest meaning, reminding us that freedom is dependent upon a recognition of limitations. (149)

In the course of the novel, Emma gradually comes to recognize her limitations. W.A. Craik observes that

> Emma, though deluded, is...never ridiculous, and the irony of the novel is much more subtle and thorough than in any of the other novels, because it is dependent on and coexistent with the heroine herself. (437)

In the opening or exposition of the novel, once Austen has made Emma's

> deficiences clear,[she] can use Emma's judgment, which on other matters is right and rational, anywhere she chooses instead of expressing her own. Jane Austen appears much less in person as narrator because here we need to know scarcely anything Emma cannot tell us, consciously or unwittingly; the unity of the plot and character is therefore much closer than ever before. (436)

Just as the effects on Emma of Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston are explored in the opening chapter, the other characters--Mr. Weston, Mr. Woodhouse and her sister--are all introduced in relation to Emma. For instance, Austen playfully describes Mr. Woodhouse's flaw, a "gentle selfishness":

> He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of everybody that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable; and he was by no means yet reconciled to his own daughter's marrying, nor could ever speak of her but with compassion, though it had been entirely a match of affection, when he was now obliged to part with Miss Taylor too; and from his habits of gentle selfishness and of never being able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself, he was very much disposed to think Miss Taylor had done as sad a thing for herself as for them, and would have been a great deal happier if she had spent all the rest of her life at Hartfield. (7-8)

Consequently, "Poor Miss Taylor" is Mr. Woodhouse's constant refrain. Austen makes her self-conscious introduction to the theme of marriage playful through irony. Not only is Mr. Woodhouse against marriage, but Emma is too, though she promotes it in others with great enthusiasm. Ironically, she ends up marrying.

Unlike the earlier novels where the hero and heroine meet for the first time at the novel's beginning, in Emma, they have already met before the novel begins. However, as in the preceding novels, the relationship between the hero and heroine is of central significance in Emma because it undergoes change and re-definition before the happy ending. Mr. Knightley, whom Emma marries at the end of the novel, is introduced as being a "sensible man about seven or eight-and-thirty, [who] was not a very old and intimate friend of the family, but particularly connected with it as the elder brother of Isabella's husband" (9). Mr. Knightley, who enters shortly thereafter, turns around Mr.Woodhouse's constant refrain and applies it to

> "Poor Mr. and Miss Woodhouse, if you please; but I cannot possibly say poor Miss Taylor. I have a great regard for you and Emma; but when it comes to the question of dependence or independence--at any rate, it must be better to have only one to please, than two." (10)

Mr. Knightley's words are ironic. At the end of the novel, after his marriage to Emma, he actually moves into Hartfield

to live with Emma and Mr. Woodhouse, and therefore has "two to please" instead of one.

When Emma takes pride in promoting a match between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston, Mr. Knightley pricks her pride with, "where is your merit?--What are you proud of? You made a lucky guess; and that is all that can be said" (13). The playful interchange between Emma and Mr.Knightley is understood only in part by Mr. Woodhouse who, by praising Emma for doing "good to others," can only tell her to "not make any more matches, they are silly things, and break up one's family circle grievously" (13). The chapter concludes with Emma playfully insisting that she make only one more match "for Mr. Elton," who has been in Highbury "a whole year, and has fitted up his house so comfortably that it would be a shame to have him single any longer" (13). Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley ironically agree in disagreeing with Emma--Mr.Woodhouse, because he would have no more marriages to bring about change, and Knightley, because he is quite decided on the point that "a man of six or seven-and-twenty" is quite capable of taking "care of himself" (14).

In subsequent chapters, the reader will, of course, see Emma trying to promote a match between Mr. Elton and her friend, Harriet, only to find Mr. Elton proposing to herself instead; the proposal rejected, he will marry soon after, introducing into Highbury a vain creature full of airs and superficialities. Thus Emma's determination to make a match

for Mr. Elton in the opening chapter of the novel prepares the reader for the comic confusion that follows.

Craik points out that

> the great constructive originality of the book is that we see..through her (Emma's) eyes and yet are able to perceive the progress of matters Emma never suspects, or if not to perceive them on first reading, to be in unwitting possession of evidence whose relevance we realize later. (447)

He elaborates on the reader's response to Emma whose

> mixture of foolishness and charm shows in her own speech; she is seen to be kind to her father, and happy for Miss Taylor though the marriage brings Emma no advantage, and these good qualities impress themselves at the same time as the topic shows the form in which Emma's vanity will show itself, that of match-making. (447)

Mr. Weston's marriage to Miss Taylor is the central topic in the opening chapter. It is explored as a focusing situation to dwell on Mr. Woodhouse's eccentricities, Emma's flawed consciousness, and Mr. Knightley's understanding of Emma's weakness as well as warmth of regard for her. Having aroused the reader's interest in Mr. Weston as Miss Taylor's husband in the first chapter, Austen sketches in his personality and history in the second. His belonging to a "respectable family" possessing "gentility and property" is set off against his "amazing marriage to Miss Churchill of a great Yorkshire family," whose "pride and importance" are deeply offended by

the match. With playful irony, the narrator underlines the fact that Mr. Weston's active cheerful mind and social temper" fail to satisfy his wife who wanted "to be the wife of Captain Weston, and Miss Enscombe" (16) at the same time.

Mr. Weston's marriage to Miss Taylor, which takes place about twenty years after his first wife's death, provides a marked contrast to the first. Miss Taylor is described as a "portionless," "well-judging and truly amiable woman" (17). Ironically Mr. Weston's second marriage, though not as "amazing" as the first, is far more happy. Austen thus plays with social patterns to upset the reader's understanding of accepted social values. When Mr. Weston first marries, society considers it to be a great match, though it does not lead to personal happiness; in his second marriage, he disregards wealth and social status and this choice leads to immense personal happiness. At the beginning of the novel, we get Austen's introduction to her themes of marriage and society, and personal happiness.

Austen also sketches in a lively backdrop to events that occur in the novel. With the neighborhood all a-stir and involved, Frank Churchill's upcoming visit to Highbury on his father's marriage, becomes a general topic of conversation in the close-knit community, whether "when Mrs. Perry drank tea with Mrs. and Miss Bates, or when Mrs. and Miss Bates returned the visit" (18). Even the wedding cake must go its rounds. The second chapter concludes with "a strange rumour in

Highbury of all the little Perrys being seen with a slice of Mrs. Weston's wedding cake in their hands" (19) which fact, the reader learns, "Mr. Woodhouse would never believe" (19). Mr. Woodhouse is constantly "teazed by being wished joy of so sorrowful an event" (19) as poor Miss Taylor's wedding. Not even Mr. Perry the apothecary's siding with Mr. Woodhouse to dissuade everyone from eating the cake,--"because his own stomach could bear nothing rich, and he could never believe other people to be different from himself" (19)--had any effect, because "still the cake was eaten; and there was no rest for his benevolent nerves till it was all gone"(19).

Mr. Woodhouse's fixed and constant refrain " Ah! poor Miss Taylor" (19) is playfully contrasted with Miss Taylor's actual position as Mrs. Weston:

> Her situation was altogether the subject of hours of gratitude to Mrs. Weston, and of moments only of regret; and her satisfaction--her more than satisfaction --her cheerful enjoyment was so just and so apparent.... (19)

With this picture of marital bliss, set beside the image of Mr. Woodhouse's refusing to believe the strange rumour "of all the little Perrys being seen with a slice of Mrs. Weston's wedding cake in their hands," the chapter concludes. In this manner does Austen introduce the wonderfully dangerous subject of marriage.

Chapter 3 begins with the sentence, "Mr. Woodhouse was fond of society in his own way" (20), and the next four paragraphs are patterned around it. Austen introduces the Westons, Mr. Knightley, Mr. Elton, Mrs. and Miss Bates and Mrs. Goddard in relation to Mr. Woodhouse. For instance, Miss Bates, a "great talker upon little matters," we learn, "exactly suited Mr. Woodhouse, full of trivial communications and harmless gossip" (21). And Mrs. Goddard, "a plain, motherly kind of woman, who had worked hard in her youth, and now thought herself entitled to the occasional holiday of a tea-visit" (22), would frequently sit by Mr. Woodhouse's fireside.

Mrs. Goddard introduces Emma to her parlour-boarder Harriet Smith "the daughter of somebody" (22). From this stage in the narrative, the point of view begins to shift to Emma's consciousness. The reader, having been quite prepared to learn more about Emma's flaws, now gets a glimpse of her way of seeing and judging. On Harriet Smith, her thoughts run on thus: "She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners" (24). The emphasis on self in "she would ...she would...she would..." matches the response of Miss Smith in the sentence:

> Miss Woodhouse was so great a personage in Highbury, that the prospect of the introduction had given as much panic

> as pleasure--but the humble, grateful, little girl went off with highly gratified feelings, delighted with the affability with which Miss Woodhouse had treated her all evening, and actually shaken hands with her at last! (25)

And so the reader gets an ironic introduction to Harriet Smith, so enamoured of Emma that she will allow herself to be led into several comic-tragic situations in the course of the narrative. A. C. Bradley writes of Emma:

> This young lady, who is always **surpassingly** confident of being right, is always **surpassingly** wrong...She chooses for a friend, not Jane Fairfax her equal, but the amiable, stupid, and adoring Harriet Smith. Her motive, which she supposes to be kindness, is the pleasure of patronage and management." (379, my emphasis)

As Craik points out:

> It is a notable point in the construction of Emma that characters are very often seen by means of those most concerned with them: Harriet is always seen through Emma, Jane through Miss Bates, and Mr. Elton through Harriet and Emma by turns. (444)

Craik further observes that Harriet's manners

> appeal to Emma's vanity and snobbery --'so proper and becoming a deference'--and the two together produce a delightful but quite unwarranted conclusion 'she must have good sense and deserve encouragement': that is, she must be sensible because she is pretty and admires Emma, and therefore...should occupy a higher place in society. ("Emma" 448)

Unlike Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, where Austen records the meeting of hero and heroine in the opening section, in Emma, the hero and heroine, Mr. Knightley and Emma, have already met before the novel begins. The novel stresses Emma's first meeting with Harriet Smith instead in the opening section, because, ironically, this friendship between the two will finally lead to Emma's awareness of her love for Mr. Knightley.

F. Persuasion:

Unlike Emma, Persuasion begins with a description, not of the heroine, Anne, but of her father. Austen focuses initially on Sir Walter Elliot's egoism, foolishness and stupidity and uses a style of mock grandeur that parallels Sir Walter's conception of himself:

> Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earlier patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century--and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed--this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened: 'ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL...(3)

It is wonderfully stylized to begin a book with someone reading a book. The compound, lengthy and pompous opening sentence also reflects a central concern of the novel--the superficial arrogance of the privileged class and the real hollowness of the apparently self-assured, perfect egoist.

The narrative tone of irony continues to develop in the paragraphs that follow. "Few women could think more of their personal appearance than" Sir Walter Elliot, we are told:

> He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion. (4)

We get an unforgettable description of vanity. The delightful analogy between his self-absorption and that of the vainest women, sets off "the blessing of beauty" with the still more superior "blessing of a baronetcy." His constant self-admiration is vividly illustrated in the first scene of the book when the reader observes him reading a book about himself.

As the novel unfolds, Austen exposes the ironic gap between Sir Walter's inflated ego and tremendous self-respect, his high social rank and apparent respectability, and the reality of his debt. The chapter that begins on the high note of Sir Walter's apparent respectability ends on the low note of the possibility of his having to leave Kellynch Hall, which

is the ultimate symbol of his respectability.

The possibility of a change of residence, with which the opening chapter concludes, is central in Chapter 2. Austen provides comic insight into a cautious lawyer's attitude in the opening sentence:

> Mr. Shepherd, a civil, cautious lawyer, who, whatever might be his hold or his views on Sir Walter, would rather have the disagreeable prompted by anybody else, excused himself from offering the slightest hint, and only begged leave to recommend an implicit deference to the excellent judgment of Lady Russell,--from whose known good sense he fully expected to have just such resolute measures advised, as he meant to see finally adopted. (11)

Lady Russell, though she had a "cultivated mind" had "prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them" (11). Even as Lady Russell recommends sensible reductions, Austen makes the reader playfully aware of her blindness to Sir Walter Elliot's essential egoism. Lady Russell tells Anne:

> I hope we may be able to convince him and Elizabeth, that Kellynch-hall has a respectability in itself, which cannot be affected by these reductions; and that the true dignity of Sir Walter Elliot will be far from lessened in the eyes of sensible people by his acting like a man of principle. (12)

Lady Russell's reference to the "true dignity of Sir Walter Elliot" reveals the comic gap between the truth and what appears to be the truth to such "sensible people" as Lady Russell, Sir Walter Elliot and those easily impressed by attractive and imposing appearances. The reader, already familiar with the so-called "true dignity" of Sir Walter Elliot, experiences no surprise at his comic explosion on learning of Mrs. Russell's recommendations:

> "What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, servants, horses, table,--contractions and restrictions everywhere. To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman! No, he would sooner quit Kellynch-hall at once, than remain in it on such disgraceful terms." (13)

Tanner points out that Sir Walter's

> relation to his house is not a responsible one--he does not see his house as part of a larger context, an interrelated rural society, an ecology, if you will; it is more like a pleasure dome or a three-dimensional mirror which flatters his vanity. So he agrees to quit it if he cannot have those pleasures. (Jane Austen 222)

Yet it is of utmost importance that he preserve his apparent respectability. Though he would let Kellynch-hall, he would not have others know this truth. Austen exposes the hollowness of his pretentions and continues to delight the reader with the contrast between Sir Walter's apparent respectability and real monetary need. To Mr. Shepherd's

suggestion that Navy Officers would make "very responsible tenants," Sir Walter replies that if an Admiral should come along, "'He would be a very lucky man ...A prize indeed would Kellych Hall be to him; rather the greatest prize of all, let him have taken ever so many before--'" (17).

