THE DEVELOPMENT OF JANE AUSTEN'S

COMIC PROCESS OF EDUCATION

by

JAMES EDWARD SAIT

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

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Abstract

This study of Jane Austen's six novels examines the relationship of comedy and education. Austen carefully constructs two kinds of comedy in her novels: surface comedy derived from inaccurate perceptions and conceptions of the world, and deep comedy, the vital rhythm of growth which is elaborated as growing love and self-awareness. All six novels develop complex relationships between reason, emotion, imagination, aesthetics and ethics.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland, victimized by the sterile surface comedy of artificial social conventions and her Gothic fantasy, an artificial aesthetic convention, moves toward a recognition of the deep comedy and vitality which her love for Henry Tilney inspires. Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* perceives and judges the superficialities of life and reacts in an emotional and picturesque fashion, while her sister, Elinor, in love with Edward Ferrars, cannot give surface expression to her emotions. Each sister is educated through tragicomic experiences to the demands of both views of life. Elizabeth Bennett and Darcy, victims of the prevailing social delusion of objectification in *Pride and Prejudice*, gradually
develop a sense of the deeper values in life through expanded aesthetic sensibility and mutual affection. Fanny Price in Mansfield Park possesses deep feelings for Edmund Bertram but must learn to be independent and give her emotions sincere expression in a society deluded by false ceremony. Emma presents surface comedy as a product of Emma's attempt to superimpose her imagined life-patterns on a benevolent world. Educated by sympathy and her attachment to Mr. Knightley, Emma recognises the world below Highbury's glittering surface and the necessity for maintaining society's existing structures. In Persuasion, Anne Elliot achieves surface expression and the capacity to act as Wentworth, a victim of society's delusions of fixed social place, comes to realize the depth of Anne's emotion.

Jane Austen's novels portray a complex picture of education through the interaction of surface and deep comedy.
"Every dam' thing about Jane is remarkable to a pukka Janeite."

Rudyard Kipling, "The Janeites"

I do not write for such dull elves
As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves.

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Introduction

Two premises form the basis for this examination of Jane Austen's artistic development: the first, that her novels are comic, and the second, that they have as a major theme the education of certain characters. For Austen, comic process educates; a hero or heroine, if not changed in essential character, gains new perspectives and acquires knowledge through experience.

The first premise, that Jane Austen's novels are comic, can easily be acknowledged. However, the type of comedy they present cannot readily be defined. Generally comic theorists attempt to define comedy by discussing those things which receive comic treatment: society, the individual, manners or social behaviour, and style. Unfortunately tending to be the products of their own times, comic theorists generate a number of conflicting views, especially in the area of social behaviour central to Austen's work, which they variously label morals, manners or conduct. Addison, an eighteenth century theorist, demanded that comic ridicule not be applied to the virtuous. In the nineteenth century George Meredith saw the moral implications of "thoughtful
laughter" as an "excellent test of the civilization of a country". 2 Meredith's contemporary, Henrị Bergson, thought of comic laughter as a social corrective:

A humourist is a moralist disguised as a scientist, something like an anatomist who practises dissection with the sole object of filling us with disgust. . . . Comedy. . . begins . . . with what might be called a growing callousness to social life. . . . In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed. 3

A twentieth century theorist, Northrop Frye, argues that comedy is oriented more to individual needs than social correction, "Comedy is not designed to condemn evil, but to ridicule lack of self-knowledge." 4 His contemporary, Susanne Langer, contends that "moral content is thematic material" 5 and that the "pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy." 6 On points other than morality a number of the theorists agree. For instance, William Hazlitt, George Meredith and Susanne Langer feel that comedy does not discriminate against women: "women. . . are more alive to every absurdity which arises from a violation of the rules of society," 7 "comedy lifts women to a station offering free play for their wit," 8 "in a nut shell: the contest between men and women . . . is the comic rhythm." 9 The major limitation of comic theorists has been their neglect of comedy in the non-dramatic form. To correct this deficiency whatever might be
applicable in their theories must be adapted to a framework relevant to the novel where "the overall effects of a narrative style . . . are secured not locally . . . but . . . by accumulation and pro-
gression."10

The work of the comic theorists, combined with this sense of the novel's particular capacity, suggests the two types of comedy continuously apparent in Austen's work: surface comedy consisting of comic individuals, comic social views, comic manners and comic style; and deep comedy, generated by growth, education and accumulated experience, elements of plot. Both Bergson and Meredith found surface comedy the main subject for analysis and plot an unessential feature:

instead of concentrating our attention on actions, comedy directs it rather to gestures. . . . action is essential in drama, but only an accessory in comedy . . . to depict characters, that is to say types, is the object of high class comedy.11

The comic poet is in the narrow field, or enclosed square, of the society he depicts . . . he is not concerned with beginnings or endings, but with what you are now weaving.12

Jane Austen concerns herself with far more than the depiction of "types" in socially relevant situations. Nearly realizing this concept of two comic levels in developing her theory of virtual Destiny as the prim-
ary characteristic of drama, Susanne Langer suggests that "Destiny in the guise of Fortune is the fabric of comedy." Fortunate circumstance frequently produces a sense of patterned vitality in Austen's novels. Education enables a character to seize circumstance, overcoming such obstacles as "the social order represented by the senex," freeing himself from internal or external, serious or comic, inhibitions. In this way the two major premises of comedy and education are closely connected.

Each of the six novels to be examined, exhibits a clear progression as Austen attempts to solve different artistic problems which derive from the conjunction of particular forms of education with the two kinds of comedy. Composition and revision dates have mainly determined the order in which the novels are discussed. Northanger Abbey contains the most youthful material. A reworking of an earlier epistolary novel, Sense and Sensibility precedes the presumed rewriting and publication of Pride and Prejudice. The last three novels, Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion, have been dated from Cassandra Austen's memorandum. In tracing the development of the comic process of education in the early half of Austen's work, we shall find the dominance of formal education gradually giving way to education
through experience, and in the latter works we shall find functional education, education "put to work", beginning to dominate. These changes result from an increased dependence on deep comedy.
Footnotes


3Bergson, pp. 143-148.


6Langer, p. 327.


8Meredith, p. 32.

9Langer, p. 346.


12Meredith, p. 46.

13Langer, p. 331.


Chapter One

Northanger Abbey

The heroine of Northanger Abbey, Catherine Morland, undergoes two forms of education: the first as she attempts to adapt herself to the heroic pattern derived from her reading, and the second as she discards the heroic pattern for the more flexible values which Henry Tilney possesses. With her first education Catherine tries to superimpose a heroic pattern on her surroundings, with the second she becomes flexible and accepts the pattern which emerges.

Education as a major motif appears in the novel's opening paragraph where Catherine's formal education is treated ironically:

She never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive and occasionally stupid. . . . Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she would like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet; so at eight years old she began. She learnt a year, and could not bear it . . . Her taste for drawing was not superior . . . Writing and accounts she was taught by her father; French by her mother: her proficiency in either was not remarkable, and she shirked her lessons in both whenever she could. (p. 14)

Her resistance to education ceases when Catherine develops "an inclination for finery" and the desire to live in the heroic pattern:

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

In order to express heroic sentiments correctly within a
society which tends to place women in passive roles, Catherine attempts a genteel form of artistic education. Unfortunately she has no extensive ability for feminine accomplishments:

Her greatest deficiency was in the pencil—she had no notion of drawing—not enough even to attempt a sketch of her lover's profile, that she might be detected in the design. There she fell miserably short of the heroic height. (p. 16)

However, this shortcoming does not prevent Catherine's vicarious pursuit of the heroic mode in Gothic novels, especially with Isabella Thorpe's help in Bath. The education of Catherine's artistic taste, but not her ability is redirected and developed through her association with the Tilneys at Bath, particularly on their walk outside the town:

They [the Tilneys] were viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing . . . Here Catherine was quite lost. She knew nothing of taste . . . She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. A misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach they should always be ignorant . . . In the present instance, she professed and lamented her want of knowledge; declared that she would give any thing in the world to be able to draw; and a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which his [Henry's] instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in every thing admired by him (pp. 110–111).

Catherine's growing love for Henry causes the education of her artistic sensibility to conflict with the vicarious enjoyment provided by her heroic education. A resolution begins to appear as she views Mrs. Tilney's portrait:

It represented a very lovely woman, with a mild and pensive countenance, justifying, so far, the expectations of its new observer; but they were not in every respect answered, for Catherine had depended upon meeting with features, air, com-
plexion that should be the very counterpart, the very image, if not of Henry's, of Eleanor's;—the only portraits of which she had been in the habit of thinking, bearing always an equal resemblance of mother and child. . . . She contemplated it, however, in spite of this drawback, with much emotion (p. 191, my italics).

The education of artistic sensibility, seen here to be the breaking of habitual patterns and their replacement with natural or sentimental taste, plays an active part in all of Austen's novels. She equates developing aesthetic sensibility with strong ethical standards: a false aesthetic depending on appearance rather than taste (judgment) usually betokens false ethics. Conduct or manners frequently become aesthetic as well as ethical concerns. For instance, Catherine learns that riding in an open carriage with John Thorpe, unchaperoned, constitutes bad social behaviour because of the picture they would present by appearing at "inns and public places together!" (p. 104).

These sometimes conflicting, minor forms of education are eventually resolved within the one major form of education, the growth of Catherine's love for Henry Tilney. After she views his mother's portrait with less heroic pretensions, Henry's scathing remarks, directed at her deluded picture of his mother's death, bring about the final disintegration of her heroic education. She even feels less concerned at breaking
an aesthetically based rule of conduct when she rides alone with Henry (p. 156). The General and Eleanor are near by so she need not be concerned with the picture they present; instead she can follow the inclinations of her emotions. Catherine learns to appreciate the judgment of Henry as a more than adequate substitute for judgments based on mere appearance or deluded impressions of the world.

On the whole, those minor forms of education which attempt to superimpose a pattern on behaviour receive a burlesque treatment, while the major education, a product of growth and accumulated experience, creates a sense of deeper, more dynamic comic rhythm. Joseph Addison provides an excellent distinction between comedy and burlesque, "The first ridicules Persons by drawing them in their proper characters, the other by drawing them quite unlike themselves." The manner in which Austen draws some of her characters "quite unlike themselves" takes the form of exaggerated caricature which fixes the character by making it act consistently within some given set of characteristics. Usually these characteristics, given in the form of a portrait, accompany the character's first entrance, as in the case of John Thorpe:

a stout young man of middling height, who, with a plain face and graceful form, seemed fearful of being too handsome unless he wore the dress of a groom, and too much like a gentleman unless he were easy when he ought to be civil, and impudent where he might be allowed to be easy. (p. 45)

Because the description, an authorial comment, gives
information beyond Catherine's immediate knowledge, Thorpe's character and the sense of his action is circumscribed with authority. Other minor characters such as Mrs. Allen (p. 20), Mrs. Thorpe (pp. 31-32) and Isabella (p. 33) are also drawn with burlesque portraits. Ironically on General Tilney's first two appearances (pp. 80, 95) we receive only a brief physical description because Catherine, still a victim of her heroic education, is more concerned with the picture she presents to him. Characters rigidified by this burlesque fashion of exaggerated description cannot possibly take advantage of the Fortune which Susanne Langer called "the fabric of comedy." The "types" which surround the central situation, they will be unable to take part in any resolution because they are already fixed.