Ironically, an Admiral does apply and is considered a "suitable" tenant for reasons the reader can by now fully comprehend and enjoy. Austen mocks Sir Walter's foolishness:

> Sir Walter was not very wise; but still he had experience enough of the world to feel, that a more unobjectionable tenant, in all essentials, than Admiral Croft bid fair to be, could hardly offer. So far went his understanding; and his vanity supplied a little additional soothing, in the admiral's situation in life, which was just high enough, and not too high. (24)

Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who move into Kellynch-hall, are, of all people, the brother-in-law and sister of Captain Wentworth, whose love Anne Elliot had been persuaded to reject seven years earlier. For Anne, it is the irony of circumstances that now revives the past.

Austen thus links Sir Walter Elliot's self-absorption and love for appearances and Lady Russell's value for "rank and consequence," with which the reader is already familiar, with Anne's broken engagement. Seven years ago she had been "persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing" (27) because Wentworth's rank and social status did not match her own. Yet though "she had been forced into prudence in her

youth, she learned romance as she grew older--the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (30). The movement from a focus on appearances and "respectability" to a discovery of the reality of true love is an essential theme of the novel.

Mary Lascelles points out that:

> The point of vantage which we are to share with Anne is precisely indicated in the opening of the story; there we are made acquainted with the range of her field of vision. We realize that we are in possession of knowledge which is denied to the other characters in the book; few of them are aware that Wentworth's life has inpinged upon hers, and of those none knows her present feelings; but we know what their first strength was, and that it is not diminished. (203-4)

Elizabeth Bowen comments on Anne's "unbroken though gentle spirit" and poses the question: "From what inner source does her courage spring?" (167). The answer she gives is:

> Love, although lost to her, still inspires her. Her undying feeling for Frederick Wentworth...still lights up for her the entire world. For Anne Elliot to love, to have loved, is a tremendous thing. Somehow, therefore, she is set apart from those whose easier longings have been satisfied. (167)

Bowen elaborates:

> Persuasion's heroine when we first meet her, owes her poise to a sort of sad inner peace, the peace which comes with the end of hope. She does not expect, and she cannot wish, ever again to see Frederick Wentworth. (167)

But the opening chapters prepare us for the unexpected when Kellynch-hall is let out to the Crofts. With the conclusion of Chapter 4, the reader is left with an insight into Anne's past experiences and hope for things to come. As Mudrick points out, Sir Walter's financial anxieties "prepare the major turn of plot which sends the Elliots to Bath and which ultimately reunites Anne and Wentworth at Kellynch" (214).

Austen's self-consciousness at the beginning of the novel gradually gives way to Anne's consciousness, and the reader increasingly sees the fictional world from her perspective. Gene Koppel refers to Austen's power and complexity as a writer: "She subtly makes the reader aware of the limited perspective she is allowing him..." (102). The reader's consciousness is enlarged despite the limited point of view. Koppel comments on Austen's theme that

> all of us--the novel's characters, the narrator, the author, and the reader--are very limited in our perspectives; each of us can experience the world only through his consciousness...there is much more to life, and to the lives of other people, than we can possibly know. (104)

Through this theme of the "bounded single consciouness," Koppel argues, Austen

> shows a constant awareness of what in our day we think of as the isolation of the individual consciousness. But in Austen's fiction this isolation is never complete. Communication, friendship, and love--all of these are difficult and uncommon...But they are possible...they are

> so worthwhile, so fulfilling, that they more than counter-balance all of the loneliness, the pain, and the frustration that one must survive in order to experience them. (105)

This fact is what Anne learns at the end in her love for Captain Wentworth. But, here, in the opening section, her isolation is complete. The reader shares her limited perspective and grows more aware of his own and is thus encouraged to develop more "empathy and understanding,...tolerance and...love" (Koppel 123). Austen plays with the irony of the reader's total response to a work of fiction and subtly points to the complexities involved in constructing her fictional world. She provides the key to a "satisfying esthetic form" (Koppel 123) at the outset of the novel by letting the reader enter the fictional world through Anne's limited consciousness.

Austen's ironic attitude to life's complications parallels the triumphant self-consciousness with which she shapes her novel. She introduces the characters, their values, history and circumstances in these first four chapters of Persuasion, which comprise its beginning. Persuasion, resembles Emma in the prior relationship of the hero and heroine, and, like Sense and Sensibility and Mansfield Park, it begins with a change in circumstances that leads to a journey. Anne's depature from Kellynch-hall opens the way for her re-union with the hero and eventually to a happy ending.

Each of Austen's six completed novels begins on a note of discord as well as apparent harmony. The ever interesting and interested social world provides a comic backdrop to the central action. Conflict centers on the major theme of human relationships, and Austen plays with human limitations at the beginning of each novel. She concludes with a definition of what it means to play: to be fully human, beautiful and free.

Austen skillfully weaves her beginnings into the fabric of her fictional world. As Ira Konigsberg points out:

> Jane Austen saw the novel as a compositional whole, not merely as a series of scenes and episodes leading to a particular denouement. She was the first to have at her disposal a full array of narrative techniques with which to achieve a multitude of effects, and the first to know how to modulate and integrate these into a single harmonious unit. (244)

He concludes that "Austen created a paradigm of what the novel could be..." (Narrative Technique in the English Novel 244).

In "The Problem of Aesthetic Form," DeWitt H. Parker argues:

> The value of the work as a whole depends upon the reciprocal relations of its elements: each needs, responds to, demands, every other element. For example, in the Young Woman with a Water Jug (by Johannes Vermeer: Metropolitan Museum), the cool green needs the warm yellow and both need the red; the casement demands the table, the map requires the dark shadow under the casement, to balance it. In a melody, each tone requires its successor to continue the trend that is being established. In short, the meaning of the whole is not something additional to the elements of the work of art, but their cooperative deed. (204)

Parker further points out that

> the unity of a work of art is the counterpart of a unity within the experience of the beholder. Since the work of art becomes an embodiment not only of the imagination of the artist, but of the imagination of the spectator as well, his own experience is, for the moment, concentrated there.(204)

Thus "Art is the expression of the whole man, because it momentarily makes of man a whole" (Parker 204). Austen's art approximates this aesthetic ideal, which is already evident in her beginnings.

The techniques of self-consciousness and playful irony at the beginning of each novel are significant. Alter observes:

> For a novelist, to devise a way of saying, "Look, I'm writing a novel," could conceivably be no more than a mannerism, a self-indulgent game. When such devices are integrated into a large critical vision of the dialectic interplay between fiction and reality, they may produce one of the most illuminating dimensions of the experience we undergo in reading a novel....(Partial Magic xiv)

Austen's beginnings prepare the reader for a unique fictional experience. As Edward W. Said points out, "Beginning is not only a kind of action; it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness" (xi).

CHAPTER IV

HAPPY ENDINGS

Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine.
--Jane Austen, Persuasion

The happy endings of Austen's novels raise interesting questions about plot, characterization, and theme. In his Foreword to the special issue on "Narrative Endings" in Nineteenth Century Fiction, Alexander Welsh argues that "Whereas Aristotle's unities of time and place may be confidently, if variously defined, unity of action evidently depends on what constitutes a satisfactory denouement." He adds "endings are critical points for analysis in all examinations of plot; quite literally, any action is defined by its ending" (1). J. Hillis Miller, in his essay, "The Problematic of Ending," sees death and marriage as the two most common ways of bringing a narrative to a "conclusion." Yet, he asserts, "the aporia of ending arises from the fact that it is impossible ever to tell whether a given narrative is complete" (5). The tying of the marriage bond both completes the action and initiates another and death a "seemingly definitive end, always leaves behind some musing

or bewildered survivor." Miller concludes that "the best one can have, writer or reader, is what Frank Kermode calls 'the sense of an ending'" (6).

Kermode's Sense of an Ending (1967) raises, among others, the question whether a story with a predestined end "respects our sense of reality" (18). Eleven years later, in "Sensing Endings" (1978), Kermode looks at the question of the novelist's responsibility in the way he sets up and fulfills certain expectations in the reader. He develops his argument by referring to Henry James who, he states

> was acknowledging this responsibility when he said that the task of the artist was not the impossible one of making 'relations stop' but of drawing 'the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so'. (145)

Henry James' reference to a magical "circle" can be applied to my analysis of Jane Austen's novels. The beginnings and endings of her six completed novels come full circle in a final harmony. The image of James' "circle" can be developed by showing that Austen's perfect endings do not relate to a perfect world (in life) but are wholly satisfying aesthetic experiences in themselves.

Schiller asserts that "the real secret of the master of any art" is

> that he can make his form consume his material; and the more pretentious, the more seductive this material is in itself, the more it seeks to impose itself upon us, the

> more highhandedly it thrusts itself forward with effects of its own, or the more the beholder is inclined to get directly involved with it, then the more triumphant the art which forces it back and asserts its own kind of dominion over him. The psyche of the listener or spectator must remain completely free and inviolate; it must go forth from the magic circle of the artist pure and perfect as it came from the hands of the Creator. (Letters 429)

Schiller's theory of the play drive rests on this criteria. As M.H.Abrams points out, Schiller "developed his own theory that art is the result of a 'play-impulse,' a free play of the faculties without ulterior motive..." (The Mirror and the Lamp 327). Austen creates a self-sufficient fictional world. The happy endings of her six completed novels magically round off her use of the comic formula and triumphantly demonstrate Schiller's aesthetic ideal.

Typically, the completion of the journey motif marks the beginning of the end of Austen's novels. The journey motif with which Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility and Mansfield Park begin, is completed when a changed heroine returns home having experienced life's complexities. The experience leads to self-awareness and is directly related to the final upward movement celebrating the marriage of the hero and heroine. In Pride and Prejudice, the completion of the journey motif takes a different form. Mr. Bingley returns to the neighborhood he had first entered at the beginning of the novel. With him, once again, comes Mr. Darcy, who has developed to a point of greater self-awareness. The narrative

comes full circle when Mr. Darcy marries Elizabeth, Mr. Bingley, Jane and the latter move out of the neighborhood.

In Emma, the journey motif is internalized. The heroine does not leave home, but her changed circumstances with which the novel begins, eventually lead to greater self-awareness. It is an internal journey of self-discovery that culminates in the marriage of the hero and heroine. Persuasion begins with a physical journey when Anne is compelled to leave home due to circumstances beyond her control. These circumstances eventually re-unite her with the hero at the novel's close. Anne also undergoes an internal journey of self-discovery, and, when she learns the truth about Mr. Elliott's character, the way is finally open for Captain Wentworth's love. Anne's self-awareness leads to self-realization, and Emma's awareness of her own limitations frees her from obstacles of her own making. She is finally capable of finding fulfillment in love.

A. Northanger Abbey

In Northanger Abbey, just as the first three chapters form the opening section of the novel, the last three can be considered to mark its conclusion. In these chapters, the journey motif, with which the novel begins, is completed and the marriage of the hero and heroine takes place.

The first three chapters thus connect directly with the last three. Catherine sets out on her journey of experience

in the opening chapters, and at the end she returns home having experienced life as she had never suspected it to be. Henry Tilney is introduced in chapter 3; at the end of the novel he re-appears when he surprises the Morlands with a visit. Mrs. Allen, who had first been introduced in the opening chapters as a significant character in this comedy of manners, re-appears at the end. Austen uses the same ironic tone to describe Mrs. Allen's manners, and her self-conscious technique marks the ending as it had the beginning. The reader is well aware of the shaping hand of the novelist as she talks of the "tell-tale compression" of the pages before them and gently explains that "the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable" (251).

The narrator's ironic tone includes the mocking tone of parody. The opening section, for instance, contains references to the heroine's interest in reading books, "provided they were all story and no reflection," and her preparing to be a heroine; at the end Catherine's mother refers her to a book, and then actually brings it down for her to read, but has to put it off for a later time. This connection between books and real life and how they help or hinder character development, is ironically re-introduced at the end to complete the pattern of parody with which the novel begins.

Katrin Burlin points out:

> From her astonishingly aggressive authorial intrusion near the opening pages of Northanger Abbey to defend the novel, to her noisy re-entrance at its end, Jane Austen's motive is to fight for her craft, to prove that it is the responsible novelist who protects us by teaching us through his art to recognize and discriminate among the fictions of life and art alike. (90)

Commenting on the significance of Austen's self-consciousness as an artist, Burlin accurately observes that "By reminding the reader at the crisis of the novel's affairs that it is a novel, the artist's delighted assertion of controlling power points explicitly to fiction as the central theme of Northanger Abbey." Burlin elaborates:

> In sharing with her reader the true fictional process, after having shown the nature and consequence of 'false' fiction, lies Jane Austen's strongest, most telling defense of the novel. But perhaps its most charming revelation is Jane Austen's notion that the real motive for authorship should be the creation of joy in the assembling of materials to express truth. That is the explanation for the cheer with which she breaks into the novel to share directly with her readers her confidence in their mutual happiness at her ingenious invention of a reward for all of Elinor Tilney's sufferings. The sketchy portrait of Elinor's lover is, of course, exquisitely appropriate to the merry tone of the passage, while the particular detail with which Jane Austen condescends to 'finish' her depiction of Eleanor's lover mocks the superficial neatness of the Gothic novel. (107)

On the one hand, Austen exposes the tendency of the conventional novel to end with the hero and heroine living

happily ever after; on the other hand, she challenges her readers to explore opposing possibilities at the conclusion of Northanger Abbey. As Burlin suggests, Austen "impertinently invites us at the end of Northanger Abbey to misinterpret its materials" (107). Though she refers to the reader and herself as "hastening together to perfect felicity" she leaves it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. The happy ending is a typical pattern of comedy, yet there is much irony in the way Austen ties up the threads of her story. Considerable ironic qualification of the comic ending is a part of the tradition she inherited from Fielding and, indeed, from Shakespeare.

This "tendency" or intention of the work is playfully expressed in the concluding sentence of the novel. Far from being the didactic statement relished by the sentimental reader, it leaves the reader to interpret the fictional material as he pleases. Has Austen educated the sentimental reader sufficiently to enable him to get the real meaning of the novel? Or is she teasing him with two possibilities to test his understanding of her fictional world? In any case, it is with a triumphant flourish, ringing with irony, that Austen concludes her novel. The reader-writer rapport, well established at the beginning of the novel, is here brought to an ironic, teasing conclusion in the last sentence of the novel:

> To begin perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen, is to do pretty well; and professing myself moreover convinced, that the General's unjust interference, so far from being really injurious to their felicity, was perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment, I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience. (252)

There is much irony in what Lloyd Brown refers to as Austen's "deliberate emphasis on the artifices and the transparent inevitability of her 'happy' endings" (Bits of Ivory 222-3). Certainly the typical comic conclusion also parodies the sentimental reader's expectations. Austen gives many readers what they want (the happy ending) even as she draws clear distinctions between the overblown gothic romance and sentimental fiction as opposed to her own realistic fiction. As Brown points out, the "principles of realism are confirmed rather than contradicted by the exaggerated mechanics of her happy endings" (Bits of Ivory 223).

Though the novel opens with the sentence that no one would have supposed Catherine Morland born to be a heroine, it turns out that she does become the heroine. Austen is reversing the expected notion of a glamorous heroine by substituting in her place a plain-looking heroine who also has "common" experiences. Nevertheless, she does meet the hero, eventually marries him, and "lives happily ever after."

Though Austen follows the expected pattern, she both parodies it and treats it seriously. She pokes fun at the reader of sentimental novels, yet gives him what he wants though the way she leads up to the happy ending is distinctly different. As Mathison points out, there is no "sensationalism, no unreality, no sentimentality... no escape from life, but as she said that a novel could be, an illumination of it" (150). Referring to Sir Phillip Sidney, who "considered 'poetry' the best teacher because it was able to provide ideal characters, noble specimens of what 'ought to be,'" Mathison points out that "Jane Austen considers the novel a better teacher than history or essays on different grounds, that it cuts through the surface of things to what is" (150).

The happy ending, then, is based on Catherine's ability to "learn how futile or even harmful parents or guardians may be, that social position has little to do with worth of character, that cruel acts may be performed by proper people (Mathison 150-1). Austen has made "the reader as well as Catherine, consider what is important, what trivial, what admirable, and what detestable in life and behaviour. In making Catherine become aware of true values, she has helped the reader do the same" (Mathison 150). Aware as she is of "true values" at the end of the novel, Catherine deserves the happiness she gets at the novel's conclusion. It is not an unconvincing, melodramatic ending. As Jan Fergus points out,

Austen wants to

> expose her readers to everything absurd in a convention or genre and then to make the convention 'work' all the same. She explodes a convention and then exploits it, and in doing so, often succeeds in eliciting a response from the reader inspite of himself. (20)

An interesting example of Austen's rejection of a novelistic formula is the passage at the end on the heroine's return: "A heroine in a hack post-chase, is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand" (232). Thus, as McKillop comments, "the novelist conducts the story by acknowledging the defeat of the heroic and the ideally correct" (57). Frank Kearful refers to Austen's technique of entering "the narration quite self-consciously in the first person as 'the author'" to strike a delicate balance "between empathy with and humorous detachment from her heroine. So, in a manner which must remind us of Fielding, she describes Catherine's return home" ("Satire and the Form of the Novel" 525). Kearful continues:

> By this combination of pathos and comedy the reader is prevented, on the one hand, from entering too closely into the experience as it might have been felt internally by Catherine, and, on the other hand, from regarding Catherine merely as a comic victim. We are placed, then, neither in the usual world of the novel nor in the usual world of satire, but rather in an ambivalent world compounded of both. (526)

Julia Brown points out that in this scene

> an emotional event is expressed in material terms as a way of pointing up the vacuity of a popular attitude. Yet the purpose of the irony is here corrective, not malicious. Contrary to what Marvin Mudrick has said, Jane Austen's comic irony is not irrelevant to sympathy; irony in Northanger Abbey, in the deepest sense, is sympathy. The chief function of the irony directed at Catherine Morland is to force us to see her as she is, ordinary, awkward, and ignorant, rather than as we would like to see her....In all the ironic comedies Austen means to show how sentiment can be hostile to humanity and irony friendly to it. (53)

Brown concludes that "Austen's criticism of gothic and sentimental fantasy is not that it overvalues life but that it undervalues it; it disguises and derogates the truth of what is" (53).

Another example of Austen's technique can be seen in the delightful paragraph in which the Morland children first see the carriage that brings their sister home. First the reader sees the scene from the childrens' point of view, then comes the narrator's joyful, involved tone that parallels the childrens' joyful discovery: "Happy the glance that first distinguished Catherine! Happy the voice that proclaimed the discovery!" (233). The repetition of 'Happy' emphasizes the childrens' exclamations of pure joy as does the repetitive sentence structure. Austen's style captures the spontaneity of the moment as Catherine is warmly welcomed home by her family. What saves the scene from being purely sentimental,

is the narrator's commentary, which is detached, evoking a comic response as in the description, "Her father, mother, Sarah, George, and Harriet, all assembled at the door" (233). As the sentence continues, the truth and genuine sincerity of family affection warm the reader's heart, but only after he or she has watched the narrator cast an amused, objective glance at the group eagerly assembled to welcome Catherine home.

In the next paragraph comes the narrative comment on the family's response to Catherine's explanation of her sudden return:

> Scarcely ... could they at all discover the cause, or collect the particulars of her sudden return. They were far from being an irritable race; far from any quickness in catching, or bitterness in resenting affronts. (233)

In the same tone, Austen both commends the family for its good nature, and, pokes fun at its dullness, but quickly reverts to appreciating their unresenting hearts in adding that there was "far from any quickness in catching, or bitterness in resenting affronts" (233).

At the close of the chapter, Austen brings out the earnestness and sincerity with which Mrs. Morland

> endeavoured to impress on her daughter's mind the happiness of having such steady well-wishers as Mr. and Mrs. Allen, and the very little consideration which the neglect or unkindness of slight acquaintance like the Tilneys ought to have with her.... (239)

At the same time, Austen brings out the comic irony in the fact that though

> there was a great deal of good sense in all this; there are some situations of the human mind in which good sense has very little power; and Catherine's feelings contradicted almost every position her mother advanced. (239)

Austen expresses playful irony in using the word "successfully" in the lengthy sentence with which the chapter concludes:

> ..and while Mrs. Morland was successfully confirming her own opinions by the justness of her own representations, Catherine was silently reflecting that now Henry must have arrived at Northanger; now he must have heard of her departure; and now, perhaps, they were all setting off for Hereford. (239)

Here detached commentary evokes a comic response. Though the reader is not allowed to lose sympathy for Catherine or her mother, the narrator's commentary points to the absurdity and irony of the situation in which Mrs. Morland thinks of how successfully her good sense is affecting Catherine and of how unsuccessful Mrs. Morland actually is.

Irony is Austen's magic wand. With it she signals the end of the novel. Kearful points out how in

> the last chapter, XV, the narrator as first person author ever more and more openly asserts, not only her presence in but her absolute control of the action. The book

> becomes her creation, its entire illusion dependent on her will. General Tilney as if by magic (the novelistic explanation offered is hardly convincing) reverses himself, and with all obstacles blocking their way providentially removed (the narrator acknowledges matters must be handled with despatch, for she is running out of pages), the lovers can look forward to interminable bliss. (526)

Kaul writes that the final chapter of Northanger Abbey is "a quick winding up. Its jauntiness is directed not so much at what is being wound up as at the custom and necessity of literary windings up in general" (212). As Alan McKillop observes, Austen's conclusions

> may appear to be the light dismissal of the ending which is characteristic of the tradition of comedy; but taken in relation to the rest of the story, it implies also that one can come to terms with real life and still play the novel-writing game, still enjoy the heightened consciousness of making up a story. (Critical Realism 61)

Kearful points out that Austen makes us aware of the "paradoxical nature of all illusion--even those illusions by which we master illusion" (527). And so, playful and triumphant, she ties up the ends of her story leaving her reader more aware, more amused, and therefore more free.

B. Sense and Sensibility

In Sense and Sensibility, just as the first six chapters form the opening section of the novel, the last five mark its conclusion. In these chapters the journey motif, with which

the novel begins, is completed, and the hero and heroine eventually marry. The upward movement of Chapter 10 (vol.3), with the recovery of Marianne, signals the beginning of the end of the novel. A gradual return of her physical health parallels the gradual completion of the narrative plot--from problems and conflict to a resolution of all conflict. The notion of formal patterning is a significant aspect of Austen's self-consciousness.

The reader is prepared for the novel's happy ending when Marianne invites Col. Brandon to visit her, and Mrs. Dashwood persuades herself "to think that something more than gratitude already dawned" in the "actions and words of Marianne" to Col. Brandon (340). Ironically, Marianne's actions are to be exactly the opposite of all her professed convictions in the opening chapters of the novel.

In the opening section, Mrs. Dashwood's and her daughters' journey from Norland Park to Barton Cottage had marked a new stage in their lives; now, at the close of the novel, the journey motif is used once again. Marianne travels back to Barton Cottage with Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor in a state of renewed health and vigor that is more than just physical; it marks a significant moment in her process of development toward self-awareness. Elinor observes the outward signs of recovery and good health in "an apparent composure of mind, which, in being the result as she trusted of serious reflection, must eventually lead her to contentment

and cheerfulness" (342). And "in the whole of her subsequent manner, she traced the direction of a mind awakened to reasonable exertion" (342).

It is a changed Marianne who can now tell Elinor:

> My illness has made me think--it has given me leisure and calmness for serious reflection...I saw in my own behavior since the beginning of our acquaintance with him [Willoughby] last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence toward myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. (346)

Chapter 10 thus shows the reader a changed Marianne, more aware of her inadequacies and more determined to improve. It is a preparation for things to come. Chapter 11 (vol.3) continues in the same vein with Elinor's attempt to help Marianne recover a sense of balance and well-being. As Elinor, Marianne, and Mrs. Dashwood sit together discussing Willoughby, Marianne speaks three times; each utterance expresses her changed state of mind and heart: "I wish to assure you both," said she, "that I see everything--as you can desire me to do." And again, "I wish for no change" and, finally "I have nothing to regret--nothing but my own folly" (352).

Austen does not go beyond this presentation of a changed Marianne to an exploration of her deepest feelings and thoughts. Instead, in the next three chapters, the focus

shifts to Elinor, the novel's symbol of balance and harmony. Austen is gradually moving the reader's attention to Elinor. We now see her through the new eyes of Marianne, who had earlier been blind to her excellent qualities, and also of her mother, who had shown more concern for the daughter who appeared to suffer more deeply. According to Fergus:

> One of Austen's major interests in the novel is to define feeling and sensitive behaviour, and she shows that it includes a capacity to estimate and appreciate others' feelings, along with a willingness to act so as to consider those feelings as much as possible. This behaviour is what Elinor exhibits and Marianne violates throughout the novel. It is Marianne who must learn to behave feelingly, not Elinor. Elinor's behaviour and the feelings which prompt it are, from the beginning, considerate and right. (41)

At the end of the novel, Elinor gets her reward. Chapter 12 dramatically presents the encounter between Elinor and Edward Ferrars, and, in its brevity and rhythm captures the irony of fate:--not Edward, but his brother, Robert, had married Lucy Steele. Elinor's response to the surprisingly joyful news is narrated thus: "She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease" (360). The narration is as restrained as the action itself. The chapter ends with the lengthy, controlled sentence:

> Edward, who had till then looked any where, rather than at her, saw her hurry away, and perhaps saw--or even heard, her emotion; for immediately afterwards he fell

> into a reverie, which no remarks, no enquiries, no affectionate address of Mrs. Dashwood could penetrate, and at last, without saying a word, quitted the room, walked out towards the village leaving the others in the greatest astonishment and perplexity on a change in his situation so wonderful and so sudden;--a perplexity which they had no means of lessening but by their own conjectures. (360)

We see here a reversal of the earlier pattern. The movement is from sense to sensibility. As Elinor, the embodiment of "sense" now expresses her "sensibility," we see a pattern completed. Fergus points out that for

> Elinor's continual exertions to control her feelings to appear cheerful when she is unhappy and to be considerate of her mother and sister in order that they be 'spared much solicitude on her account...leads Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne to assume-along with some of the critics-that in fact she has no feelings. (41)

He concludes that this situation

> embodies two central ironic perspectives. First, consideration for others' feelings permits others to be inconsiderate of one's own. Secondly, excess of sensibility (in Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood) becomes insensibility--insensitivity to and misjudgement of other's feelings. As a result, Elinor is given credit neither for having feelings nor for commanding them. (41)

Yet, as this scene demonstrates, Elinor can both express and command her feelings of pure joy on learning the truth about Edward Ferrars' situation.