Perhaps following Addison's advice, Austen does not burlesque the sensible or virtuous characters. Henry Tilney, on entering the novel, is described solely from Catherine's point of view:

He seemed to be about four or five and twenty, was rather tall, had a pleasing countenance, a very intelligent and lively eye, and if not quite handsome, was very near it. His address was good, and Catherine felt herself in high luck. (p. 25)

The limitation of the description to dominant physical
characteristics within Catherine's perception actually frees Henry from any pre-determined response from the reader. He will be able to grow, or promote growth, and seize Fortune, becoming the source of the deep comic rhythm, without the reader finding him out of character. Minor sensible characters who are not part of the deep comic rhythm, do not receive physical and mental portraits; instead their actions speak for them. Mr. Allen, for instance, shows more than his gout when he investigates Mr. Tilney:

> How proper Mr. Tilney might be as a dreamer or a lover, had not yet perhaps entered Mr. Allen's head, but that he was not objectionable as a common acquaintance for his young charge he was on enquiry satisfied for he had early in the evening taken pains to know who her partner was (p. 30).

Catherine unites both the burlesque and the deep comedy with the burlesque exaggeration of her "heroic" role gradually giving way to greater sensibility as the novel progresses.

Burlesque caricature combined with Gothic parody produces a curious rhythmic pattern when Catherine visits Northanger Abbey. Henry's portrait of her first night-to-be in the Abbey (pp. 157-159) largely determines the pattern of Catherine's Gothic fantasy; she expects the house to be "'a fine old place, just like what one reads about'"(p. 157). Supplied with Gothic details from her previous reading, she sees the chest in her
room and the remains of silver handles appear "broken perhaps prematurely by some strange violence" (p. 163).

Her "fearful curiosity" only heightened by the maid's ill-timed interruption finally rises to such a pitch that she throws back the chest's lid only to find "a white cotten counterpane, properly folded, reposing at one end of the chest in undisputed possession!" (p. 164).

This mundane deflation does not prevent her seeing the "black and yellow Japan" cabinet (p. 168) as the repository of some treasure. "Well read in the art of concealing treasure," Catherine explores the cabinet, discovering "the precious manuscript" (p. 169).

Her candle snuffed out, she suffers a sleepless night only to awake to find the manuscript only "An inventory of linen, in coarse modern characters" (p. 172).

Catherine persists in her Gothic fancies despite these deflations because she sees the physical structure of the Abbey itself, when shown around it by the General and Eleanor, as a kind of Gothic caricature:

> the costliness or elegance of any room's fitting up could be nothing to her; she cared for no furniture of a more modern date that the fifteenth century. . . . she was further soothed in her progress, by being told, that she was treading what once had been a cloister (pp. 182-183).

Henry not only corrects her conception of the Abbey's
architecture by telling her the mysterious staircase leads from the stable-yard to his own chamber (p. 194), he also rapidly dissolves her caricatured conception of the General as a murderer. This deflation, connected with the object of her affection, causes Catherine to shed her heroic pretensions and her Gothic fantasies.

The burlesque elements give way to the deeper comic rhythm of growth which springs from elation rather than deflation, Langer's "vital feeling . . . the image of human vitality holding its own in the world amid the surprises of unplanned coincidence." The General and John Thorpe try to prevent the expression of "vital feeling". Instead of destroying the developing love, the frustrating actions which they present only serve to bring Henry and Catherine closer together. Thorpe's attempts to prevent Catherine walking with the Tilneys are aggravating. But this causes Catherine to even more arduously pursue the Tilneys to apologise after the broken walking engagement:

she . . . hastened away with eager steps and a beating heart to pay her visit, explain her conduct and be forgiven; tripping lightly through the church-yard, and resolutely turning away her eyes, that she might not be obliged to see her beloved Isabella and her dear family, who, she had reason to believe were in a shop hard by. She reached the house without any impediment . . . [the General and Eleanor] "were just on the point of walking out, and he being hurried for time, and not caring to have it put off, made a point of her being denied." (pp. 90, 94, my italics)
Prevented by the General from being forgiven, Catherine must wait until that evening at the theatre to tell Henry that she has been "quite wild" (p. 93) to speak to him. On being thanked by Henry for at least waving as she passed by in Thorpe's carriage, she replies, "if Mr. Thorpe only would have stopped, I would have jumped out and run after you" (p. 94). The actions of both the General and John Thorpe produce a benevolent reaction:

Is there a Henry in the world who could be insensible to such a declaration? Henry Tilney at least was not. With a yet sweeter smile, he said everything that need be said of his sister's concern, regret, and dependance on Catherine's honour. (p. 94).

In another major incident General Tilney tries to prevent the lover's union. Misinformed a second time about Catherine's financial situation after seeing John Thorpe in London, he sends Catherine packing. This action of the senex ironically promotes Henry's declaration:

His father's anger, though it must shock, could not intimidate Henry, who was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice. He felt himself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland . . . believing that heart to be his own which he had been directed to gain [by his father] no unworthy retraction of a tacit consent, no reversing decree of unjustifiable anger, could shake his fidelity, or influence the resolutions it prompted. He . . . declared his intention of offering her his hand. (pp. 247-248)
The novel's comic action is accomplished ironically through the help of those very people who seek to impede its progress. Instead of deflating the characters, as the Gothic delusions deflate Catherine, the impediments which frustrate the expression of "vital feeling" only strengthen the characters' convictions and increase the sense of elation.

The major comic rhythm of growing love is also contrasted with the unsuccessful love affair between Isabella Thorpe and James Morland. Neither a caricature nor a man of sense, James, in his letter to Catherine, appears to have learned some lesson, "'Thank God! I am undeceived in time!'" but he has really learned very little if he can still say, "'Poor Thorpe is in town; I dread the sight of him; his honest heart would feel so much.'" His emotions have overthrown his rational intellect "'happy for me had we never met! I can never expect to know such another woman!'" (p. 202).

Unfortunately James fell in love with a "type", the mercenary flirt. In Bath's artificial society where manners can obscure morals, the affair flourishes; but Isabella, unable to adapt to a better understanding of James's financial situation, begins to re-enact the pattern of her usual courtship style with a new man, Captain Tilney. However, she is
unable to seize Fortune. Catherine, on the other hand, never alters the direction of her affections although the pattern of her actions as well as her physical location changes. She turns from surface artificiality to Henry's moral reality, the education forming the deep comic process of the novel.

Lionel Trilling has said,

in any complex culture there is not a single system of manners but a conflicting variety of manners, and that one of the jobs of a culture is the adjustment of this conflict. 3

Northanger Abbey, like a "complex culture", contains a "conflicting variety of manners". Some of the characters such as Isabella Thorpe and General Tilney, allow their financial attitudes to determine their conduct; others, such as Henry and Eleanor Tilney, Mr. Allen and Mrs. Morland, allow sense based on human values to determine their conduct. Those whose exaggerated sense of exterior values (for dress or horse-ware) determine their actions, Mrs. Thorpe, Mrs. Allen and John Thorpe, appear to be amoral. Catherine, the only remaining character of consequence, experiences an irregular education which moves her from the desire for a patterned, heroic life-style to the desire to marry Henry with the sometimes gradual, sometimes abrupt, assumption of his tastes and sensibilities. The novel's educative movement appears
irregular because the burlesque and comic elements conflict; the burlesque so exaggerates externals that Catherine, Austen and the reader, at times lose sight of the value of the heroine's internal development. Although *Northanger Abbey* does, in a limited way, "ridicule lack of self-knowledge" and represent the equality of men and women, increasing the sense of individual characterization, the novel seems to give more weight to its examination of social and artistic delusions. Catherine's Gothic fantasy, for instance, at first balances the General's deluded picture of her wealth. Although he is not actually a murderer, proving the substance of her delusion wrong, Catherine has accurately assessed his character. At least she loses her Gothic delusions but the General never sees her financial position clearly. His final capitulation to the marriage plan occurs with "a fit of good humour" brought about by Eleanor's "marriage with a man of fortune and consequence" (p. 250). Although he is "assisted by that right understanding of Mr. Morland's circumstances" and knows "that Catherine would have three thousand pounds" (p. 251), his final approval comes from

the private intelligence which he was at some pains to procure, that the Fullerton estate, being entirely at the disposal of its present proprietor, was consequently open to every greedy speculation. (p. 252, my italics)
In order for the resolution to take place, the General must continue in his delusion. The social changes in the novel are minimal. The Thorpe's plans do not succeed. Eleanor marries. Henry and Catherine prepare to marry. If they are to form a "new social unit" crystalizing to provide the comic resolution, it will not be the normal resolution of New Comedy which Frye sees as "the surrender of the *senex* to the hero, never the reverse." The vigour and excitement of burlesque exaggeration are not allayed in a comic resolution where the audience knows too little of the world the lovers go to and too much of the world they come from. Catherine's education through Tilney, a deep comic process, comes to a resolution but the other characters remain in a state of burlesque, leaving the reader to wonder what the lover's place in the world will be. They free themselves from the Abbey but somehow the reader cannot; we are more attached to it than we can be to Henry and Catherine, or Woodston, their home.

Austen attempts to correct this defective resolution in *Sense and Sensibility* by internalizing and diversifying the process of education and limiting the burlesque elements. The uneven comic process of education in *Northanger Abbey* where burlesqued views of the
external world achieve revision through the heroine's enlarged experience could not accommodate the subtle changes of character which occur in *Sense and Sensibility*. 
Footnotes

1 Addison, p. 467.
2 Langer, p. 331.

4 Frye, p. 452.
5 Frye, p. 452.
Chapter Two

Sense and Sensibility

Like Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility combines the education of artistic taste and moral perception. Both Dashwood sisters have artistic past-times; Elinor plays and Marianne draws. However, Edward Ferrars, ironically criticizes Marianne's taste for the Gothic picturesque:

"You must not imagine too far, Marianne—remember I have no knowledge in the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere." (p. 97)

In keeping with her sensitivity to language and her attempts at uncouth sincerity, Marianne replies:

"I detest jargon of every kind, and sometimes I have kept my feelings to myself, because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning." (p. 97)

Marianne's picturesque feelings usually find settings appropriate for their expression whether she is in the hills behind their home or the undoubtedly rococo Grecian Temple at Cleveland where she catches cold
Marianne's dedication to pure expression becomes dangerous because it is predicated on appearance. Again as in Northanger Abbey such dependance on appearances, a false aesthetic, leads to false ethics, in Marianne's case to passive incivilities, as, for instance, when she converses with the Steele sisters:

"What a sweet woman Lady Middleton is!" said Lucy Steele.
Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell. (p. 122, my italics)

While Marianne's aesthetic of truth is both selfish and unsympathetic, Edward's expression of his preference for natural beauty combines true aesthetics with humane ethical standards:

"I like a fine prospect but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy villages please me better than the finest banditti in the world." (p. 98)

When Marianne does learn to recognise the sincerity behind a bland or hackneyed exterior, a change from weighing expressions to discerning sentiment, she begins to show signs of growth. In Sense and Sensibility Austen emphasises the need to make moral judgments on
external behaviour or manners in order to develop the 
primary education of sympathetic understanding. Formal 
education becomes a moral standard used to distinguish 
between the sympathetic and selfish characters.
Elinor perceives and condemns Lucy Steele's lack of 
education which no amount of good manners can conceal:

Lucy was naturally clever; her remarks were 
often just and amusing . . . but her powers had 
received no aid from education, she was ignorant 
and illiterate, and her deficiency of all mental 
 improvement, her want of information in the most 
common particulars, could not be concealed from 
Miss Dashwood . . . Elinor saw, and pitied her 
for, the neglect of abilities which education 
might have rendered so respectable; but she was 
with less tenderness of feeling, the thorough 
want of delicacy, of rectitude, and integrity of 
mind, which her attentions, her assiduities, her 
flattery at the Park betrayed (p. 127).