Edward's proposal to Elinor is merely reported:

> When they all sat down to table at four o'clock about three hours after his arrival, he had secured his lady, engaged her mother's consent, and was not only in the rapturous profession of the lover, but in reality of reason and truth, one of the happiest of men. (361)

The stylized expression "the rapturous profession of the lover" contrasts with "the reality of reason and truth". Austen self-consciously uses the conventional novelistic phrase "the happiest of men" and leaves the details of what transpired to the reader's imagination. Here "reason" and "truth" are the key words that define happiness. The entire novel has revolved around the concepts of "sense" and "sensibility" that are integral to reason, truth, and the capacity for happiness.

Austen uses tremendous irony to complete the pattern of her happy ending. Mrs. Ferrars forgives her son, Robert, more readily for marrying Lucy than she does Lucy for becoming her daughter-in-law:

> But perseverance in humility of conduct and messages, in self-condemnation for Robert's offence, and gratitude for the unkindness she was treated with, procured her in time the haughty notice which overcame her by its graciousness, and led soon afterwards, by rapid degrees, to the highest state of affection and influence. (377)

Mrs. Ferrars "haughty notice" of her daughter-in-law, Lucy, is balanced against Lucy's "humility" and "self-condemnation." The "happy ending" places both on an equal footing--the mother-in-law proud as ever, and the daughter-in-law raised to the "highest state of affection and influence" (377).

The multiple weddings with which Sense and Sensibility concludes are typical of comedy. The words "marriage" and "happiness" appear to be interchangeable, but the irony goes deeper: Edward's and Elinor's marriage is set off against Robert's and Lucy's to draw attention to the values and attitudes on which these marriages are based. Ultimately, society is made up of so many marriages, so many attempts at order and harmony. Austen probes the nature of this order, this apparent harmony, and, by revealing flaws in individuals and relationships, points to true harmony and balance within and between individuals. As Tony Tanner observes:

> At the end two parallelograms are formed which demonstrate on the one hand true harmony (Elinor and Edward, Marianne and Brandon), and on the other a merely apparent, superficial harmony (Lucy and Robert, John and Fanny Dashwood)--as is often the case, Jane Austen helps to make us appreciate the value of the real thing by juxtaposing a travesty or parodic version of it. (Introduction 9-10)

With Marianne's marriage to Col. Brandon, we are told "her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby" (379). Even

Willoughby "lived to exert and frequently to enjoy himself" (379). Sense and Sensibility thus ends happily and closely follows the comic formula. Yet major critics like Tanner, Mudrick and Watt are disturbed by the apparent harmony and happiness at the end of the novel.

Watt is critical of Brandon's marriage to Marianne, which is "hurriedly presented and psychologically unconvincing" (128). Yet Watt responds to Mudrick's criticism that "Marianne the life and center of the novel, has been betrayed; and not by Willoughby" (93). According to Watt:

> This position ...depends upon our accepting Marianne as an admirable example of the gallant struggle of the individual sensibility against a hostile world. But...that was not Jane Austen's view of the matter. Like T.S. Eliot, she was, in her own way, an opponent of the dissociation of sensibility: she knew very well that in life both the heart and the mind often came up against all but insurmountable obstacles. (128)

Watt further aptly observes that Austen

> thought that in life sensibility would founder if it were not directed by sense, because its course would take no account of what she thought were the actual, and assumed to be unalterable, configurations of society. Marianne had been lucky, not only to find Col. Brandon waiting to take her in, but also to have a sister like Elinor who took a more realistic view of what the individual can concede without losing his integrity. ("Sense Triumphantly Introduced to Sensibility" 128-9)

Col. Brandon's presence saves Marianne from ultimate and total destruction and in this lies her happiness. Harmony and order are represented in their coming together, and in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, everything is possible.

At the close of the novel, Austen hints at such possibility even as she ties up the threads of her story with a moment of regret for Willoughby mixed with a steady ironic tone of triumph and resolution. Marianne is well and in safe hands, not precariously left on the dizzying slopes of absolute passion. She is on the plains, not on a mountain top, but she has room to dance, to gradually unfold her wings and be in harmony with nature and man having come to a conscious, more mature understanding of love as a steady stream of contentment. With sense and sensibility blended in equal proportions, she learns to play.

Yet Tanner is disappointed with "the way Marianne is disposed of at the end." He argues:

> She is married off to Brandon to complete a pattern, to satisfy that instinct for harmonious arranging which is a part of the structure both of that society and the book itself. Her energy is sacrificed to the overriding geometry. Jane Austen even hints at coercion--albeit an affectionate pressure--involved in this resolution. (Introduction 31)

Tanner goes on to say that

> The novel has at least shown the existence and power of the inner subterranean life of the emotions, but it

> returns to the surface at the end and is resolved with such brusque manipulation of plot that one wonders if Jane Austen intended that as a last bitter irony. It is certainly hard to know how exactly to respond to the end. (Introduction 32)

Tanner further points out that "There is every evidence that Jane Austen intended a complex and not a complacent response" (33). He interprets Austen's intentions:

> What is implied in all her work is that human society ought to be very good indeed to justify the inroads made on 'nature'--the feelings within us as well as the trees around us--to erect and secure it. To this end sense and sensibility should work together as closely as possible. But--it is another lesson of her novels--the work is not easy and there is the chance of pain at every step of the way. For a perfect balance between the two must remain an artist's dream, and meanwhile many houses serve merely as prisons for once brilliant dancers, and the greenhouses continue to go up where once the great trees swayed in the more liberal air. (34)

Here Tanner directly addresses issues of artifice and patterning that are a part of Austen's self-consciousness. At the end of Sense and Sensibility, the irony of perfect happiness as an impossibility prevails as does the irony that to be fulfilled and happy, Marianne must marry Col. Brandon, who represents the order and security associated by Austen with bliss, joy, contentment, and harmony. Austen makes the ironic suggestion that one's capacity to dream is limitless, yet life has clear limits; Marianne, to find fulfillment, must recognize these limits. In youth, life's possibilities seem

endless, yet, with time, experience and understanding, one learns to recognize clear limits. To recognize the limits is to be able to see and not be bound by these limitations. Marianne comes to understand the true nature of human relationships and love and the importance of reason and good sense in controlling sensibility. To know this truth about life is to be free. In that sense Marianne is free, and therefore happy.

To answer Tanner's pertinent question, it is quite clear that Austen plays with life's gentle and harsh ironies--the feeling heart must feel more pain, and the solution lies in one's capacity to feel less pain in oneself by turning to the needs of others, to connect. Austen's triumph lies in the fact that she can see and understand the disturbing conflicts in life but can restore order in her comic world. Believing like Aristotle that art completes life, Austen demonstrates that capacity to be free in her tone of triumphant playfulness. In her own ironic way, Austen fulfils the "artist's dream" Tanner refers to.

Fergus argues that if it is accepted that Austen's

> subject is not 'sense' vs. 'sensibility,' or 'sense' reconciling itself with 'sensibility,' but rather a study of sensitive behaviour--what assists or mitigates against it and what it costs--then it is clear that her 'tags' do not indicate or limit the meaning of the novel. In this light, the contrasts and heavy patterning seem to be Austen's delight rather than her burden: she is exploring and enjoying the possibilities of formal symmetry. Her parallels and contrasts have an exuberant quality in their proclaimed and assertive character. She

> calls attention, here as in Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice, to her own technical virtuosity, her own mastery of the principles of structure. (Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel 54)

To play with words in order to play with life's meanings is Austen's endeavour. She alerts the reader to a new way of harmonious patterning in life that parallels the formal patterning of fictional form.

C. Pride and Prejudice

Just as in Northanger Abbey, General Tilney's expulsion of Catherine Morland from the Abbey ironically hastens the happy ending, in Pride and Prejudice, Lady Catherine's dramatic encounter with Elizabeth Bennet at the close of the novel, far from preventing her marriage to Darcy, actually speeds up the action and leads to the happy conclusion. Thus Chapter 16 (vol.3) marks the beginning of the end of Pride and Prejudice. In the next four chapters, Austen triumphantly ties up the threads of her fictional design.

Pride and Prejudice had opened with the neighborhood all a-stir at the prospect of Mr. Bingley, the man of property, moving into the area. It now ends, after many comings and goings, with Bingley's return to Longbourne to marry and settle down; with him comes Darcy. That Lady Catherine's visit marked a turning point in Darcy's attitude to Elizabeth becomes evident in Chapter 16, which brings him back to

Longbourne. His aunt's visit had had an effect quite contrary to what she had expected: "It taught me to hope," Darcy tells Elizabeth

> as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly. (367)

As the action moves toward its happy conclusion, E.M. Halliday observes:

> When it comes to selectivity, the filters through which the narrator of Pride and Prejudice habitually views the action are much more discriminating than those of any photographer, and they positively cut out much that is the stock in trade of the average novelist. What color is Elizabeth's hair? What did she wear at the Netherfield ball?...But the answers to these and a hundred similar questions it is the narrator's privilege to withhold...What Jane Austen chooses to give is pretty well summed up in her observation about Darcy and Elizabeth at the happy moment when Elizabeth finally accepts Darcy's hand: 'They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too much to be thought and felt and said for attention to any other objects'. Thought and feeling, their verbal expression--this is the world of Jane Austen, so beautifully illuminated for us by her artistic control of narrative perspective. (83)

This scene demonstrates how, eventually, Darcy and Elizabeth free themselves from their limitations--pride and prejudice--and create a pattern of harmony and balance. Ultimately, their relationship is one of beauty because they are free. Each achieves an inner balance and harmony, and then, in

connecting, perfects a pattern of beauty and freedom. As Mark Schorer points out in his introduction to Pride and Prejudice:

> two persons of firm character and mind take opposing temperamental postures upon meeting; through their own quality and through events that are brought on by their relationships with others, the opposition thickens into a tangle... misunderstandings are finally cleared away,their real feelings are exposed, and the elements in their temperaments that brought on the initial confusion--which all the time have been exposed to a steady pressure that has slowly been loosening them--are corrected; in their alteration, they are free to merge." (v)

Schorer adds, "The novel ends at the point at which the characters have moved into their fullest self-awareness" (xxi).

The key word "truth" with which the novel had opened, now figures conspicuously in the opening paragraph of Chapter 17 (vol.3). Unlike the opening sentence of Pride and Prejudice, where "the truth" playfully presented as a universal fact is actually a neighborhood concern, "the truth" at the end of the novel is about Elizabeth's moment of pure play and fullest existence; it is her moment of love and fulfillment. To her sister's question, "Where have you been walking to?" (372) she can only say in reply, "that they had wandered about, till she was beyond her own knowledge. She coloured as she spoke; but neither that nor anything else, awakened a suspicion of the truth" (372). Once again, on the same page, the word "truth" appears as Elizabeth confides in

Jane. To the incredulous sister, she simply states "I speak nothing but the truth. He still loves me, and we are engaged" (372). A few lines later, the narrator declares, "Miss Bennet still looked all amazement. Elizabeth again, more seriously assured her of its truth" (373). Such repetition draws attention to Austen's artifice; it gives the reader a sense of a pattern completed.

In response to Jane's question, "are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?" (373) Elizabeth archly replies, "It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world" (373). Here, Austen's playful reference to the perfectly happy ending of Pride and Prejudice, also lets Elizabeth mock the conventional happy endings to romantic love in fiction. E.M. Halliday observes that we have

> good reason to anticipate, with delicious anxiety, that Darcy and Elizabeth will wind up in each other's arms; yet Elizabeth, from whose point of view the story as a whole is focused, does not begin to perceive this denouement until near the end. ("Narrative Perspective in Pride and Prejudice," 82)

There is thus irony in the fact that the reader expects a happy ending; he can see events moving in that direction, yet Elizabeth herself is aware of the "happy ending" only when it occurs, not in expectation. A delightfully ironic relationship exists between the reader's awareness of the

central character's future and her unawareness of her own feelings.

In the opening section, Elizabeth's and Darcy's first meeting had begun and ended on a negative note with the Bennets heartily disliking Darcy, and Darcy not being impressed by Elizabeth's beauty. This initial dislike develops to such an extent that Elizabeth must clear it as she breaks the happy news to Jane, Mr. Bennet and the excited Mrs. Bennet in Chapter 17. For the reader, expectations of a happy conclusion are set up in the opening sentence of the novel with its reference to marriage, property, and excitement in the neighbourhood. This is more evident in the tone than substance of the beginning of Pride and Prejudice.

In the opening chapters, Mrs. Bennet's enthusiasm on hearing of the arrival of a man of property contrasts with Mr. Bennet's indifference to the event. The novel begins with the marriage question (we see the Bennet marriage) and emphasis on property as a social value; ironically, the conventional expectations of marriage to a man of property are fulfilled. Yet when Elizabeth and Darcy finally come together, they resolve an "essential conflict" (Marcus 83), what Schorer refers to as adjusting the "social scale...with the moral scale" ("Pride Unprejudiced" 88). Dorothy Van Ghent aptly describes the conclusion as a "difficult and delicate reconciliation of the sensitively developed individual with the terms of his social existence" (100).

The novel had begun with a revealing conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. In the concluding section, the Bennets are contrasted again in their very different responses to Elizabeth's engagement to Darcy. Mr. Bennet refers to the dangers of an unequal marriage, and makes the telling statement, "My child let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life" (376). Mrs. Bennet, on the other hand, forgetting how heartily she dislikes Darcy, breaks into a string of exclamations, "how rich and great you will be ! What pin money, what jewels, what carriages you will have!" (378). Carried away by the grandeur of wealth as being synonymous with happiness, she is contrasted with her husband who places value on human qualities of love, understanding, and mutual respect as ingredients of a happy marriage.

Marcus refers to "the power of will which Darcy and Elizabeth develop, the ability to educate themselves which lies at the heart of the novel" (86). It is "the process whereby Darcy and Elizabeth come to understand one another, to modify pride and prejudice, and to effect a successful adjustment between personal and social claims" (87). Schorer points out that the

> movement of these individual human beings exists, of course, within a larger movement, that of the world about them. Not everything in that world is happy at the end...Pride and prejudice have not departed from the world. And Jane Austen need not have feared: hers is a moral realism, and the world is not intolerably bright by any means. Still it is brighter. (xxi)

As Elizabeth and Darcy "come into self-recognition...their individual beings rise momentarily above that society and then sink back into it again" (xxi). Schorer explains, that as this happens, "the moral and the social scales make their readjustment. Individual beings, as our hero and heroine have discovered it, will not make that society different, but to a larger degree than they as individual human beings have 'improved in civility,' civilization has refined its humanity" (xxi).

It is a happy conclusion and Austen moves quickly to tie up the loose ends of her story in the last two chapters. Chapter 18 begins with a playful conversation in which Elizabeth tells Darcy, "Lady Catherine has been of infinite use, which ought to make her happy, for she loves to be of use" (381). Of her own happiness she writes to Mrs. Gardiner, "I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such justice. I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh" (383). Though toying with cliches even here, Elizabeth Bennet is getting beyond conventional expressions of joy. Admired by Darcy for the "liveliness of her mind" (380), Elizabeth does indeed have the capacity to be happier than her sister Jane.

The chapter concludes with the narrator joyfully summing up typical responses to the happy occasion. While "The joy which Miss Darcy expressed on receiving...information, was as sincere" as was her brother's in sending it, "Miss Bingley's

congratulations to her brother, on his approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere. She wrote even to Jane on the occasion, to express her delight, and repeat all her former professions of regard" (383). Austen's tone mocks at the insincere and hypocritical response of Miss Bingley to her brother's engagement to Jane. At the same time, the tone of Austen's polished language parallels and mimics the superficial polish of Miss Bennet's social graces. Austen announces that seemingly everyone is perfectly happy at the end of the novel. Miss Bingley's apparent happiness contrasts with the lovers' realization of true happiness.

The wedding day itself is not described in Chapter 19; its aftermath is. Austen's typical technique is to focus on the significance of the event rather than on the event itself. The reader gets a glimpse of the future, of what happened after Elizabeth married Darcy and Jane, Bingley as Austen makes her self-conscious entrance in this chapter to speedily summarize the rest of her narrative. With the central pattern perfected, she now wraps up her story. Mrs. Bennet's character remains unchanged, Mr. Bingley misses Elizabeth and enjoys visiting her when he's least expected, Kitty improves herself in a better atmosphere and Mary adjusts to the new situation. Happiness is defined in many ways. Mrs. Bennet's happiness, Lydia's happiness, and the Gardiners' happiness, provide an interesting pattern of contrast as do Lady Catherine's and the Gardiners' reactions to Darcy's and

Elizabeth's pattern of fulfilment.

Tave comments on Elizabeth's and Darcy's love in this way:

> The form in which domestic felicity comes to Elizabeth and Darcy is unusual and it is there not by luck. It comes, first, because both are amiable and that is a necessary foundation, but it comes because on that is built something more. Above all, as Elizabeth knows, there must be love, or to use the word Jane Austen prefers in such contexts, there must be "affection." It is the quieter, more general word, for an emotion of slower growth and more lasting therefore; but it is, in this context, a strong word for a deep emotion. (Some Words 131)

The narrative comes full circle when, in paragraph three of the concluding chapter, we read that Bingley and Jane moved out of the neighborhood. It is Bingley's moving into the neighborhood that had caused such expectations of marriage. Ironically, those expectations are perfectly fulfilled. Austen makes use of the conventional happy ending; at the same time, the novel ends at the point at which the hero and heroine have achieved the highest level of playfulness.

D. Mansfield Park

Just as the first two chapters comprise its beginning, the last three mark the ending of Mansfield Park. Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park for the first time at the novel's beginning; now, at the end of the novel (in Chapter 15, Vol. 3), she returns once again from Portsmouth to Mansfield a

changed person. Chapters 16 and 17 continue to develop the movement upward which concludes with Fanny's marriage to Edmund.

Fanny had been sent to Portsmouth to appreciate Henry Crawford's attentions to her; in Chapter 15 (vol. 3), which marks the beginning of the end of the novel, she returns to a Mansfield overwhelmed by Henry Crawford's affair with Mrs. Rushworth. As at the conclusion of Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, the journey motif is completed with the heroine's return, which symbolizes her change. Fanny comes back more sensitive and aware. She has experienced the contrast between her parents' house and that of her uncle's: "...in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards everybody which there was not here" (383). She perceives her parents' house to be "the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be" (388). By contrast

> The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony--and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them here. (391)

Tony Tanner points out that it is "while she is staying at Portsmouth that the question of which is her true 'home' occurs to Fanny" (Introduction 13). That she chooses

Mansfield over Portsmouth Tanner considers "important because when the uncommitted self finally chooses its 'home', it is in effect identifying itself with a certain way of life and a role within it" (13). Tanner continues, "Fanny's transfer of her allegiances from her actual birthplace to her place of upbringing is evidence of her capacity for true judgment. She has found her real, spiritual 'home'" (13). It is appropriate, according to Tanner, "that when Fanny finally returns to Mansfield Park soon to become one of its most important guardians, Jane Austen invests the landscape with a verdant, symbolic promise" (13-14).

Austen describes Fanny's return to Mansfield Park:

> It was three months, full three months, since her quitting it; and the change was from winter to summer. Her eye fell everywhere on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees, though not fully clothed, were in that delightful state when further beauty is known to be at hand, and when, while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains 'for the imagination'. (446-7)

What Fanny sees in nature reflects her own refreshed and revitalized state of mind. The connection between Fanny's experience at Portsmouth and her return to Mansfield Park is brought out by R. F. Brissenden in this observation:

> Psychologically the experience is distressing to the point of torment--and this is the main reason why her return from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park and Edmund should bring with it such an authentic sense of release and fulfillment. (157)

Yet in the Mansfield Park to which Fanny now returns, the tranquillity, harmony and cheerfulness have been replaced by agitation and despair. It is a typical Austen pattern that presents discord and despair before the final movement upward to hope and harmony. Fanny's return brings comfort to Lady Bertram. Before that, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris and Tom "had been all solitary, helpless, and forlorn alike" (448). Edmund's return with Fanny

> was almost as welcome to his brother, as Fanny to her aunt; but Mrs. Norris, instead of having comfort from either, was but the more irritated by the sight of the person whom, in the blindness of her anger, she could have charged as the daemon of the piece. (448)

Mrs. Norris' perverse reasoning concludes that "Had Fanny accepted Mr. Crawford, this could not have happened" (448).

Fanny, in fact, has triumphed in her refusal of Henry Crawford. By adhering to her principles and values, Fanny not only escapes the evil symbolized by Henry Crawford, but ultimately realizes the state of perfect happiness when she marries her cousin Edmund. By contrast, once Maria is with "friends without any restraint, without even Julia" (450), she succumbs to temptation and runs off with Crawford; Julia, in turn, elopes with Mr. Yates. It is an ironic commentary on the opening chapters of the novel, where Maria and Julia were considered superior in social status to their cousin Fanny, and were actively encouraged by their aunt Norris to

be proud and arrogant.

Edmund is caught in an intricate web of incidents. His regard for Mary Crawford is a distressing link with the Henry Crawford-Maria affair. But, as he confides in Fanny, he learns the truth about Mary Crawford's real nature and realizes how he has "been deceived" (459) in his understanding of her and is able to free himself from disillusion. Tanner comments:

> He is blind enough to Mary's faults to imagine himself in love with her ...And in Fanny's hour of need, he too deserts her and tries to persuade her to marry Henry Crawford. It is only after much tribulation that he recognizes Fanny as his true mate. (Introduction 19)

Austen begins her concluding chapter with a playful flourish: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can" (461). Then she self-consciously proceeds to her happy ending. "My Fanny," she affectionately calls her heroine, "must have been happy in spite of everything. She must have been a happy creature in spite of all..." (461). Here the repetition of "she must" re-affirms Fanny's state of harmony and bliss. The "she must" pattern modulates to "She had sources of delight ....She was returned to Mansfield Park, she was useful, she was beloved; she was safe from Mr. Crawford..." (461).

Gradually, the clouds of despair and anxiety begin to lift over Mansfield Park. Austen devotes over two pages to

describing Sir Thomas' consciousness of "errors in his own conduct as a parent" (461). His reflections take us back to the beginning of the novel, where he had come across as an extremely concerned father. He now reflects on his daughters' education and upbringing:

> He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them. (463)

Of Henry Crawford, Austen conjectures: "Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward--and a reward very voluntarily bestowed--within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary" (467). But, as it turns out, Crawford goes off with Maria

> because he could not help it, regretting Fanny, even at the moment, but regretting her infinitely more when all the bustle of the intrigue was over, and a very few months had taught him ...to place a yet higher value on the sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, and the excellence of her principles. (468)

It is these qualities of excellence that finally lead to Edmund's surmise "whether it might not be a possible, and hopeful undertaking to persuade her that her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love" (470).

At this point Austen self-consciously announces:

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

The narrator playfully continues "what was there now to add, but that he should learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones-"(470). And in a teazing, ironic tone, Austen goes on:

> She was of course only too good for him; but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very steadily earnest in the pursuit of the blessing, and it was not possible that encouragement from her should be long wanting. (471)

Karl Kroeber aptly argues that such a happy ending would "lose some of its point for a reader unfamiliar with the convention of the happy ending of matrimony." He elaborates on the use of the word "natural" in the concluding section of Mansfield Park:

> Jane Austen's fiction never pretends to be anything but fiction. This openness permits the play on the word 'natural' ...However one interprets Mansfield Park, one recognizes that the 'natural' is an issue at the center of the action...one may recall the brilliantly written scenes of Fanny's visit to Portsmouth as representing how

> little hold 'natural' ties have on the heroine....What is most natural to a human being in Jane Austen's view is not fully comprehended in the instinctive, the physical, or the biological. Intuition and sensation are dangerous guides. It is 'natural' for a human being to be civilized--to think, feel, and behave in accord with artifices of thought, emotion, and behavior which have been trained into him, encouraging some propensities and repressing others. For a civilized person, it is 'natural' to be conventional. (Styles in Fictional Structure 125-6)

Austen thus plays with words to unfold different layers of meaning. Kroeber rightly argues that the "natural bond of family is feeble in contrast to what might be termed the 'nurtural' bond that links Fanny to Mansfield" (126). Fanny thus ends up, as Tanner puts it, with "a different social identity" (7). Tanner makes the point that

> Fanny starts her life in a very lower-middle-class family in Portsmouth: we last see her effectively accepted as the mistress of Mansfield Park. Initially an object of charity, she ends up cherished as the indispensable mainstay of the Mansfield family. With her final marriage and full social and familial recognition, her self is successfully and rightfully defined. (Introduction 7-8)

Loved by Edmund, Fanny was "indeed the daughter" that Sir Thomas wanted. As the novel draws to a close, Austen points out the contrast between Sir Thomas's opinion at the beginning and at the end of the novel:

> The promise of Fanny for a daughter, formed just such a contrast with his early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl's coming had been first agitated, as

> time is forever producing between the plans and decisions of mortals, for their own instruction, and their neighbour's entertainment. (472)

Here Austen reveals her typical attitude to her art. Life is a game, she seems to say. No matter how well you think you play it, subtle and less subtle surprises do prevail. Added to this is the constant pleasure derived by the onlookers regardless of the players' fates.