Not only do Lucy's over-effusive manners betray to 
Elinor her ignorance but the deficiencies of both 
the Steele sisters are conveyed to the reader through 
gross errors of grammar (pp. 150, 151, 273). Edward 
establishes the value of formal education in love and 
marrige when he shows Elinor Lucy's letter freeing 
him from their engagement:

"I will not ask your opinion of it as a 
composition . . . For worlds would not I have 
had a letter of hers seen by you in former 
days.—In a sister it is bad enough, but in a 
wife!" (p. 365)

Formal education, established as a moral index for the 
characters and the reader, increases our sensitivity to
language, eventually betraying Willoughby, who like Lucy, substitutes flattery and cliché for self-assurance and sincerity. Speaking of Marianne's letters outside her sickroom, he consciously displays his deficiency to Elinor:

"what I felt is—in the common phrase, not to be expressed; in a more simple one—perhaps too simple to raise any emotion—my feelings were very, very painful. Every line, every word was—in the hackneyed metaphor which their dear writer, were she here would forbid—a dagger to my heart. To know that Marianne was in town was—in the same language—a thunderbolt." (p. 325)

We quickly distinguish that, like Lucy, Willoughby is totally selfish with no sympathetic understanding.

This education of sympathetic understanding functions particularly through the double heroines. A. Walton Litz finds "the rigid antithetical form" of "late eighteenth century moralistic fiction" to be Austen's "starting point" and feels justified in saying "Marianne represents Sensibility and Elinor stands for Sense." Critics have generally been divided into two camps; those who believe the novel holds up Sense and denigrates Sensibility and those who believe Austen is trying to make the two qualities mutually acceptable. Obviously Marianne learns a lesson in sense from Elinor's ability to bear, in silence, the knowledge of Edward's engagement to Lucy (p. 262). However, we cannot regard Elinor as completely insensible; she has two major
emotional outbursts. The first occurs after Marianne receives Willoughby's letter:

Elinor . . . eager to know what Willoughby had written hurried away to their room, where, on opening the door, she saw Marianne stretched on the bed, almost choked by grief . . . without saying a word . . . took her hand, kissed her affectionately several times, and then gave way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's. (p. 182)

Not quite so disinterested a display of sympathy, the other major incident occurs when Edward announces Lucy's marriage to Robert, his brother:

Elinor could sit not longer. 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. Edward, who had till then looked anywhere, rather than at her, saw her hurry away, and perhaps saw—or even heard her emotion (p. 360, my italics). The importance of this emotional expression lies in the depth of feeling which it communicates to Edward. The sisters' educations consist not only of tempering sense and sensibility but also on Marianne's part of learning to see the world around her in other than surface, picturesque forms, and on Elinor's part of learning to show surface expression of what she deeply feels. Both educations transcend the narrow antithetical limits to enter an area of sympathetic understanding. Marianne learns of her own selfishness not only from Elinor, but also from an understanding of Willoughby's selfishness (pp. 349-352).
This education in sympathy relates to what Edward has called Marianne's "favourite maxim, that no one can ever be in love more than once in their life" (p. 93). From acknowledging Willoughby's unworthiness, Marianne develops a sympathetic understanding for Colonel Brandon:

with a conviction of his fond attachment to herself . . . Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting . . . she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments . . . Marianne found her own happiness in forming his (pp. 378-379).

Elinor, in many ways a more subtle portrait of self-contained emotion than Jamie Bennett, has ably learned "the propriety of overcoming" strong emotions by counteracting them with others (p. 280); forbidden to love Edward because of his prior engagement, she readily disguises her feelings, turning them into a mild friendship. Near the end of the novel she has learned, and earned,

the satisfaction of a sleepless night . . .
every thing by turns but tranquil . . . she was oppressed, she was overcome by her own felicity;— and happily disposed as is the human mind to be easily familiarized with any change for the better, it required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquillity to her heart. (p. 363)

This more subtle analysis of emotional education in
Sense and Sensibility necessitates a different comic form.

The novel has neither an overall comic nor burlesque tone although it possesses one of Jane Austen's best comic scenes, John and Fanny Dashwood's discussion of settlements (pp. 8-13). Instead of unifying the novel through either Gothic parody or the comic rhythm of growing love, Austen has chosen, in keeping with her desire to create strongly individual characters, to examine malicious, hypocritical and benevolent comic figures. The malicious characters, John and Fanny Dashwood, and Nancy Steele, display the effects of unprincipled self-interest, which severely limits their burlesque treatment because of the danger they present to the lovers. Lady Middleton, an early prototype of Lady Bertram, displays her hypocrisy on hearing of Willoughby's engagement to Miss Grey:

Lady Middleton expressed her sense of the affair about once every day, or twice, if the subject occurred very often, by saying, "It is very shocking indeed!" . . . having thus supported the dignity of her own sex, and spoken her decided censure of what was wrong in the other, she thought herself at liberty to attend to the interest of her own assemblies, and therefore determined (though rather against the opinion of Sir John) that as Mrs. Willoughby would at once be a woman of elegance and fortune, to leave her card with her as soon as she married. (pp. 215-216)

Because this picture of Lady Middleton comes from a
narrator taking an omniscient point of view rather than through obtrusive authorial commentary or burlesque portraiture, it is made more damning than comic. The reader rather than the author passes judgment.

Like his wife, Sir John displays a similar ability to forget his past allegiance to the Dashwoods when he sees Willoughby in town:

"Last night, in Drury-lane lobby, I ran against Sir John Middleton, and when he saw who I was—for the first time these two months—he spoke to me. . . . he told me that Marianne Dashwood was dying of a putrid fever at Cleveland . . . His heart was softened in seeing mine suffer; and so much of his ill-will was done away, that when we parted, he almost shook me by the hand while he reminded me of an old promise about a pointer puppy. (p. 330)

Less prone to the demands of their own "good" natures, the Palmers seem more benevolent comic characters. At first they appear to be burlesque figures, he is rude and she laughs too much; they are gradually developed into more realistic representations. Although Mrs. Palmer reacts to Willoughby's engagement with unwarranted emotion and later cruelly repeats to Elinor "all the particulars . . . of the approaching marriage" (p. 215), her concern for her child at Cleveland commands the reader's sympathy. Mr. Palmer's unwillingness to leave the area of infection "as well from real humanity and good-nature, as from the dislike of appearing to be frightened away by his wife" (p. 308)
proves him a better character than he at first appears. On the whole, their marital relations serve as a prototype of the Bennetts' in *Pride and Prejudice*. The remaining benevolent comic figure, Mrs. Jennings, called by Ian Watt "the main agent of this educative process" because she "has the essence of what really matters as regards sense and sensibility", seems an obvious burlesque figure. However, Henri Bergson says "a comic figure is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself" and Mrs. Jennings knows how she appears to others. When she invites the Dashwoods to stay with her in London, she says:

"I thought it would be more comfortable for them to be together; because if they got tired of me, they might talk to one another, and laugh at my odd ways behind my back." (p. 154)

Such infrequent self-commentary supplies unexpected pathos. Austen has deliberately prevented the reader from seeing any of the characters from a purely comic or purely burlesque point of view by provoking ethical judgments or sympathy for individual pathos. With highly varied character portrayal she saves the novel from melodrama, but the emphasis on individual characterizations rather than comic "types", classifiable within prevailing social delusions like the parasitic Thorpes, creates a process of education which can only
be called tragicomic.

In "The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry" Giambattista Guarini, the Italian Renaissance playwright and critical theorist, finds that tragicomedy mingles:

all the tragic and comic parts that can coexist in versimilitude and decorum ... This is done in such a way that the imitation, which is the instrumental end, is that which is mixed, and represents a mingling of both tragic and comic events.5

Instead of mingling comic presentation with burlesque exaggeration and having the heroine choose the deeper comic rhythm of love, in Sense and Sensibility Austen forces the characters to near tragedy and then retrieves them, enlarging their perspectives of life through suffering. The comic aspect of the education, again this enlarging of perspectives, usually results from the recognition of the limitations of certain patterns of behaviour and the transcendence of the patterns; with Marianne increased civility, especially to Mrs. Jennings (p. 341), transcends her original selfishness; with Elinor the right to love shatters patterns of excessive emotional restraint. By combining serious events with the growing ability to discriminate, the tragicomic process promotes the education of sympathy, as both Elinor and Marianne discover the dangerous
limitations of their narrow worlds. The process becomes more immediate for the reader through the creation of sympathy which underlies the comic.

Guarini also speaks of another tragicomic feature, the treatment of vicious individuals, which Austen uses to maintain the novel's plausible reality:

Punishment, which in the double form of tragedy comes upon the malefactors, is unfitting to tragicomic poetry, in which according to custom the bad characters are not chastized. . . . Comedy ordinarily desires to give a prosperous end to its worst characters.6

This necessitates the lovers, the newly emerging social unit, being secluded from the malicious segment of society. Lucy Steele, Robert Ferrars, John and Fanny Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars form one segment of society, with Lucy rewarded with money for her attachment to money instead of love. One expects the lack of punishment to be amoral; instead the separation of malicious and benevolent characters appears to judge those who behaved badly by depriving them of a place within the enlarged vision of life.

Guarini also speaks on the style of language appropriate to tragicomedy:

The normal and chief style of tragicomedy is the magnificent, which, when accompanied with the grave, becomes the norm of tragedy, but when mingled with the polished, makes the combinations fitting to tragicomic poetry.7
While Elinor, and, to some extent, Edward display polished or ironic diction which echoes either Henry Tilney or Elizabeth Bennett, both lack sufficient exterior dramatization to bear their ethical burdens with vitality or magnificence. In fact, Austen's conviction of the place of ethics in comedy led her to excessive moral proofs concerning some of the characters such as Colonel Brandon's story of Eliza and Willoughby, labeled "unconvincing" by Ian Watt. The sermonizing on art (Vol. I, Chapter XVIII) or selfishness (Vol. III, Chapter XI) seems obtrusively sensible. Austen criticizes *Pride and Prejudice* because

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

*Sense and Sensibility,* with plenty of shade and little playfulness, verges on the abyss. Whether these obtrusively moral parts of the novel result from its early epistolary form as "Elinor and Marianne" or are merely the uncertain first approach to ethics in serious comedy, Austen clearly feels the emphasis on individual realization demands ethical standards.
By pushing the major action as close to disaster as possible and then creating a social unit dissociated from the malicious elements of society, Austen has prevented herself from dramatizing the assimilation of the knowledge which Elinor and Marianne have acquired. The two antithetical units: sense and sensibility, selfishness and sympathy, cannot achieve total dramatic import. With the development of the unifying social delusion Austen acquires the means of portraying an interior world equal to a dramatized exterior in *Pride and Prejudice*. 
Footnotes


4Bergson, p. 71.


7Guarini, p. 525.

8Watt, p. 49.


Chapter Three

Pride and Prejudice

The formal, moral and artistic educations, used as a basis for burlesque in Northanger Abbey and established as standards for ethical judgments in Sense and Sensibility, are used as indices for human sympathy in Pride and Prejudice. Motivated as in Northanger Abbey by the growing attachment between the hero and heroine, the major education consists of learning to recognise intrinsic worth in a world where people are treated as social objects.

The novel's opening statement immediately displays this social tendency for treating single aspects of people as their whole worth:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. (p. 3)

Instead of the lengthy expository chapters common to Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, the novel immediately plunges into the preliminaries of acquaintance with Mr. Bingley. Not until the fourth chapter, after the acquaintance has been made, after the ball has been held, after the first judgments of the major
characters have been formed, do we begin to get any expository biographical information, which delineates the Netherfield party rather than the Bennetts (p. 15). With the conversation between Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas, the social habit of objectification is applied to events which the reader has been witness to. Charlotte, particularly, betrays a constant view of people as objects:

"If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him" (p. 21).

When Elizabeth replies that Jane cannot be overt in her affections because "she is not acting by design" (p. 22) Charlotte elaborates her ethic of male-as-object in the marital hunt with a rather unhealthy view of marriage:

"Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so familiar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation" (p. 23).

An outstanding comic scene, described by Lydia, shows how an unperceptive society fails to recognise intrinsic worth or human dignity:

"we had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel Forster's. . . . We dressed up Chamberlayne in woman's clothes, on purpose to pass for a lady,—only think what fun! . . . When Denny, and Wickham, and Pratt, and two or three more of the men came in, they did not know him in the least." (p. 221)"
A disguised "object" would be difficult to recognise, especially for Wickham who sees women as "fortunes". The prevalence of this social delusion directly effects the major love theme.

When Miss Bingley and Darcy discuss women at Netherfield, Miss Bingley maintains that feminine "accomplishments" create the educated woman:

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages . . . besides all this she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions . . . "All this she must possess," added Darcy, "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading." (p. 39)

Such static conceptions of education as the creator of an aesthetically pleasing object prepare the reader for hearing that Elizabeth has become "an object of interest in the eyes" of Mr. Darcy:

No sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing (p. 23).

With Miss Bingley teasing him about the alterations he will make to Pemberley's gallery, Darcy admits how important externals are to him:

"As for your Elizabeth's picture, you must not attempt to have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?"
"It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but their colour and shape, and the eye-lashes, so remarkably fine, might be copied." (p. 53)²

Before Darcy can obtain Elizabeth this false aesthetic must be discarded and a new ethical and aesthetic basis found. The first of Austen's heroes to receive an education in human understanding equal to that of the heroine, Darcy makes his first proposal while still regarding Elizabeth as a physical object:

he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination (p. 189, my italics).

Darcy must learn to stop regarding himself and the rest of the world as objects, thinking "'meanly of their sense and worth compared with [his] own" (p. 369).

Elizabeth educates him with lessons on intrinsic worth, as he acknowledges:

"What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you I was properly humbled." (p. 369)

Invited to tour with her aunt and uncle, the Gardiners, after Wickham has become attached to Miss King, Elizabeth, equally prone to objectifying human values by rigidly adhering to her first impressions,³ presents an aesthetic of nature which opposes the false aesthetic:
"My dear, dear aunt... what delight! what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour... what are men to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend! And when we do return, it shall not be like other travellers... we will recollect what we have seen."

(p. 154)

This idea of travelling into the natural world, gaining experience which can be brought back to the everyday world, suggests Northrop Frye's concept of the "green world":

the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into a green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.

Although the comic resolution is not totally achieved in the "green world" in Pride and Prejudice, it certainly begins at Pemberley, whose natural air delights Elizabeth and the Gardiners:

Pemberley House... was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground... in front a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste.

(p. 245)

On entering Pemberley's gallery shortly afterwards, she finds Darcy's portrait:

a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to
have sometimes seen, when he looked at her.
... as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude that it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.
(pp. 250-251, my italics)

With the aid of memory and aesthetic imagination Elizabeth relives the proposal scene without the rigid effect of her first impression of Darcy to obscure her perception of his emotion. When she tells Jane she dates her love for Darcy from "first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (p. 373), Elizabeth is ironically accurate; her appreciation of natural beauty promotes her perception of intrinsic worth.

In order to preserve the place of ethics in serious comedy, Austen carefully maintains the notion of intrinsic worth within the bounds of conventional morality. Malicious or evil characters do not possess intrinsic worth, no matter how aesthetically pleasing they appear externally. Elizabeth connects morality with discovery when she speaks to Darcy of his second proposal:

"My resolution of thanking you for your kindness to Lydia had certainly great effect. Too much, I am afraid; for what becomes of the moral, if our comfort springs from a breach of promise, for I ought not to have mentioned the subject? This will never do."
"You need not distress yourself. The moral will be perfectly fair. Lady Catherine's unjustifiable endeavours to separate us, were the means of removing all doubts." (p. 381)

Even though ironically elevating the motivation for the discovery of love from Lydia to Lady Catherine, both lacking intrinsic worth, Austen still maintains that only the good are rewarded. Clearly she has shifted her view since *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*; the comic resolution will not separate the lovers from the rest of society. Through the force of their love they have discovered society's major delusion. This discovery generates most of the novel's deep comedy or "vital feeling".

The dominant social feature of objectification unites every comic element in *Pride and Prejudice*, allowing Austen to return to burlesque caricature without losing the sense of the character's individuality. The burlesqued characters try to impose their own patterns on the world, giving rise to such outstanding examples of intellectual callousness as Mr. Collins and Mary Bennett, both incapable of transforming knowledge acquired from books to a compassionate understanding of the human situation. Mrs. Bennett, Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine lack any self-awareness. Each of them desires a world ordered by their own minds,
where no chance or spontaneous action is possible. Mr. Collins even attempts to objectify social intercourse. Although he tells Mr. Bennett that his compliments "arise chiefly from what is passing at the time," he also admits:

> though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible."

(p. 68)

Lady Catherine and Mrs. Bennett want their daughters married to money and position. Elizabeth and Darcy by breaking these external impediments to their union at the same time as they break internal impediments, celebrate the vitality of life.

As in Northanger Abbey Austen combines a comic surface with a deep comic rhythm, educating the hero and heroine both through their growing attachment and their reactions to surface impediments. The comic rhythm develops impetus not only from the frustrating attempts of Wickham and Lady Catherine to prevent Elizabeth and Darcy from marrying but also from the highly symmetrical plot structure. As in Northanger Abbey, another pair of lovers, Jane and Bingley, who intuitively recognise each others intrinsic worth, parallel the major action. Distinguished as simple characters by Elizabeth (p. 42) they provide a contrast
of constant devotion against which Darcy and Elizabeth appear more active and exciting. Another pair, Lydia and Wickham, exhibit passion without the governing power of reason. So far removed from the mental or human alertness of any of the other comic figures and "only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue" (p. 312), the two serve as moral exempla rather than participants in the benevolent comic resolution. Both the comic surface and deep comic rhythm emphasise the unique comic positions of Elizabeth and Darcy.

Elizabeth generates spontaneous physical vitality, like the excitement the Gardiner children display when their parents drive up to the Bennett's door. "Joyful surprise lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their whole bodies, in a variety of capers and frisks" (p. 286). Lionel Trilling also notices Elizabeth's physical exhuberance:

no quality of the heroine of Pride and Prejudice is more appealing than her physical energy. We think of Elizabeth Bennett as in physical movement; her love of dancing confirms our belief that she moves gracefully. It is characteristic of her to smile; she likes to tease; she loves to talk.

Elizabeth combines the dominant qualities of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood: their wit, vitality, and capacity for action in the limited feminine world. Darcy, also capable of spontaneous action, after he has been educated and accepted by Elizabeth, displays a verbal
wit equal to Elizabeth's as he parries question with compliment:

"Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?"
"Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement."
"But I was embarrassed."
"And so was I."
"You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner."
"A man who had felt less, might." (p. 381)

Although he has "yet to learn to be laughed at" (p. 371), Darcy has learned to laugh.

With such energies, the comic combatants completely triumph over the social delusion. That society which set out to make a rigid structure out of objectified human values, turning morality and love into money and marriage, instead of being destroyed, sweeps along with the lovers to a comic conclusion with the revitalization not of the structure but of the values it represents. Unlike Catherine and Henry Tilney or Elinor and Edward Ferrars, Elizabeth and Darcy need not retreat from the rest of society to preserve their union. Money and marriage, as long as they are humanely used, present no danger to the lovers. In *Pride and Prejudice* recognition of the social delusion, the comic education, does not destroy the social delusion; instead the intrinsic values of social convention are re-established.
The novel achieves this end not by burlesquing sentimental or Gothic fiction (both artistic conventions) or by pushing the individual to the limits of self-preservation to establish self-knowledge, but rather by the simplest means of disguise and recognition. Mistaking the mask for the face behind it, as Lydia and Wickham mistake marriage for respectability, creates part of the surface comedy of social irony. The characteristic ironies of Elizabeth, Darcy and Austen herself, dissociation of material presented and material implied, recognise the inadequacies of word-masks to portray meaning. The comic resolution reconciles those enlightened enough to recognise masks with those who still see masks as the essential part of the social face. William Hazlitt has said, "There is nothing more powerfully humourous than what is called keeping in comic character . . . consistency in absurdity".\textsuperscript{8} Pride and Prejudice persists in its social and verbal ironies in spite of Darcy and Elizabeth's education, creating a sense that the whole social machine could again rigidify human values the moment Mr. Bennett retreats to his library. However, this idea is hardly tragic, entailing, as it does, the possibility of another Elizabeth and Darcy.

Pride and Prejudice marks the end of the first
major development of Austen's artistic career. The sense of festivity, of patterned dance under the guise of Fortune, the mating of the best of manhood with the finest of womankind, does not occur again. The accumulation of self-knowledge which happens "off-stage" for Darcy and for Elizabeth through devices reporting "off-stage" events, such as Darcy's letter and Jane's letters concerning Lydia's elopement, is to be brought "on-stage" with the suffering heroine. The change in only the hero and heroine, which they direct primarily at one another while the rest of the world, unchanged, sees them in their characteristic masks, can no longer be considered a sufficiently strong moral conclusion. It becomes more difficult for a Mrs. Bennett, Lady Catherine or Mr. Collins to live on after the final page in order to maintain comic consistency. Education moves further away from the comic surface towards the deep impulses of growth.
1Both R.W. Chapman in his "Index of Characters, Etc." for Pride and Prejudice (p. 414) and G.L. Apperson in A Jane Austen Dictionary (Oxford: Kemp Hall Press Ltd., 1932) believe that Chamberlayne is a member of the Militia. I feel that it is more likely that he is a servant at the Forsters, especially considering the general attitudes towards servants expressed in the novel, i.e. Hill, p. 289.

2On a visit to a London Gallery, Jane Austen saw "a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her . . . but there was no Mrs. Darcy" (Letters, p. 309) This suggests that Austen, like many readers, pictured Elizabeth verbally, by what she said, rather than visually.