It is Fanny, the outsider, who brings a new order and stability to Mansfield Park. Kroeber persuasively argues that "Fanny realizes the ideals of Mansfield better than Sir Thomas himself." He observes that

> The values of Mansfield are affirmed by being made subtle and more complex. In a word, Fanny alone can make the proprieties of Mansfield 'tender.' The resolution of the book can be presented in a cool, generalized, summary fashion because it does not simplify. (127)

Brissenden, who sees a "much greater psychological depth and complexity" (165) in Mansfield Park than in any other of Austen's novels, observes that

> there is something profoundly and strangely satisfying about the conclusion of Mansfield Park: despite the formulaic patness with which everything is wound up, there is a sense in which it 'finishes' more strongly than any of the other novels. (157)

The "formulaic patness with which everything is wound up" is a triumphant aspect of Austen's playfulness. Self-consciously, she plays with her art, teasing the reader to accept the perfect world which, in reality, is not perfect. As Robert Draffan argues:

> Austen's so-called perfect matches are so hard-won and surrounded by such folly...Certainly to regard the ending of Mansfield Park as happy makes nonsense of what has preceded. All of Jane Austen's novels are concerned with the achievement of personal definition and self-fulfillment...Mansfield Park makes similar progress. Sir Thomas appreciates his errors and adjusts his values; Julia advances gradually, Tom's illness acts as a purgative ; Edmund's eyes are opened ; Maria is to be brought to her senses by having to live with Mrs. Norris. But this is not to shrug off without a residuum the earlier severe and unrelenting condemnation of the Great House and its residents. ("Mansfield Park: Jane Austen's Bleak House" 382-3)

Yet the novel ends with a happier marriage than that with which it begins. Fanny and Edmund do realize the ideal. Avron Fleishman observes that Fanny's

> patient conquest of Edmund and her marriage to him are the fulfillment of as constant an emotion as is recorded in the world of Mansfield Park; what it lacks in vibration it makes up in a quality which is, Jane Austen says, beyond her power to describe. (A Reading of Mansfield Park 55-6)

Kroeber refers to Fanny's and Edmund's marriage as a "celebration of a love which deserves the sanction of marriage" (129). He identifies "the love between Jane

Austen's protagonists" as being "not simply a matter of personal relation" but also "inseparable from their relations with others" (129). Austen's concern is with a larger pattern that includes the individual in the social order. A happy marriage elevates, re-orders, and brings a greater sense of wholeness to that order.

Fanny is deserving and ready for Edmund's love. Edmund, in turn, has suffered intense disillusionment. Only on perceiving the truth is he open to give and receive love deeply and sincerely felt. Fleishman's criticism focuses on Austen's ironic attitude toward life: life imposes limits which the truly free person recognizes, yet transcends. Fanny has known "early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (473); Elizabeth Bennet's background contrasts as sharply with Fanny's as does Marianne Dashwood's, yet they all develop in the course of the novel and reach a point when they can achieve the happiness they deserve. It represents the highest good. Marriage forms a pattern of beauty and freedom. These protagonists find fulfilment in giving love, retain their freedom to be their own persons and aspire to reach higher levels of consciousness. They have learned to play.

E. Emma

Chapter 13 (vol.3) marks the beginning of the end of Emma. Emma, awakened into a new state of self-awareness, is

overwhelmed by Mr. Knightley's proposal to her. The next four chapters (14-17) develop the upward movement that eventually celebrates the marriage of the hero and heroine.

Symbolically, in Chapter 13 (vol. 3), the "loneliness" and "melancholy" at Hartfield associated with cloudy, depressing weather, now begin to change. "Never had the exquisite sight, smell, sensation of nature, tranquil, warm, and brilliant after a storm been more attractive" to Emma who "longed for the serenity they might gradually introduce" (424). Ironically, her wishes are fulfilled, for immediately after she goes out with "spirits freshened, and thoughts a little relieved," she sees Mr. Knightley "coming towards her" (424); she is indeed closer than ever before to the point of balance, harmony and joy, but does not know it.

In interpreting his looks, her imagination is actively at work picturing his brother's response to Mr. Knightley's proposal to marry Harriet Smith! In the comic confusion that follows, it becomes apparent to the reader that Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, mistakenly believes Emma to be in love with Frank Churchill, whose engagement to Jane Fairfax has just become known. Failing to understand the actual cause of Emma's words, "I seem to have been doomed to blindness" (425), Mr. Knightley attempts to console her, "Time, my dearest Emma, time will heal the wound--your own excellent sense--your exertions for your father's sake--I know you will not allow yourself-" (426).

Austen plays with a complex situation here. Not only does Mr. Knightley erroneously believe Emma to be attached to Frank Churchill, but the error, once cleared, opens the door to further confusion, this time on Emma's part. When Mr. Knightley, speaking of Frank Churchill, says "In one respect he is the object of my envy": from Emma's point of view "They seemed to be within half a sentence of Harriet, and her immediate feeling was to avert the subject, if possible" (429). The reader, well aware of more than either Mr. Knightley or Emma, stands with the author-narrator enjoying her technique of dramatic irony as the plot reaches its highest point of suspense and interest in the proposal scene.

The comic confusion once cleared and the proposal made, Emma, we read, "was almost ready to sink under the agitation of this moment. The dread of being awakened from the happiest dream, was perhaps the most prominent feeling" (430). As for Mr. Knightley, "Within half an hour, he had passed from a thoroughly distressed state of mind, to something so like perfect happiness, that it could bear no other name" (433). Mr. Knightley's concern over Emma's attachment to Churchill, balanced against Emma's concern over Mr. Knightley's attachment to Harriet, accounts for the unexpected degree of happiness experienced by both. Austen triumphantly plays with the perfect symmetry of despair changing to bliss. As the chapter concludes, we read, "This one half hour had given to each the same precious certainty of being beloved, had cleared

from each the same degree of ignorance, jealousy, or distrust" (432). It marks the beginning of the end of the novel's happy conclusion.

A. Walton Litz points out that what distinguishes Emma from Mansfield Park

> is the fact that the philosophical debate has been completely realized in human action. Mr. Knightley, who succeeds in the fatherly role where Sir Thomas Bertram failed, is able to act as a moral chorus without diminishing our sense of his reality. Instead of standing as Emma's opponent or censor, he represents the native good sense which is obscured by her abuse of reason. (Jane Austen 134-5)

Unlike Sir Thomas the authority figure who symbolizes oppression and self-denial, Knightley's, as Litz points out, liberates "something within Emma herself" (135). Once freed from her own limitations, Emma is open to and deserving of love and perfect happiness. As Litz observes, "Emma concludes with happiness and reconciliation, and there is nothing forced or sentimental in this conclusion" (142). He adds:

> The beauty of Emma lies in the fact that Knightley is a realistic figure, not a fictional paragon, and that in accepting him Emma is embracing a social identity which harmonizes with the self of her best imagination. (142)

John Halperin rightly argues that

> it is Emma's inability to subject fancy to reason that causes most of her problems and forms the core of the

> novel's dramatic structure. Her perception of the world and of the people in it is clouded by her imagination, by misplaced faith in her own powers of deduction until the final resolution. (201)

Thus "her reality is of her own making--until Mr. Knightley's proposal and her own sudden self-revelation" (202).

Halperin further observes:

> Indeed, almost all of the major characters in Emma live within a reality of their own devising; the world they see is often a function of their own selfish egoism ...In Mr. Woodhouse's world everyone as a matter of course prefers bad food to good and lives in mortal fear of draughts. ("The Worlds of Emma" 202)

In Chapter 14, Austen playfully refers to Mr. Woodhouse as "Poor Mr. Woodhouse" thus echoing Mr. Woodhouse's constant refrain of "poor Miss Taylor," "poor Isabel" (and "poor" anyone who marries) in the opening chapters. In Chapter 1, in response to Mr. Woodhouse's constant exclamation "poor Miss Taylor! 'tis a sad business," Mr. Knightley had replied "poor Mr. and Miss Woodhouse, if you please; but I cannot possibly say 'poor Miss Taylor'" (10). Now, in the concluding section, Austen teasingly underlines the fact that Mr. Woodhouse is in for a great, unsettling surprise! Yet, to the impending change, Austen brings about a happy solution when Mr. Knightley plans that "he should be received at Hartfield" since Emma would never leave Hartfield while her father lived and "Mr. Woodhouse taken from Hartfield" would be impossible.

At this point Emma's happiness would be complete were it not for the thought of "Poor Harriet" (450). She can only hope that "Mr. Knightley would be forgotten, that is, supplanted" (450). With a triumphant flourish Austen concludes Chapter 15 with Emma's amused thoughts on Harriet's fate "it really was too much to hope even of Harriet, that she could be in love with more than three men in one year" (450).

Austen plays with parallellism at the novel's conclusion. Mr. Knightley's proposal to Emma closely follows Jane Fairfax's engagement to Frank Churchill. Of his affair with Emma, Frank Churchill writes to Mrs. Weston:

> "Amiable and delightful as Miss Woodhouse is, she never gave me the idea of a young woman likely to be attached; and that she was perfectly free from any tendency to being attached to me, was as much my conviction as my wish.--She received my attentions with an easy, friendly, good humoured playfulness, which exactly suited me." (438)

His words echo Emma's in Chapter 13:

> "He never wished to attach me. It was merely a blind to conceal his real situation with another--It was his object to blind all about him; and no one, I am sure, could be more effectually blinded than myself--except that I was not blinded--that it was my good fortune--that, in short, I was somehow or other safe from him." (427)

"Playing a most dangerous game" (445) Mr. Knightley calls it, but, as the novelist would have it, everything turns out well

in the end.

Austen emphasizes the comic gap between appearances and reality when Emma visits Jane Fairfax, who acknowledges "I had always a part to act.--It was a life of deceit!--I know that I must have disgusted you" (459). Emma's reply alerts the reader to a swift movement toward a happy conclusion: "I feel that all the apologies should be on my side. Let us forgive each other at once" (459). Emma's tone reflects her creator's self-conscious toying with cliches in "Let us forgive each other at once." Austen mocks the sentimental cliche, and, at the same time, asserts her narrative role to get on with her story and tie up all loose ends.

As the novel moves towards its happy conclusion, the joyful news about the birth of Mrs. Weston's baby is announced in Chapter 17. The novel had opened with Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston and, now, at the close of the novel, comes the happy news about their baby's birth:

> Mrs. Weston, with her baby on her knee...was one of the happiest women in the world. If anything could increase her delight, it was perceiving that the baby would soon have outgrown its first set of caps. (468)

Emma had patiently waited for Mrs. Weston's safe delivery, before breaking the news of her engagement. Mr. Woodhouse, as expected, "could not be soon reconciled; but the worst was overcome, the idea was given; time and continual repetition

must do the rest" (467).

As the happy news spreads, the neighborhood is all a-stir with surprise and excitement. Austen takes immense delight in this reaction in saying:

> It was no more than the principles were prepared for; they had calculated from the time of its being known at Randall's how soon it would be over Highbury; and were thinking of themselves, as the evening wonder in many a family circle, with great sagacity. (468)

"In general" we learn "it was a very well approved match" (468). But Mr. and Mrs. Elton's surprise on hearing the news "was not softened by any satisfaction" (469). Once again the refrain "Poor Knightley! poor fellow!" (469) is heard as Mrs. Elton concludes the whole affair to be a "sad business"; the words reflect her own mood and attitude toward Emma's marriage to Mr. Knightley:

> Poor Knightley! poor fellow!--sad business for him.--She was extremely concerned; for, though very eccentric, he had a thousand good qualities.--How could he be so taken in?--Did not think him at all in love--not in the least.--Poor Knightley!--.....No more exploring parties to Donwell made for <u>her</u>. Oh! no; there would be a Mrs. Knightley to throw cold water on everything.--Extremely disagreeable! (469)

This passage illustrates Kroeber's viewpoint that "It is Jane Austen's formal simplicity in presenting moral complexities which makes her novels so unusually re-readable" (62).

Kroeber points out that in Mrs. Elton's response to Mr. Knightley's engagement to Emma

> authorial irony is transposed into the speech of a character, a speech which dramatizes the values and attitudes and understanding surrounding the union of the protagonists...She [Mrs Elton] is given the next-to-last word to emphasize a simple but decisive fact: the fineness, the preciousness, of the union of Emma and Mr. Knightley is something that no other characters in the novel are capable of fully appreciating. (63)

By Chapter 18, the only obstacles to Emma's perfect happiness are "her distressing thoughts" about Harriet. Austen triumphantly presents an interesting scene between Mr. Knightley and Emma, in which Emma and the reader are informed at the same time about Harriet's having accepted Robert Martin's proposal. Austen addresses the reader:

> The joy, the gratitude, the exquisite delight of her sensations may be imagined. The sole grievance and alloy thus removed in the prospect of Harriet's welfare, she was <u>really</u> in danger of becoming <u>too</u> happy for security.--What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgement had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future. (475, my emphasis)

Austen first self-consciously emphasizes the extent of Emma's happiness in "she was really in danger of being too happy for security"; then the height of Emma's happiness is explored through a pattern of negatives that suggest the positive.