3The novel's original title was "First Impressions", Minor Works, facing page 242.

4Frye, p. 456.


8See Hazlitt, the opening chapter discusses the child's delight in the use of masks.

Chapter Four

Mansfield Park

In Mansfield Park Austen, for the first time questions the nature of education. While maintaining the concept of education unified by reaction to a social delusion developed in Pride and Prejudice, the novel explores two new areas of conflict: the problem of environment and education or nature and nurture, and education's function in society. While in Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice the product of the educative process has been a young lady of wit and resources, in Mansfield Park Fanny Price possesses little surface vitality and no wit to attract the reader. Combining the tragicomedy of Sense and Sensibility with the mask manipulation of Pride and Prejudice, the novel explores the limits of human adaptability to external circumstances within a deluded society. In this way Austen diverts attention from the comic flowering of education towards steady growth.

The heavily biographical opening chapters dealing with Fanny's arrival at Mansfield Park introduce the nature-nurture conflict. Mrs. Norris characteristically conceives of education as the magic panacea for all evils
of birth:

"Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to any body." (p. 6)

Sir Thomas, although essentially agreeing with Mrs. Norris, fears the possibility of an evil nature:

"Should her disposition be really bad . . . we must not, for our own children's sake, continue her in the family; but there is no reason to suspect so great an evil. (p. 10)

Fanny arrives:

somewhat delicate and puny . . . small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly shy, and shrinking from notice; but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke her countenance was pretty. (pp. 11-12)

The first stage of Fanny's education, like Catherine Morland's, consists of an adaptation to existing patterns:

The place became less strange, and the people less formidable; and if there were some amongst them whom she could not cease to fear, she began at least to know their ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them. (p. 17)

Conforming to the will of others and concealing her own "good qualities"(p. 21) creates a pattern more difficult to break than Catherine's Gothic fantasy. Fanny's formal education, begun with the help of Edmund and the governess, broadens her thought but does not curtail her imitation:
He knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which, properly directed must be an education in itself. Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History; but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (p. 22)

Teaching where a desire to please exists, Edmund's education functions to improve Fanny, just as Fanny's education later functions to improve her sister, Susan (p. 397). The adaptation to pattern gives Fanny a learned appreciation of nature so that she expresses her regret for the loss of Sotherton's avenue of oaks with Cowper's lines "'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited!'" (p. 56). Later, on the evening after news has reached Mansfield that Sir Thomas will return in November, Fanny and Edmund look out a window:

"Here's harmony!" said she, "Here's repose! Here's what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry only can attempt to describe. . . . When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to . . ." 

"I like to hear your enthusiasm, Fanny. It is a lovely night, and they are much to be pitied who have not been taught to feel as you do" (p. 113).

Gradually Fanny's education moves towards self-expression embodied in another aesthetic of nature. However,
instead of using the aesthetic of nature as an aid to recognising intrinsic worth in others, as Elizabeth Bennett does, Fanny, a less-active heroine, uses it to recognise her own worth and eventually to free herself from dependance on Edmund.

Unfortunately Fanny's education takes place within a society which demands regularized or conventional behaviour. In order to exist in society she must construct, through her moral education, a social "character", which will stand for her in society's transactions, while at the same time she must maintain her own individual feeling. Edmund elucidates this relationship when he speaks to Miss Crawford of the clergyman's social role:

"He . . . has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally— . . . the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence. . . . The manners I speak of might rather be called conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect in short of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend (pp. 92-93).

Against the natural background of Sotherton's wilderness, Edmund attempts to distinguish between manners founded on social propriety and conduct founded on firm principles. Behind every action in Mansfield Park the danger of turning proper conduct into ceremonious manner poses
a constant threat. The planned journey to Maria's bridal home, Sotherton, becomes a long ceremonious discussion of who shall ride in what carriage or whether Fanny should go; everyone conceals his true motives, the various feelings for Henry Crawford, behind a facade of social pleasantries (pp. 76-79). At Sotherton Julia and Mary Crawford's reduction of daily prayers and marriage to ceremonious actions depending on who is standing before the altar in Sotherton chapel (pp. 86-89) prepares for the actual wedding of Maria and Mr. Rushworth:

It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed—the two bridesmaids were duly inferior—her father gave her away—her mother stood with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated—her aunt tried to cry—the service was impressively read by Dr. Grant. Nothing could be objected to when it came under the discussion of the neighbourhood, except that the carriage which conveyed the bride and bridegroom and Julia from the church door to Sotherton, was the same chaise Mr. Rushworth had used for a twelvemonth before. (p. 203)

The whole occasion, robbed of any feeling, has become mere propriety. This dissociation of sensibility can only be healed with the successful construction of a functional "social character". Fanny's education provides her with a sound character; Maria Bertram's does not:

Sir Thomas . . . became aware how unfavourable to the character of any young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia
had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with his own severity. . . . bad as it was, he gradually grew to feel that it had not been the most direful mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been wanting within, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect. He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. . . . Maria had destroyed her own character (pp. 462-465).

Lacking principle, Maria's conduct destroys her social mask.

Both Henry and Mary Crawford have inadequate social masks, and suffer from what Denis Donahue calls "The two great temptations which lie across the path of truth in Jane Austen's fiction . . . 'charm' and 'selfishness'."¹ Miss Crawford's sprightliness of mind, "her talents for the light and lively" (p. 81), almost obscures the selfishness which she is conscious of herself (p. 68). Like his sister, Henry Crawford has not been nurtured in the best of households. Possessed of a pleasing character, he sets out to break Fanny's heart, or rather to make it over in his own image:

"I will not do her any harm, dear little soul! I only want her to look kindly on me . . . to think as I think, be interested in all my possessions and pleasures." (p. 231)

Unsuccessful until he makes Fanny's brother a lieutenant, through the intercession of his uncle, the Admiral, Henry further improves on his visit to Portsmouth. However, the beneficial effects of the acquaintance
cannot overcome his poor education and lack of principle:

Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long. . . . Would he have persevered, and up-rightly, Fanny must have been his reward (p. 467).

Our consciousness of the motives or circumstances behind the Crawfords' actions does not always prevent our feeling sympathetic to their vitality. Both of them, like Elizabeth and Darcy, are aware of the ceremonious propriety of the deluded society in which they live. Finally Austen asks us to judge them on ethical rather than aesthetic grounds, assessing their selfish conduct rather than their engaging manners.

The passion for creating characters or ceremony creates much of the novel's surface comedy. But *Mansfield Park* has a deep comic rhythm as well: Fanny's individual growth, which at times opposes the surface comedy on ethical grounds. The outstanding example of surface comedy, the assumption of a character unsuited to a particular social role or a character not created from one's own experience, occurs in the play sequence after Mr. Yates arrival at Mansfield. Lionel Trilling emphasises the moral aspects of this sequence at the expense of the comic:

The play is Kotzebue's *Lover's Vows* and it deals with illicit love and a bastard, but Jane Austen, as her letters and novels clearly show, was not a prude. Some of the scenes of the play permit
Henry Crawford to make love in public, but this is not said to be decisively objectionable. What is decisive is a traditional, almost primitive, feeling about dramatic impersonation. . . . the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator, that, indeed, the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the real self.  

While some of the characters do lose their integrity, the comic rather than moral loss stems from the selection of the play, the later selection of roles and the inadequacies of some of the performers, all of which parodies the normal process of education. In Saturnalian fashion, Henry Crawford admits:

"I could be fool enough at this moment to undertake any character that ever was written . . . I could rant or storm, or sigh, or cut capers in any tragedy or comedy in the English language." (p. 123)

Not only does Tom Bertram abdicate his role as heir-apparent, in the reversed world of the play he becomes a member of the servant class, a rhyming butler. Overthrowing his absent father's moral universe, he transforms the billiard room into the theatre and his father's room into a place where make-up and disguises are put on:

"the doors at the farther end, communicating with each other as they may be made to do in five minutes, by merely moving the bookcase in my father's room . . . my father's room will be an excellent green-room. It seems to join the billiard-room on purpose. (p. 125)

Only Fanny sees all the ceremony attached to selecting
a play as the result of disguised self-interest:

Fanny looked on and listened, not unamused to observe the selfishness which, more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all, and wondering how it would end. (p. 131)

Instead of ending, the parody becomes more intense. The first casting objective, trying to match a part with acting ability, like matching conduct with principles, soon gives way to "type-casting", matching roles with physical appearances. When Crawford suggests that Julia play Amelia, Tom Bertram insists on Mary Crawford because "Amelia should be a small, light, girlish, skipping figure" and "Miss Crawford... looks the part" (p. 135). The reverse of the exterior world implicit in the created world of Lover's Vows, one of the most complex structural devices ever used by Austen, presents a comedy of social delusions. However, unlike Pride and Prejudice where social delusions objectified in money and marriage were revitalized, Mansfield Park does not condone the false assumption of roles. To recognise falsely assumed roles has become so difficult, even the hero and heroine are victims of the Crawfords' fine exteriors, that any false assumption of social disguise, however comic, must be regarded as dangerous and unethical. Austen's other treatments of morality have tended to accept
manners, right conduct and respectability as appropriate symbols for superior ethics. If economic status became too excessive an element of social respectability, as in Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, the lovers were secluded from the prevailing social delusion. The peaceful co-existence of delusion and understanding in Pride and Prejudice necessitated a certain amount of re-location accomplished through Darcy's wealth. In the previous novels moral evils had either been abstract or distanced with a blur of respectability: the Thorpes fade away, Colonel Brandon's bastard child turns out not to be his, Lydia and Wickham achieve formal respectability in marriage. Not so in Mansfield Park, those who do wrong are punished: Mrs. Norris, the only character excessively materialistic, is exiled with Maria, Tom Bertram loses his health, Sir Thomas loses his daughters and the Sotherton connection, Mary Crawford loses Edmund, and Maria Rushworth loses her respectability. No peaceful co-existence or tidy seclusion is permitted. Lady Bertram, Fanny, Edmund, Sir Thomas and Susan do, however, begin to grow. Having learned his lesson, Tom Bertram recovers his health. The split between comic, ceremonious propriety and serious principled conduct, does not destroy the main characters. The comedy of fortunate circumstance,
vitality and symmetry, gloriously achieved in *Pride and Prejudice*, has no place in the darker world of *Mansfield Park*; the absence of sparkling wit suggests a quieter tragicomic delight in the growth of the individual.

Both Edmund and Fanny must assimilate experience and use it to function in a regenerative pattern. Edmund, more erratic than Fanny, succumbs to the temptations of Mary Crawford's natural manner, withdraws, is ordained, almost succumbs again, and, eventually discerning Mary's selfishness, he finds Fanny, the object of his nurturing, the worthy recipient of his love. Fanny presents a picture of steady growth as she learns to assert herself. Gradually she breaks away from dependence on Edmund, first by not approving his decision to act in the play (pp. 155-156) and later by refusing to advise him about Miss Crawford (p. 269). Her later refusal to conform to the wishes of Sir Thomas and Henry Crawford, breaking the early pattern of adaptability and compliance, shows further comic growth. The largest pattern which she must break, created by her imagination, concerns her family. Her visit to Portsmouth, a structural device which balances the attempt to overthrow social order in the play sequence, creates an expanded vision of the world. Her own home, like the play, is chaotic:
William was gone;—and the home he had left her in was—Fanny could not conceal it from herself—in almost every respect the reverse of what she would have wished. It was the abode of noise, disorder, impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be. (pp. 388-389)

The physical debilitation which Fanny suffers in Portsmouth, matches the moral debilitation suffered by the others because of the play. The return to Mansfield Park, almost a retreat into a green world, brings Fanny home to a place where the aesthetic of nature promoting the apprehension of what lies behind social masks, has made some radical changes. Maria, Mrs. Norris and the Crawfords have gone; Fanny returns with spring:

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 (p. 446).

Focusing on the accumulation of experience in a more psychologically determined manner, Austen allows us to see Fanny from the age of ten till the time of her marriage without purely sequential authorial commentary like that given in Northanger Abbey: "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday have now passed in review before the reader" (p. 97). Instead of parcelling events in this precise manner, Austen, when she does enter the novel, discusses time very ambiguously:
I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own . . . I only intreat 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 Mary Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (p. 470)

This comment shifts the cause for social or individual changes from the exterior form of the world, whether chronologically apportioned time or fortunate circumstance, to interior experience. In this way the deep rhythms of growing love and individual growth are brought to a natural union, experienced and ready to contribute to the new social growth.

As serene and organic as the conclusion is, it still leaves some artistic problems. The restriction of surface comic elements to a primarily immoral position and the increased emphasis on inner delight creates a problem for the reader who feels sympathetic to all the comic elements. The condemnation of imaginative and artistic vitality in Henry and Mary Crawford is particularly difficult to appreciate. Austen, herself, must have felt the attractiveness of comic imagination for in Emma she attempts to marry imagination to reason.
Footnotes


2 Trilling, "Mansfield Park", p. 132.
Chapter Four

Emma

The novel's first sentence clearly shows Emma Woodhouse as older and further removed from a formal education but just as inexperienced as any of the previous Austen heroines:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a 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. (p. 5)

The marriage of her governess, Miss Taylor, to Mr. Weston, leaves Emma in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude. She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her in conversation, rational or playful. (p. 7)

Emma's ardent critic, Mr. Knightley, feels that she will not receive a rational education from the habit of reading:

"Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through . . . and I dare say she may have made out a very good list now. But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. (p. 37)

Emma possesses that attractiveness of character which
Henry and Mary Crawford displayed in their active although immoral use of creative imagination. Given "the power of having rather too much her own way," (p. 5) which destroys any social restraints, and thinking she has "made the match" (p. 11) between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston, Emma's fancy selects Harriet Smith to be made over, as her companion, "a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect" (p. 23). A reverse of the functionalism of education in *Mansfield Park* where Fanny's education helped her sister, Susan, Emma's education instead of alleviating a painful situation causes Harriet to feel dissatisfied with a reasonably pleasant one, her attachment to the Martins. The effect becomes more comic when Emma fancies artificial surges of "vital feeling" by matching Harriet and Mr. Elton:

She thought it would be an excellent match; and only too palpably desirable, natural and probable, for her to have any merit in planning it. . . . It was not likely, however, that any body should have equalled her in the date of the plan, as it had entered her brain during the first evening of Harriet's coming to Hartfield. (pp. 34-35)

Like Catherine's Gothic fantasy, Emma's imagination quickly glosses over realistic elements, "a want of elegance of feature" in Mr. Elton, to find him "a very pleasing young man, a young man whom any woman not fastidious might like" (p. 35). The power of
Emma's fancy destroys the good effects of education, the ability to make discerning judgments (*Sense and Sensibility*) and the capacity for human sympathy (*Pride and Prejudice*). Emma first loses her artistic sensibility, improving on Harriet's actual dimensions while painting her picture (p. 47), then the moral scruple which would not have allowed her to romanticize Harriet's bastardy (p. 27) and finally her capacity to sympathize with the faults of others. The loss of these forms of education through fanciful self-deceit and their subsequent recovery through the agency of Mr. Knightley provide the comic surface and the deep comedy of Emma's education.

The comedy in *Emma* presents the consummation of Austen's former work. In *Northanger Abbey* surface comedy develops from static burlesque caricatures and the deep comedy of growing love derives from the overcoming of exterior frustrations. The education through tragicomedy in *Sense and Sensibility* undermines the burlesque and emphasizes perseverance and the alleviation of excessive sense and excessive sensibility through sympathy. *Pride and Prejudice* reintroduces elements of burlesque caricature and emphasizes the growing love between Darcy and Elizabeth, connecting them through
the discovery of society's deluded view of people as objects. The ceremonious propriety and the growth to independence of the heroine provide ethically conflicting sources of comedy in *Mansfield Park*. All of these works have major artistic problems. Outward forms of comedy in *Northanger Abbey* prevent an adequate representation of the heroine. Correcting this inadequacy with a unified education, more subjective analysis of the heroines and the introduction of tragic elements in experience in *Sense and Sensibility* allows ethical proofs to overbalance the comic and dramatic structure, forcing the lovers to retreat from a malicious society. The comic education in *Pride and Prejudice*, the discovery of the prevailing social delusion and the revitalization of socially rigidified structures, curtails the subjective analysis of the hero and heroine. The heroine's recovery in *Mansfield Park* only introduces the conflict between the condemned, but at times, attractive comic surface and the ethically approved deep comic growth, leaving the reader dissatisfied with the judgments he has to make while appreciating the fact that the lovers' union is not secluded. All these representations and their artistic problems indicate that Austen is trying to achieve an artistic union of the surface and deep comic elements while
maintaining a clearly defined ethical structure. Emma presents this union by dealing with the education of the two faculties with access to the surface and deep comic elements, fancy and understanding. By increasing the subtlety of the tragic elements through greater internalization and restricting the location to Highbury, Austen maintains the education of sympathy but evades the obtrusive ethics present in Sense and Sensibility and Mansfield Park. Making the social delusion a fault of the faculty of fancy rather than the fault of rigidified social or moral structures avoids the excessive attraction to surface elements present in Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice. Austen robs no one of the capacity to feel or to reason, creating a fruitful and eventful society and saving the novel from burlesque.

In Highbury, Austen creates a material and mental cornucopia. None of her previous novels have so many references to food: pork and apples go to the Bateses, who dispense cake to their guests; strawberries and a cold supper are produced at Donwell Abbey; the Weston's ball at The Crown has a sit-down dinner; the Coles have a dinner; the Woodhouses reciprocate; a picnic takes place at Box Hill; and tea is frequently taken at Hartfield. The reason for Mr. Elton's proposal to
Emma, whom he imagines is in love with him, Emma considers to be an overindulgence in "Mr. Weston's good wine" (p. 129), ironically suggesting the link between material and mental fruitfulness. Highbury abounds in such run-away fancies: Mr. Woodhouse imagines himself in danger of sickness; Mrs. Elton imagines that she and her husband are social leaders; Harriet imagines Mr. Elton returns her love and then later imagines the same thing with Mr. Knightley; Mr. and Mrs. Weston fancy a union between Emma and Frank Churchill. Of course, Emma's own fancies create the novel's major action: she imagines a past and a married future for Harriet Smith; she imagines an interest between Mr. Dixon and Jane Fairfax; and, she imagines herself infallible. The Frank Churchill–Jane Fairfax disguised engagement deceives the Highbury inhabitants, promoting a good number of delusions. The motif of disguise becomes both comic and pathetic when Miss Bates' nimble and erratic chatter causes everyone, and especially Emma, to believe she has no reason and consequently no feelings. Ironically Miss Bates' speech is no disguise at all; quite accurately she says, "'What is before me, I see!'" (p. 176), what she sees, she tells. 1 Although she possesses no imagination,
she makes no use of her reason. Reason also achieves a fruitful stature in Highbury. Jane Fairfax, one of the most reasonable characters, combines beauty and accomplishments with a capacity for moral error, which the reader regrets because of the person Jane is, rather than the morality she sins against. Distinguished by his forthright attitudes to practical life, Mr. Knightley also possesses verbal and intellectual wit. Instead of robbing him of humour or giving him a purely ironic wit, Austen allows Knightley some seemingly disinterested word-play, including a bi-lingual pun on Frank Churchill:

"Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable in French, not in English. He may be very 'amiable,' have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him." (p. 149)

This total social fecundity, an extension of "vital feeling", contrasts, but does not always conflict with, Emma's fancies which create artificial surges of vital feeling. The activity of Highbury, when Emma and Harriet go to Fords the day after the Coles' dinner-party, not only reflects the state of Emma's mind but also illustrates the particular contrast between surface and deep comedy:

Harriet, tempted by every thing and swayed by half a word, was always very long at a purchase; and while she was still hanging over the muslins and changing her mind, Emma went to the door for
amusement!—Much could not be hoped from the traffic of even the busiest part of Highbury;—Mr. Perry walking hastily by, Mr. William Cox letting himself in at the office door, Mr. Cole's carriage horses returning from exercise, or a stray letter-boy on an obstinate mule, were the liveliest objects she could presume to expect; and when her eyes fell only on the butcher with his tray, a tidy old woman travelling homewards from shop with her full basket, two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone, and a string of dawdling children around the baker's little bow-window eyeing the gingerbread, she knew she had no reason to complain, and was amused enough; quite enough still to stand at the door. A mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer. (p. 233, my italics)

Emma expects to see familiar objects, and people doing busy jobs; instead she sees lively human, but anonymous, activity. Reality's activity more than matches that of her imagination; in fact, it shows the limited sphere of Emma's vision of life. Somehow Emma's attractive, fanciful imagination, the surface comedy, must be sympathetically aligned with the deeper comedy of Highbury's vitality.

None of Austen's previous novels link comedy and education through sympathy with the appearance of spontaneity that Emma possesses. By losing artistic, moral and social sensibility under the spell of her self-deceiving fancies and regaining them with the help of experience and love, Emma learns the positive, vital quality of understanding. Although Jane Fairfax's superior playing prompts Emma to practice "vigourously an hour and a half" (p. 231), it is her attachment to Mr.
Knightley that begins to return to Emma the artistic sensibility she sacrificed while drawing Harriet. Like Elizabeth Bennet on a similiar visit, Emma, at Donwell Abbey, Knightley's home, shows her natural taste:

She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant... its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up... the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes, which stretching beyond the garden at an equal distance from the river, seemed the finish of the pleasure grounds.—It led to nothing; nothing but a view at the end over a low stone wall with high pillars, which seemed intended, in their erection to give the appearance of an approach to the house, which never had been there. Disputable, however, as might be the taste of such a termination, it was in itself a charming walk (pp. 358-360).

The picturesque style which might have delighted a young Marianne Dashwood does not merit approval here, providing instead an ironic comment on Emma's artificial and imaginative conception of her own "approach" to Donwell Abbey through "young Henry", her sister, Isabella's son. While Emma has enough artistic taste to reject the false approach in its objectified form, she does not yet see the false approach of her imagination.

The following day Emma shows the extent of her sympathetic deficiency as she and Frank Churchill amuse themselves by speculating on the thoughts of the other picniers. Frank says that Emma
"only demands from each of you either one thing very clever... or two things moderately clever—or three things very dull indeed" (p. 370).