"Nothing" placed in initial position of the last two sentences develops a lyricism of its own. It emphasizes an upward movement toward harmony and fulfillment. Austen thus explores the change in Emma's external circumstances as well as her inner process of acquiring self-knowledge. She playfully continues that with all obstacles to Emma's happiness removed: "In the gayest and happiest spirits she set forward with her father; not always listening, but always agreeing to what he said" (476). On arrival at Randalls they meet Mrs. Weston and then Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax together for the first time. Austen's comic form, with its multiple marriages at the end of the novel, is very clearly defined by the end of this chapter. Harriet and Robert Martin, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley--the novel will conclude with these happy marriages just as it had opened with Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston.

As Austen moves on to her last chapter, every source of concern is removed. Emma meets Harriet once more to happily discover--"unaccountable as it was!--that Robert Martin had thoroughly supplanted Mr. Knightley, and was now forming all her views of happiness" (481). Added to this comes more joy when Harriet's parentage becomes known and she proves to be "the daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance which had ever been hers and decent enough to have always wished for concealment" (482).

The novel ends with Harriet's marriage to Robert Martin followed by Emma's to Mr. Knightley; Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill expect to marry the following month. Austen makes a delightful reference to Mr. Woodhouse's nervous system being badly affected by news of Mrs. Weston's poultry house which was robbed one night of all her turkeys. With this incident comes the sudden realization of the need for "the strength, resolution, and presence of mind" (484) of Mr. Knightley, and so Mr. Woodhouse cheerfully consents to his daughter's wedding to Mr. Knightley. The novel ends, as it had begun, with a playful reference to Mr. Woodhouse's gentle selfishness. Its outcome is pure joy for Emma and Mr. Knightley and all who loved them, for "the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union" (484).

F. Persuasion

Just as the first four chapters of Persuasion comprise its beginning, the last three shape its ending. From Chapter 10 to 12 (vol. 4), we see a completion of the journey motif with which the novel begins; it eventually leads to the marriage of the hero and heroine.

In Chapter 10 (vol.4) Anne is "most thankful for her knowledge" of Mr. Elliot's true character. It is a moment of relief that opens the door to Captain Wentworth thus ushering

in the happy conclusion. Anne is now more aware of Mr. Elliot's social face and the social games he plays, for

> ...she saw insincerity in every thing. His attentive deference to her father, contrasted with his former language, was odious; and when she thought of his cruel conduct towards Mrs. Smith, she could hardly bear the sight of his present smiles and mildness, or the sound of his artificial good sentiments. (214)

The social game is not confined to Mr. Elliot alone, but is evident everywhere. Austen plays with her fictional world to expose the games people play with each other. In Chapter 10, for instance, she playfully announces the unexpected arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Musgrove:

> Surprise was the strongest emotion raised by their appearance; but Anne was really glad to see them; and the others were not so sorry but that they could put on a decent air of welcome; and as soon as it became clear that these, their nearest relations were not arrived with any views of accommodation in that house, Sir Walter and Elizabeth were able to rise in cordiality, and do the honours of it very well. (216)

The complex, yet smooth flowing sentence reflects the unruffled, social graces that are of central significance in Austen's comedy of manners. In this passage, the fact that "their nearest relations" had not come to stay pleases Sir Walter and Elizabeth sufficiently to enable them to play their social roles with perfect grace.

At one point in Chapter 10 (vol.4), the conversation between Anne and Charles Musgrove is "interrupted by the absolute necessity of Charles' following the others to admire mirrors and china" (219). Austen underlines the theme of vanity and the significance of maintaining appearances. Earlier in the novel, Sir Walter's tenant, Admiral Croft, is amused by the number of large looking glasses in Kellynch-hall. The mirrors reflect Sir Walter's vanity as does Elizabeth's decision in this chapter not to invite the Musgroves and their party to dinner:

> Elizabeth was, for a short time, suffering a good deal. She felt that Mrs. Musgrove and all her party ought to be asked to dine with them, but she could not bear to have the difference of style, the reduction of servants, which a dinner must betray, witnessed by those who had been always so inferior to the Elliots of Kellynch. It was a struggle between propriety and vanity; but vanity got the better, and then Elizabeth was happy again. (219)

When Elizabeth formally hands out her invitations, she includes Captain Wentworth:

> After the waste of a few minutes in saying the proper nothings, she began to give the invitation... one smile and one card more decidedly for Captain Wentworth. The truth was, that Elizabeth had been long enough in Bath, to understand the importance of a man of such an air and appearance as his. The past was nothing. The present was that Captain Wentworth would move about well in her drawing room. The card was pointedly given, and Sir Walter and Elizabeth arose and disappeared. (226)

It is a comic scene with the grand arrival and disappearance of the distinguished. Wentworth's acceptance by Elizabeth to maintain and enhance appearances contrasts with the reality of the past when Wentworth was rejected as an unsuitable match for Anne. His subsequent success and wealth have since reversed the situation. The chapter concludes with Anne's anxious attempts to settle the question of whether or not Captain Wentworth would accept the invitation.

The next chapter opens with Anne amidst Mrs. Musgrove, Mrs. Croft, Captain Harville and Captain Wentworth. While Captain Wentworth occupies himself in writing a letter, Anne finds herself listening to Mrs. Musgrove's "powerful whisper" and Mrs.Croft's reply. An early versus a long or uncertain engagement is their topic of conversation. It arrests Anne's attention and even Captain Wentworth's pen "ceased to move, as his head was raised, pausing, listening..."' (231). But he continues to write and pause and listen as Anne and Captain Harville engage in a dialogue on love.

Anne's understanding of love is expressed in the words:

> "I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as--if I may be allowed the expression, so long as you have an object, I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest when existence or when hope is gone." (235)

This warm and sincere statement encourages Captain Wentworth to propose to Anne at last; it marks a turning point in the novel. The hero and heroine find themselves

> more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting. (240-41)

Here Austen's use of stylized repetition re-inforces the strength of their relationship. "More" added to "more" also signals an upward movement toward harmony and fulfilment.

Chapter 12 (vol.4) moves swiftly to its conclusion. In their decision to marry, Captain Wentworth and Anne meet with little "to distress them beyond the want of graciousness and warmth--Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned" (248). The reader is playfully reminded at this point that

> Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody. He was now esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish spendthrift baronet, who had not had principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him.... (248)

The concluding chapter picks up the central significance of Sir Walter's favorite book, the Baronetage, with which the novel also opens. It underlines his vanity. Now at the

novel's close, it is not his love for Anne, but his acknowledgement of Captain Wentworth's superiority of appearance that "enables Sir Walter at last to prepare his pen with a very good grace for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honour" (249). As for Mr. Elliot, the news of Anne's engagement bursts on him "most unexpectedly. It deranged his best plan of domestic happiness, his best hope of keeping Sir Walter single by the watchfulness which a son-in-law's rights would have given" (250). Mr. Elliot sees marriage as a game based on one's ability to outwit others; it has nothing to do with giving and loving. He now leaves Bath and

> on Mrs. Clay's quitting it likewise soon afterwards, and being next heard of as established under his protection in London, it was evident how double a game he had been playing, and how determined he was to save himself from being cut out by one artful woman, at least. (250)

Mrs. Clay plays her game; Mr. Elliot plays his till they get together as equals, equally able to outwit each other. Austen toys with a delightful pattern of human relationships here. She concludes that Mrs Clay has

> abilities, however, as well as affections; and it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William. (250)

The reader is left with this comic possibility .

A striking contrast to this comic pair is provided by Anne's and Captain Wentworth's love for each other. Andrew Wright aptly observes that "Jane Austen's characters are instruments of a profound vision: she laughs at man, but only because she takes him seriously" ("Persuasion" 153). The hero and heroine finally transcend their own limitations--Captain Wentworth, once free of pride is open to love, to give as well as receive; Anne develops from an "unnatural beginning" and learns to be natural and free. They finally come together in perfect harmony to form a pattern of freedom and beauty.

The two concluding sentences underscore their perfect happiness with a hint of clouds in an otherwise bright blue sky:

> His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance. (252)

These perfectly balanced sentences underline more poignantly the enjoyment of happiness when one is aware of the possibility of pain. It is a triumphant conclusion. Austen plays with her central characters who have learnt to play; she plays with her readers in the hope that they may begin to see what it means to play, to be free, and therefore truly happy.

In "Persuasion: forms of estrangement," Litz points out that

> Anne has painfully learned 'the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle'... and at the end of the novel that circle, so lovingly restored and enlarged, has no permanence beyond the moment. (232)

It is just such a moment of happiness that Austen ironically celebrates in her happy ending. In Austen's novels, to be happy is to be free; the fact that the hero and heroine have achieved that inner freedom is of more importance than the uncertainty life's circumstances might bring.

Litz also argues that "Anne's need is as much communication as it is love, and inspite of the happy ending the deepest impression we carry away from Persuasion is one of human isolation" (Jane Austen 154). This impression of isolation can be linked with Anne's own awareness that "she had no family to receive and estimate" Captain Wentworth "properly; nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters" (251). To Anne, this was

> a source of as lively pain as her mind could be sensible of under circumstances of otherwise strong felicity. She had but two friends in the world to add to his list, Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith. To those, however, he was very well disposed to attach himself. (251)

It is the quality of the attachments that contributes to the pattern of harmony and play at the end. Unlike her closest family members, Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth who cannot connect, Anne, though the most isolated, can connect with Captain Wentworth and thus transcend the limited world that surrounds her. In her fullness of being, she is triumphant and free, with a joyful capacity to play. She finds a perfect match in Captain Wentworth.

At the beginning of the novel we read, "She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older--the natural sequel to an unnatural beginning" (30). When first introduced, we learn that she is nobody

> with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;--she was only Anne. (5)

Her movement in the novel is from absolute isolation to a fulfilling connection in love. It marks Anne's growing capacity to express her spontaneous feelings and thus free herself from isolation. She is learning to be natural and is therefore beginning to play. Captain Wentworth, though surrounded by true friends with the same profession, must gradually transcend his self-imposed distance from the woman he truly loves to break his isolation; once free of pride, he can be natural and play at the highest level of being. The

impression of apparent isolation symbolized by a vast threatening sea in the background at the novel's close, is really the backdrop for adventure and courage. The contrast between the warmth and comfort of life on shore with the vast unknown symbolized by the sea, poses a challenge to individuals like Anne and Captain Wentworth, who, having transcended their limitations, can see more and are therefore free to attain the highest levels of playfulness. Their warm and true attachment to each other provides a clue to their capacity to have an ever increasing circle of friends and well wishers with the passage of time.

In "A Serious Comedy," R. S. Crane persuasively argues that Persuasion is a novel of personal relations "the relations of two persons who had once been everything to one another, then apparently nothing, and finally everything again, but on a higher level of affection and understanding" (175). Crane elaborates:

> The happiness of Anne and Wentworth is 'rational' as well as 'rapturous' because its basis is the fuller knowledge they have acquired since their first meeting many years before 'of each other's character, truth, and attachment'. It is the happiness, in short, not simply of lovers but of moral individuals--a happiness which can be achieved only by persons of superior minds and characters, and to which, consequently, when we are convinced that this is indeed the case, we tend to respond in a more complex way than to the merely 'sentimental' resolutions of ordinary love tales...it is not simply that a marriage is to take place, but a good marriage, of the kind we would wish all persons we particularly value to have. (177)

Crane points out the contrast

> between people--Sir Walter, Elizabeth, Mary, Mr. Elliot, Mrs. Clay--who are cold, self-regarding, proud, calculating; and other people--Admiral and Mrs. Croft and the Harvilles--who are conspicuously pleasant, warm-hearted, self-reliant, unpretentious. (186)

As the novel progresses, Anne finds herself "more and more strongly drawn to the second" group (186).

Bradbury's comments on the ending of Persuasion are preceptive. He argues that for Anne

> who is effectively the central consciousness in the story, the sailors are a force of change, and she sees the difference between the two groups in social and moral terms. Not only are they freer and easier, but they can actually keep up estates better; and Anne's severance from her family is conducted by means largely of this sort of insight and her realization that here, in this group there are much supportable values basic to the moral level of persuasion in the book. (Bradbury 220-221)

Bradbury aptly sums up the main themes of the novel "first...the theme of the separation of the lovers and their final reconciliation, and, second...the theme of the divorcing of Anne from her family" (224). He traces

> two essential lines of possible development of a sort that we are familiar with in the novels--the progress of a heroine towards social status and to self-awareness must diverge in such a way as to show that self-awareness is incompatible with a social inheritance. (223)

In rejecting the social group represented by her father, Anne finally learns to play; she and Captain Wentworth find fulfillment in marriage. It is a conclusion conspicuously unlike that of Austen's earlier novels, where typically the hero and heroine move toward greater self-awareness and also become a part of the larger social group. In those novels self-awareness and social inheritance are not incompatible. Not so in Persuasion where with Anne's self-awareness comes the need to break away from her family. True happiness depends on this. The happy ending of Persuasion thus provides new insight into Austen's technique of resolving her story.