Like Mrs. Jennings, Miss Bates, pathetically familiar with her own limitations, exclaims:

"then I need not be uneasy... I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan't I?" (p. 370).

Emma, whose fancy has released her wit from any limitations of moral or civil realities, falls:

Emma could not resist.

"Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me—but you will be limited as to number—only three at once." (p. 370)

This, to the woman whom Emma has previously described to Harriet as one of the most sympathetic people in Highbury:

"she is only too good natured and too silly to suit me; but in general she is very much to the taste of every body... I really believe if she had only a shilling in the world, she would be very likely to give away sixpence of it" (p. 85).

Emma's behaviour, a form of surface comedy performed merely for effect, betrays her lack of feeling for the kind dullness of every day life. When Knightley speaks of her insult to Miss Bates:

Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off.

"Nay, how could I help saying what I did?... I dare say she did not understand me." (p. 374)

Knightley does not, however, allow Emma's fancy to
obscure the reason or feelings of others:

"Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance . . . Were she your equal in situation . . . She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old age must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion."

Knightley discloses the tragedy of Highbury, the inequality of situation in the land of plenty, which only good manners and good sense can compassionately counteract. On the surface Highbury glitters, but this surface can only be maintained through a knowledge of the social structures and charitable, not fanciful, attempts to resolve them. In this way Emma aligns surface and deep comedy but, unlike Pride and Prejudice, the novel does not achieve its resolution through the revitalization of rigidified structures. The social system is flexible; one can move down the class-scale, like Miss Bates, or with some difficulty and good manners one can move up, like the Coles. All is well in Highbury as long as no one is denied his own humanity. Emma's insult denies Miss Bates her individuality, and reduces Emma to the stature of the artificial Mrs. Elton. Repentent, Emma pays an early morning call the next day to Miss Bates and makes every attempt at civility. Moving from repentence to sympathy, Emma inquires after Jane. Miss Bates, in her most lucid
speech of the novel, details Jane's acceptance of employment. This further evidence of social-scale arouses Emma's sympathy even more:

Her heart had been long growing kinder towards Jane; and this picture of her present sufferings acted as a cure of every former ungenerous suspicion, and left her nothing but pity... She spoke as she felt with earnest regret and solicitude (pp. 379-380).

As well as alleviating the situation in which she has placed Miss Bates, Emma's sympathy counteracts her earlier fanciful suspicions of Jane's attachment to Mr. Dixon. When Harriet confesses her love for Mr. Knightley, Emma's sympathetic education becomes fully conscious. She immediately realizes that her own attachment to Donwell Abbey is the result of her attachment to its owner. This last lesson, the hardest to bear because with it she must acknowledge her own vanity and self-delusion, becomes a double lesson in sympathy. The creator of Harriet's illusions must not destroy Harriet; the imagination must acknowledge its previous lack of reason and compassion. The height of Harriet's aspirations promotes the regeneration of Emma's moral sensibility. Class levels exist for the protection of the individuals within them; if she had left Harriet alone, no harm would have been done. This further acknowledgement of the importance of social structures and Mr. Knightley's declaration of love
complete Emma's education. Although this realization comes mainly through Emma's attachment to the reasonable Mr. Knightley, the novel does not subordinate sensibility to sense, or imagination to reason.

No resolution can take place, no "new social unit" can form, without the help of imagination. Emma and Knightley do not feel able to marry without the support and consent of the most imaginative Mr. Woodhouse:

In this state of suspense they were befriended not by any sudden illumination of Mr. Woodhouse's mind, or any wonderful change of his nervous system, but by the operation of the same system in another way.—Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed one night of all her turkies—evidently by the ingenuity of man. Other poultry-yards in the neighbourhood also suffered.—Pilfering was housebreaking to Mr. Woodhouse's fears. . . . The strength, resolution, and presence of mind of the Mr. Knightleys, commanded his fullest attendance. (pp. 483-484)

A threat to Highbury's fecundity, the poultry theft becomes a personal threat to the only character who consistently resists change, promoting a resolution through "the operation of the same system in another way." The cornucopia of Highbury, its imagination, still exists, but instead of working against Emma by conflicting with the deeper human aims, it works for her, rewarding her education.

In Mansfield Park and Sense and Sensibility the heroines were educated through exposure to tragic
forces which directed them towards the vital patterns of life. In *Pride and Prejudice* and, to a limited degree, *Northanger Abbey*, the heroines were educated from rigid to flexible patterns of life through fortuitous circumstances, chance meetings and released frustrations. In *Emma* the power of capricious imagination unifies the two types of education. Emma's self-realization stems from her near tragic attempts to impose form on an external world already endowed with humane and reasonable forms. Fortunate circumstance, such as the poultry theft, increases the sense of social vitality. As in Fanny Price's education, the comic process of Emma's education makes functional what Emma has learned formally as moral decorum and proper social behaviour.

If Highbury had any fault for Austen, it might be the fault of Illyria, a world of imagination and dreams come true, which at times obscures ethical considerations by focusing on individuals. In *Persuasion* Austen explores the relation of the individual to the comic society in less imaginative surroundings, trying to create a more plausible solution to the conflicts of reason and emotion, ethics and aesthetics.
Footnotes

1 See Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, rev. ed. (1939; London: Oxford University Press, 1963), for an analysis of Miss Bates' speech as tangential rather than erratic (pp. 93-95) and her function in *Emma* as the reteller of all the events in Highbury (pp. 177-178).
Chapter Six

Persuasion

Persuasion resolves many of the artistic and ethical problems which the conflict between reason and emotion have presented in the earlier novels. In Anne Elliot, Austen re-examines the passive or incapacitated heroine. Possessing neither Elizabeth Bennet's wit nor Emma Woodhouse's imaginative vitality, she descends from the line of heroines which includes Elinor Dashwood, Jane Bennett and Fanny Price. However, she does not possess their youth or beauty. Like all three, Anne perseveres in her attachment to the man of her choice despite social obstacles. Only Mansfield Park rivals Persuasion for a widely travelled view of both social and physical worlds. Surface comedy, again the product of rigid patterning, never far from the burlesque, conflicts with the deep comedy of persistent love. Education, observed only as behaviour not as an index to moral judgment or human sympathy, now serves to unite Wentworth, a victim of rigid social patterns, and the persevering Anne.

Like Fanny, Anne uses her formal education to
rehabilitate someone else. She advises Captain Benwick, the man to later save Wentworth from a false marriage, to read "a larger allowance of prose in his daily study" especially

    memoirs of characters of worth and suffering
    ... as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind
    by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples
    of moral and religious endurances (p. 101).

When she finds herself the confidante of everyone at Uppercross, Anne's behaviour exhibits the completeness of her moral education:

    She could do little more than listen patiently,
    soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other; give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbours, and make those hints broadest which were meant for her sister's benefit. (p. 46)

Well-schooled in decorum and civility and capable of understanding and assessing the actions of others, Anne attempts to reconcile a complex situation. The arrival of Captain Wentworth and the ensuing tangled relationships with the Musgrove sisters and Charles Hayter expose the major deficiency in Anne's character, her inability to act. She expresses a silent wish that her role as moral mediator might have artistic scope:

    Anne longed for the power of representing to them all that they were about, and of pointing out some of the evils they were exposing themselves to. She did not attribute guile to any of them. (p. 82)

Anne becomes more active as the novel develops.
Instead of maintaining artistic detachment, she becomes a moral exemplar for Captain Wentworth by actively participating in society:

Her character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness . . . At Lyme, he had received lessons of more than one sort. The passing admiration of Mr. Elliot had at least roused him, and the scenes on the Cobb, and at Captain Harville's had fixed her superiority.
(pp. 241-242)

Anne achieves the capacity to act through a series of dislocations. Cast out of Kellynch by her father's inadequacies, installed as visitor at Uppercross, and then as visitor to Lyme and Bath, Anne becomes more active as her vision of the world expands. Again Austen uses the description of setting to echo the heroine's feelings. In much the same way that the street in front of Ford's reflected the activity of Emma's mind, the description of Lyme and its environs creates a perfect setting for Anne:

Charmouth, with its high grounds, and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation (p. 95)

Retired sweetness and "unworned contemplation" characterize Anne in her passive role. But freed from the restraints of her family's sterile sense of social position and aided by the changed setting, Anne blooms
again and acts when Louisa has her near fatal fall
on their final day in Lyme. Believing in nature rather than
artificiality, Anne regretfully accompanies Lady Russell
to Bath:

Lady Russell . . . entering Bath on a wet afternoon
. . . amidst the dash of other carriages, the heavy
rumble of carts and drays, the bawling of newsmen,
muffin-men and milkmen . . . made no protest.
. . . Anne did not share these feelings. She
persisted in a very determined, though very silent,
disinclination for Bath; caught the first dim
view of the extensive buildings, smoking in the
rain, without any wish of seeing them better (p. 135).

Detesting the artificiality of Bath's society, Anne
tells Wentworth, at Lady Dalrymple's concert, that the
Lyme experience was not in the least distressing:

"The last few hours were certainly very
painful . . . but when pain is over, the remembrance
of it often becomes a pleasure. One does not love
a place the less for having suffered in it,
unless it has been all suffering, nothing but
suffering—which was by no means the case at
Lyme. . . . So much novelty and beauty! I have
travelled so little, that every fresh place would
be interesting to me—but there is real beauty
in Lyme" (pp. 183-184).

Although more optimistic than Keats's "in the very
temple of Delight/Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran
shrine,"¹ the mixture of strong emotions, joy and
sorrow "recollected in tranquillity"² suggests that
emotional as well as intellectual sympathy has been
absorbed into the process of education. Made comic
instead of tragic through the agency of memory which
expands the distance from which the experience is viewed, emotional sympathy reinforces the positive actions at Lyme, preparing for the strength of Anne's attachment to Mrs. Smith in Bath. Langer's concept of "vital feeling" given expression, would apply to Anne's education; she gains the ability to act and display her feelings. Both the rational mind and the irrational emotions educate Anne from passive perseverance to a display of strong emotion when she speaks to Captain Harville of Benwick's affection for Louisa Musgrove:

"Oh!" cried Anne eagerly, "I hope I do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures. . . . All the privilège that 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." (p. 235)

The surface social world, beset with comic delusions of heirarchy, from which Wentworth, Anne's opposite, makes his way to a knowledge of the vital principles of conduct, proves as much a hazard to the lovers' union as Anne's passivity. The danger lies in Wentworth's acceptance of surface actions and judgments. He exhibits this tendancy in the conversation with Louisa Musgrove which Anne overhears:

"Your sister is an amiable creature; but yours is the character of decision and firmness . . . It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive
a character, that no influence over it can be depended on. . . . Here is a nut . . . To exemplify, a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot anywhere . . . My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm."

(p. 88)

Such determination without a conception of principle only teaches Louisa to act forcefully, not rationally, in the expectation of reward, a lesson which Wentworth regrets when Louisa "determines" to jump down the steps at Lyme and falls (p. 109). In his confession to Anne, after she has accepted his proposal, he admits that his pride prevented him from recognising her worth:

In his preceding attempts to attach himself to Louisa Musgrove (the attempts of angry pride) . . . he had not understood the perfect excellence of the mind with which Louisa's could so ill bear a comparison . . . He had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind. (p. 242)

Such unwarranted pride dominates the novel's surface comedy where it is mocked as false vanity. Sir Walter Elliot, and his daughters, Elizabeth and Mary, typify falsely based pride. Resisting change and present circumstance with more vigor than Mr. Woodhouse, Sir Walter retreats into the Baronetage where

he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one . . . any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt (p. 3).
Like the burlesque portraiture of *Northanger Abbey*, though less benevolent, the picture of Sir Walter given in the novel's opening pages draws the limits of his past present and future actions:

Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and situation. (p. 4)

Opposed to the Elliots and at times to Captain Wentworth are the Crofts who rent Kellynch Hall. Having no excessive sense of personal dignity (their carriage is always overturning) nor personal vanity (the Admiral removes the mirrors from Sir Walter's dressing room, p. 128), they represent the happy normalcy and deep comic vitality of a well-matched couple. Anne acknowledges them as the proper owners of the Kellynch natural world:

she had in fact so high an opinion of the Crofts . . . that however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal, she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners'. (p. 125)

However, the Musgroves rather than the Crofts prove to be the major educating force for Wentworth. In spite of the outwardly ludicrous and offensive effusions of Mrs. Musgrove, over her son whom alive nobody had cared for, Wentworth, after a minimal display of distaste, commiserates with her:

There was a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth's face . . . a certain glance of his
bright eye, a curl of his handsome mouth, which convinced Anne, that instead of sharing in Mrs. Musgrove's kind wishes as to her son, he had probably been at some pains to get rid of him. . . . in another moment he was perfectly collected and serious . . . Mrs. Musgrove was of a comfortable substantial size, infinitely more fitted by nature to express good cheer and good humour, than tenderness and sentiment . . . Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as deep a right to be in deep affliction, as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain,—which taste cannot tolerate,—which ridicule will seize. (pp. 67-68)

Wentworth, hardly in a position to ridicule the conjunction of appearance and reality or reason and emotion, learns even more from Louisa's false determination. Just as strong emotion recollected in tranquillity forms part of Anne's education, turning tragedy into comedy with the absorption of the incidents at Lyme into a larger vision of life, false emotion recollected ludicrously and false determination acted upon near tragically, promote Wentworth's recognition of Anne's worth. Once Captain Benwick falls in love with Louisa, Wentworth begins to descend from the surface comedy to the deep comedy of love.

Both Anne's learned capacity for action and Wentworth's acquired ability to discriminate between surface values and real worth free them from frustrating restraints. The restraints of family and Lady Russell
who, when offering advice, "was in the place of a parent"(p. 346), forced Anne "into prudence in her youth"(p. 30). Freed from the restraining effects of his pride, only jealousy of Mr. Elliot (p. 241) prevents Wentworth from declaring himself until he overhears Anne speaking with Captain Harville. With the overcoming of these obstacles, he proposes and the comic resolution takes place. With the comic resolution comes a vital physical regeneration. The sense of physical beauty, parodied as vanity in Sir Walter, receives its proper rehabilitation in Anne through the power of affection. When Wentworth tells her:

"to my eye you could never alter" [she smiled and let it pass. . . . the value of such homage was inexpressibly increased to Anne, by comparing it with former words, and feeling it to be the result, not the cause of a revival of his warm attachment. (p. 243)

Instead of sermonizing, Anne's inward comment allows the restoration of the balance between aesthetics and ethics to take place naturally. The central figure of moral good, the detester of artificiality, now has an exterior equal to her moral beauty. This restoration creates an atmosphere of unselfishness. The magnanimity of Anne's not speaking recalls Elizabeth Bennett's decision not to tease Darcy or Mr. Woodhouse's final act of imagination. But, while both Pride and Prejudice and Emma strive to
maintain the smooth surface of social appearance, *Persuasion* looks on the damaging evils of pride in Sir Walter and charm in Mr. Elliot only to laughingly dismiss them.

Because *Persuasion* differs so sharply from *Emma*, appearing to retreat from that exciting, imaginative, "green world" of Highbury to a burlesque of social attitudes and individual posings, some critics have thought the novel was unfinished. In particular, the social structure in *Persuasion*, divided sharply between those characters concerned with appearance and position and those who are warmly human and unself-conscious, allows for as many disguises as are present in *Mansfield Park*. But the ethical elements in the comic resolution suggest anything but retreat. Sir Walter and Elizabeth do not receive a punishment equal to that of Mrs. Norris or Julia Rushworth. No one really worries about Sir Walter who "'will never set the Thames on fire'" (p. 32). As for his daughter, whom "Thirteen winters' revolving frosts had seen... opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded" (p. 7), no one is pained to hear that she "must long feel that to flatter and follow others, without being flattered and followed in turn, is but a state of half enjoyment" (p. 251). Even Mr. Elliot,
the wearer of a more incidious disguise, may receive
his just, but humourous, reward from the false "Penelope"
(p. 23), Mrs. Clay:

He soon quitted 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 . . . Mrs. Clay's affections had overpowered
her interest, and she had sacrificed, for the young
man's sake, the possibility of scheming longer
for Sir Walter. She has abilities, 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.
(p. 250, my italics)

The abrupt change to the present tense suggests that
the comic world will go on to deliver its own vital,
poetic justice. If Mr. Elliot is to be punished, the
punishment will equal his crimes. Anything but a retreat,
the reconciliation of surface and deep comedy in *Persuasion*
is the least dissatisfying of all of Austen's resolutions.
By creating a comic process in which Anne's education to
expression in the surface world and Wentworth's education
to the recognition of deep feeling balance the two types
of comedy by reaching toward one another, Austen
unites the effects of fortunate circumstance and
vital individual delight. Major events such as the
Crofts renting Kellynch, Louisa's fall at Lyme, Mrs.
Smith's appearance at Bath, fortunate circumstances
which move Wentworth and Anne closer together, alternate
with seemingly minor occurrences as Anne's overhearing Wentworth and Louisa, or Wentworth's overhearing Anne and Captain Harville. The hero and heroine achieve more than the tragicomic education of Elinor Dashwood or Fanny Price, more than the sympathetic education of Emma Woodhouse; they achieve a perfect union of surface and depth. *Persuasion* appears to be a finished novel, not only because of Austen's comment to her niece on its readiness for publication, but also because Austen's treatment of the characters and the action, the comedy and the education, grows out of everything she has previously written. With such a growth, such a perfect union, pernicious artistic and ethical problems have fallen away. Austen has learned about her craft what Mrs. Smith has learned about gossip:

"It does not come to me in quite so direct a line as that; it takes a bend or two, but nothing of consequence. The stream is as good as at first; the little rubbish it collects in the turnings is easily moved away." (pp. 204-205)

For Austen, the "stream" is not only "as good as at first", it has revealed surprising depth and vitality.
Footnotes


3See W.A. Craik, Jane Austen: The Six Novels (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 188.

4The numerous Homeric references suggest that Persuasion might be seen as a reworking of the return of Odysseus, from Penelope's point of view (the true Penelope, Anne Elliot).

5"I have a something ready for Publication, which may perhaps appear about a twelvemonth hence." (Letters, p. 484) "You will not like it, so you need not be impatient. You may perhaps like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me." (Letters, p. 487)
Afterword

From this examination of Austen's six novels we can observe that five major concerns are treated as aspects of the comic education: reason, emotion, imagination, aesthetics and ethics. In the main, the central characters can be divided into those who attempt to impose superficial and often rigid patterns derived from these five concerns on the existing structure of reality and are comically educated through the breaking of those patterns and the establishing of new perspectives, and those who, with a deep understanding of these concerns, are educated to a surface expression of their inner vitality through the comic action of frustration and release.

In Northanger Abbey Catherine Morland, victimized by her Gothic imagination, gains practical aesthetic and ethical values from her emotional attachment to Henry Tilney, a character of reason and wit. Surface comedy originating in parodied aesthetic sensibility gives way to the deep comedy of growing love. Northanger Abbey fails artistically, however, because the reader
does not know enough of the interior identities of the characters; the surface comedy is more vital.

Attempting to correct this deficiency in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen employs double heroines, Elinor and Marianne, reason and emotion or deep comedy and surface comedy. Marianne's taste for the Gothic picturesque, a false aesthetic, opposes and eventually gives way to the aesthetic of nature espoused by Edward. Elinor, contrasted with her more expressive sister, must learn to give surface expression to the love she feels deeply. The education of sympathy, enacted with the help of Lucy Steele and Willoughby who have a nearly tragic effect upon the heroines, causes the loss of selfishness, whether reasonable or emotional, and creates an expanded understanding of the surrounding world. Neither *Sense and Sensibility* nor *Northanger Abbey* can provide an ethically satisfying society, and the lovers are therefore secluded at the end of the novels.

In *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy and Elizabeth, both representatives of reason and emotion, are victims of the prevailing social delusion, the dehumanization of people into objects. Elizabeth's education occurs as she turns from the false aesthetic and ethic of appearance, embodied in Wickham, to the true aesthetic of unadorned nature. Darcy is educated by what Elizabeth
tells him of his appearance when he proposes. Both move from an inaccurate perception of surface values, where neither is particularly self-aware, to self-realization and a deep understanding of their mutual love from which they revitalize the dehumanized social values. In the successful resolution both characters triumph over the social pattern of rigid objectification.

Another passive heroine, Fanny Price in Mansfield Park reintroduces strong ethical considerations as she gradually learns to express herself. She and Edmund, both believing in the deep values of life, balance Mary and Henry Crawford who believe in surface values. The creators of surface comedy, which depends on the false aesthetic and ethic of ceremony and self-interested manners, are punished and the practitioners of the deep comedy of growing love are rewarded. This resolution does not prove entirely satisfactory because here, as in Northanger Abbey, the surface comedy contains a certain amount of vitality, especially in the characters of Mary and Henry, which the deep comedy needs.

In Emma Austen returns to a separation of deep comedy and surface comedy in Mr. Knightley and Emma. Emma's imagination tempts her to try to restructure the already productive Highbury society. Again a false aesthetic, revealed by Emma's alteration of actuality in Harriet's portrait, gives way to a true aesthetic of nature.
Gradually Emma's imaginative pre-conceptions are eroded by reality and finally destroyed through her sympathetic understanding of Miss Bates's situation and the recognition of her own love for Knightley. However, sensing the danger of the capitulation of emotion and imagination to pervasive reason, Austen definitely establishes Highbury as an imaginative society. But, a well-defined and functional ethic is not always clear in Highbury where individual imagination may at any time attempt to rigidify the social structure.

In her final novel, *Persuasion*, Austen attempts to solve this ethical deficiency by having Anne represent the deep comedy and Wentworth the surface comedy. Anne's acquisition of emotional expression meets Wentworth's recognition of her love amid a world prone to delusions of fixed social order. Partial punishment of the deluded characters, rather than total banishment, constitutes part of the benevolent ethical resolution, but the perfect match of Anne and Wentworth develops it even more powerfully. The aesthetic of natural beauty and emotion, "recollected in tranquillity", suggests a union of aesthetics with the ethic of temperance or patience.

The problems faced and their attempted solutions in the six novels show that the fictional
worlds painted on "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory" were large enough for artistic and philosophical contentions of size and resolutions of satisfaction.
Footnotes

A Selected Bibliography


Meredith, George. *An Essay on Comedy.* See Bergson.