At the end of each novel, Austen provides an ideal paradigm. The central characters transcend Schiller's form drive and sense drive to express the play drive. They are growing, developing characters who perfect a pattern through their triumphant ability to play. According to Schiller, "it is precisely play and play alone, which of all man's states and conditions is the one which makes him whole and unfolds both sides of his nature at once" (Letters 425). The theory of the play drive does indeed "prove capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful, and of the still more difficult art of living" (426). The harmony Austen achieves at the end of each novel goes beyond parody and satire to express Schiller's ideal of play. It has everything to do with the art of living happily ever after.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> ...let there be a play drive, since only the union of reality with form, contingency with necessity, passivity with freedom, makes the concept of human nature complete.
> Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man

Austen creates aesthetically satisfying works of art that enable her to reach a point of perfect equilibrium. Through the finite world of her comedy of manners, she shapes ideal fictional patterns. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, for instance, are firmly rooted in their social world. As they free themselves from limitations, both personal and social, they move closer to the ideal. The happy ending symbolizes their freedom to form ideal patterns because they, having learned to play, become more fully human. The happy ending thus satisfies at a more sophisticated level than would a conventional, happy ending. As D.W. Harding points out in his essay "Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction"

> The spectator enters imaginatively, with more or less accuracy and fullness, into some of the multifarious possibilities of life that he has not himself been able to achieve. (314)

He argues that "What is sometimes called wish-fulfilment in

novels and plays can...more plausibly be described as wish-formulation or the definition of desires" (313). Aware of the value of the aesthetic experience, Austen plays with her reader as she plays with her art. She uses the conventional happy ending to make a serious point. As an Elizabeth and a Darcy learn to play, the reader too "can achieve an imaginary development of human potentialities that have remained rudimentary in himself or been truncated after brief growth" (Harding 314).

Austen provides comic insight into the most positive aspects of human nature by exploring the central question--What makes a person whole? Through play, she demonstrates what makes one playful, and therefore, whole, fulfilled, and happy. Stuart Tave affirms that "There is a completeness of form which is the proper end of living" (Some Words 15). Referring to the development of Austen's heroines, he points out that "There is a true Elizabeth or Emma we want to see come to wholeness in the growth of time" (Some Words 15). Tave perceives that

> The real freedom is in the life triumphing over the illusion that it escapes those limits which hold smaller spirits; it is in the life that transforms every impediment into an acquisition and fills its room and its moment. (Some Words 33)

Julia Brown aptly concludes that "One does not have to be intelligent to be good in Jane Austen, but one does have to

be intelligent to be free, to see and evaluate one's choices" (Jane Austen's Novels 125). It is their intelligence that finally sets Austen's heroes and heroines free to transcend the form drive and the sense drive to express the play drive.

Austen expresses the truth about life's complexities and mysteries through play. The pattern of a happy ending, as we have seen, is not merely a convention she joyfully presents. She shows a pattern perfected because, as Tave persuasively argues, for Austen, life is not

> a disorder to be ordered, a given mess on which those of tidy compulsions impose tidiness. It is not a meaningless heap from which meaning is extracted by reduction and exclusion. Meaning is the first fact. It is obscured by inexperience, by miseducation, by deception, above all by internal blindness, but it is there and it is clear to the opened eye. (33-34)

Drawing on the analogy of dance, Tave continues:

> The form of the dance does not suppress significant motion; by its order it sets free the dancer. Jane Austen's world is full, it has all the parts it needs and all of them are fully given to us as far as they are needed. All parts become luminous in a defining vision. (34)

Tave aptly concludes that "There is good dancing everywhere that men and women have mastered the arts of time and space to move with meaning" (35). And, as Juliet McMaster observes, "Austen continues to satisfy us with her full dramatization

of the achieved love that engages the whole personality and sets the lovers in their own equilibrium, in their own shared private space" (478-79). This explains the strong sense of closure of Austen's novels.

The "magic of the novelist's art," as Alter points out, "is considerably more than a set of card tricks" (Partial Magic 222). Austen's self-consciousness challenges the reader

> to active participation in pondering the status of fictional things, forcing him as he reads on to examine again and again the validity of his ordinary discriminations between art and life and how they interact. (Partial Magic 224)

In The Created Self Preston observes that "Comedy depends on our feeling able to reshape life, and...the delight we take in this is properly a function of art's 'seriousness'" (94). He adds that "any achieved work of art takes on the status of play. That is what art is, in relation to life" (94).

Austen demonstrates Schiller's assertion that in experiencing the aesthetic mode at its best, man can "succeed in raising himself from the limited to the absolute..." (430). The finite world of a child at play is also an ideal world of infinite possibilities. But the child wholly absorbed in unself-conscious play provides a striking contrast to a self-conscious novelist at play. Austen plays with patterns of action and character development, with words and meanings, and, most significantly, with life and art. She makes the

ironic suggestion that life can be most fully experienced through art since a perfect aesthetic experience is possible. Aware that life as it is is not perfect, Austen asserts that one can experience life as a perfect whole only aesthetically.

Alter's view that "The joyful self-consciousness of art...richly affirms the autonomy of the creative spirit of man" (Fielding 202) relates to Austen's delight in shaping her fictional material. In both Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, for instance, she self-consciously shows her fictional characters reading books within the books in which they themselves appear. Northanger Abbey begins with the heroine immersed in her fictional world of heroism. She enjoys reading books "provided they were all story and no reflection" (15). At the end of the novel Catherine's mother refers her to a book, and then actually brings it down for her to read, but has to put it off for a later time. This connection between books and real life and how they help or hinder character development, is ironically re-introduced at the end to complete the pattern of parody with which the novel begins. Persuasion also begins and ends with Sir Walter Elliot reading and writing in the Baronetage. Whereas Catherine Morland develops in the course of the novel, Sir Walter remains unchanged. Gradually Catherine begins to separate illusion from reality, to read and reflect on experience and even comprehend Henry Tilney's ironic stance. She learns to play, unlike Sir Walter, whom we leave where we

found him--self-absorbed, achieving no balance within himself or with others. His favorite book mirrors his egoism. Austen mocks at the object and quality of his reading and contrasts him with other characters in her novel who can free themselves from illusion. Katrin Burlin points out that Austen's "rescue of her favorite characters from the consequences of irresponsible fiction making calls attention to her own supremacy as fiction-maker" (106).

Burlin emphasizes Austen's "notion that the real motive for authorship should be the creation of joy in the assembling of materials to express truth" (107). A novelist at play, Austen is both involved in and removed from her fictional world. More subtle in her self-consciousness than Cervantes, Sterne, or Fielding, she makes the reader "more conscious of the play of mind rather as an enlargement of his own sensibility than as the mechanism of a narration" (Preston 11-12). Preston aptly points out that she "calls on irony to render the narrative intelligence as a kind of third dimension to the action, or as a colour filter...affecting all the tones in the scene" (Preston 11-12). Austen's irony underlines her self-consciousness as an artist and her impersonality and control of aesthetic distance.

I have focussed on the beginnings and endings of her novels to demonstrate the over-all balance Austen achieves in her fiction. This is already evident at the beginning of each novel. Lloyd Brown refers to Austen's "ability to integrate

completely any one mode of communication, any single 'bit of ivory' within the total framework of each novel" (9). The choice of lexical items and syntactic structures foreshadows larger structures of meaning that relate to the rest of the text. Hers is a tightly woven fabric of intersecting threads. As Edward Said aptly observes, "the notion of beginning is...tied up in a whole complex of relations" (5).

The beginnings of Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park terminate in the meeting of the hero and heroine, while Emma and Persuasion do not. The scene in which the hero and heroine come together for the first time completes the beginning of these novels because it establishes the central pattern of human relationships that must undergo change and re-definition before the happy ending. Emma resembles Persuasion in the prior relationship of the hero and heroine. But in Persuasion this relationship has a longer history than any of Austen's other novels. Anne and Wentworth's relationship is much further advanced and deeply established at the beginning of the novel.

A journey is also a beginning motif that sets the plot in motion. In Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and Mansfield Park, the journey to another place results in the hero and heroine meeting. A changed heroine returning home marks the beginning of the happy ending. In Pride and Prejudice a close friend of the hero's moving into the

neighbourhood sets the stage for the hero's and heroine's first meeting, their conflicts, and eventually a resolution of all conflict. In Emma, a change of circumstance, not a change of locale, marks its beginning. Persuasion begins with a change in circumstances that causes a journey.

The reader, placed close to the movement of Anne's mind, experiences her development more fully than any other Austen heroines. Anne is the center of the novel's consciousness. The reader can see a distinct movement from the external social world to the interior world of Anne's consciousness. Only in the opening and concluding sections of Persuasion is the authorial voice heard. Unlike the preceding novels, in Persuasion, as Barbara Hardy observes, "A sense of the author...in the preoccupations of art and its analogues" disappears (A Reading of Jane Austen 191).

Endings relate to beginnings and frame Austen's fictional world. As Ira Konigsberg asserts:

> Jane Austen saw the novel as a compositional whole...She was the first to have at her disposal a full array of narrative techniques, and the first to know how to modulate and integrate these into a single harmonious unit. (244)

DeWitt Parker perceptively writes that "Art is the expression of the whole man, because it momentarily makes of man a whole (204). Austen's art approximates this ideal which is already evident in her beginnings.

Happy endings in Austen's novels are neither sentimental nor forced. Walton Litz points out that in Emma, for instance, "the beauty...lies in the fact that Knightley is a realistic figure, not a fictional paragon" (Jane Austen 142). In accepting him "Emma is embracing a social identity which harmonizes with the self of her best imagination" (Litz 142). Because Mr. Knightley liberates "something within Emma herself" she is deserving of love and perfect happiness (Litz 135).

Perfect happiness, underlined in Austen's happy endings, is set off against an imperfect world. Her ironic view explores opposites. The very real social world she presents in detail is also the setting for an upward movement toward the ideal. This movement typically reaches a point of perfect equilibrium in the happy endings of her novels; but, as Mark Schorer reminds us

> Not everything is happy at the end...Pride and prejudice have not departed from the world...but to a larger degree than they [hero and heroine] as individual human beings have 'improved in civility,' civilization has refined its humanity. The alteration is minor. It is also mighty. (Introduction xxi)

This "mighty" alteration is made possible by the play drive which combines "the greatest fullness of existence with the highest autonomy and freedom" (Schiller 422). As Wilkinson and Willoughby point out in their commentary on

Schiller, "A 'noble soul' is, for Schiller, a man essentially at one with himself, 'free' because all his functions are working in harmony..." (272). It is Austen's ideal as well.

Like the preceding novels, Persuasion, Austen's last completed novel, ends happily but moves toward a new direction. Anne, the heroine, develops from an "unnatural beginning" and learns to be natural and free; likewise, Capt. Wentworth, the hero, also transcends his limitations. However, unlike the earlier novels, the joyful re-union of the hero and heroine does not relate to a larger social order. These Austen characters move away from individual fulfilment in society and pay a price for their happiness. Life at sea, with all its uncertainties, contrasts with the security of life on land. As Gene Ruoff points out "Anne and Wentworth are themselves given no geographic destination" ("Anne Elliot's Dowry" 61). He argues that

> Austen seems to suggest that a party of individuals with a firm sense of the integrity of and continuity of the self will be able to overcome the fragmentation of society at large, which is so clearly imaged by the loss of the Kellynch estate and the near dissolution of the extended family as a social institution. (67)

The new direction Austen takes in Persuasion gives us a happy ending at sea with all its dangers and limitless vistas.

Barbara Hardy rightly argues that

> Persuasion persuades us that someone who achieves the

> blend of passion and reason is still left with personal and social problems. Jane Austen separates the problem of the good imagination from the achievement of happiness. She presents a mind strong enough to grow and survive with the minimal comforts and aids. (A Reading of Jane Austen 191)

Hardy adds, "Up to Persuasion she [Austen] has been concerned with the dangers of the imagination, but Persuasion shows us the perpetual and common difficulty of being human" (192). Anne learns to overcome this difficulty as she learns to play and achieve balance. Anne's deeper sensibility and sensitivity to life are ultimately what make her more human, more able to respond to life's limitations and possibilities. Of all Austen's heroines, she is most beautiful because she is most free.

Tave perceptively points out that "the right sort of balance is not only a middle between extremes but an achieved union of excellences" (29). Unlike Anne, who achieves a fine balance, most of Austen's other fictional characters, like Sir Walter Elliot, Mr. Collins, Mary Crawford and Mrs. Elton, cannot play. As Honan asserts the test of a character's "liveliness, life-of-spirit is always in her [or his] real sense and sensibility [which]...involve perception, feeling and intellect" (170).

Feeling and intellect, emotion and reason--these correspond to Schiller's sense drive and form drive. When both combine and "work in concert" the play drive, which makes

one fully human, is realized (Schiller 424). Austen awakens in the reader a desire for the play drive. Gene Koppel observes that

> Austen's fiction incorporates a total response vision... which...achieves the kind of meaningful, unified perception...most contemporary writers have assumed can never again be within the range of human consciousness. (The Religious Dimension 99)

Through a self-conscious joy in assembling her fictional material, and her ironic stance, Austen demonstrates a probable possibility--the art of living happily ever after if one has learned to play. Her fiction enriches and enlarges our perception of the significance of play; it liberates those who fully respond to her art. The ideal reader's delight in her novels can only match her own pleasure in telling a tale, in creating a world and leaving it as a celebration of life at its best.

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