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**Jane Austen and the Reader:
Rhetorical Techniques in
*Northanger Abbey, Pride and
Prejudice, and Emma***

by

Carolyn G. Boles

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Jane Austen and the Reader:
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Prejudice*, and *Emma*

by

Carolyn G. Boles*

Jane Austen cannot follow readers into any other time . . . The reader is the only traveller. It is not her world or her time, but her arts, that is approachable.

—Eudora Welty¹

What is there about Jane Austen's work that makes the reader a *traveller*? What is there about her art that makes it *approachable*? Wayne Booth thinks that the answers to these two questions lie in an understanding of Austen's mastery of the rhetoric of narration.² This present investigation is concerned with Austen's rhetorical techniques in three of her six novels, *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*, chosen because they are generally considered to be representative of her early, middle, and late work.

According to Booth, rhetorical techniques are any devices of the storyteller's art that shape or manipulate a reader's response to the work.³ The present investigation examines Austen's rhetorical techniques in matters of style, characterization, narrative method, and the narrator-reader relationship. Because her techniques are so closely related in application, a certain amount of repetition is useful to the investigation: for example, some aspects of style affect characterization; some aspects of characterization affect narrative methods; and irony affects all four categories.

In her use of these rhetorical devices, Austen has but one aim — that of involving her reader in a fictional world in which the "underlying motif . . . is the disparity between appearance and reality."⁴ She demands, therefore, that the reader becomes involved with her analytical processes.

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¹Eudora Welty, "A Note on Jane Austen," *Shenandoah*, 20 (Spring 1969), 7.

²Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 244.

³Booth, *Fiction*, preface.

⁴Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue*, p. 242.

I

STYLE

i. Conceptual Terms

As a novelist, Jane Austen employs general or conceptual terms extensively. Words like *reason*, *good sense*, and *self-command* appear on almost every page. She also makes frequent ironic statements (Isabella Thrope's "laughing eye of utter despondency" in *Northanger Abbey*; Mrs. Bennet's "querulous serenity" in *Pride and Prejudice*; and Mr. Woodhouse's "happy regrets" in *Emma*).⁵ Indeed, she often sustains irony in long passages with complex effects. With these devices—her consistent use of conceptual terms and her frequent application of the ironic statement—she exercises her reader's perception and judgment.

Although scholars have suggested that, in her use of conceptual terms, she is merely following in the tradition of Samuel Johnson and other eighteenth-century writers like one ". . . who inherits a properous and well-ordered estate,"⁶ she nevertheless employs this ". . . vocabulary of the eighteenth-century morality and aesthetics with maximum precision."⁷ In fact, her vocabulary takes on added dimensions as she ventures ". . . beyond anything she might have learned from Johnson."⁸ Indeed, her strength possibly lies in the manner in which she consistently ". . . combines and recombines the elements of her more than ample discriminative vocabulary in delineating her character's morals, temperaments, and minds."⁹ Thus, she manages to awaken the reader's interest in her carefully chosen terms, earns his acceptance of them, refines his understanding of them, and finally invites his use of them in formulating his own analysis of behavior and his evaluation of action. By her frequent use of general and abstract terms, she is, in effect, "schooling" the reader.¹⁰ Obviously, these conceptual terms, which offer the reader criteria for judgment of character, are the most significant

⁵Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (New York: Signet Classic-New American Library, 1965), p. 56; *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 164; *Emma* (New York: Signet Classic-New American Library, 1964), p. 82. Future references to these works appear in the text as *NA*, *PP*, or *E*, respectively.

⁶Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, p. 107.

⁷A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development*, p. 49.

⁸Robert Scholes, "Dr. Johnson and Jane Austen," *PQ*, 54 (1975), 381.

⁹Scholes, p. 381.

¹⁰David Lodge, *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel*, p. 99.

aspect of her vocabulary.¹¹ Page cites a number of Austen's keywords (both nouns and adjectives), the most frequent of which are *manner*, *address*, *amiable*, *civil*, *easy*, *courteous*, *gallant*, *polite*, *openness*, *reserve*, *artless*, *temper*, *judgment*, *benevolence*, *candour*, *respectable*, *genteel*, *clever*, *knowledge*, *understanding*, *genius*, *well-informed*, *sensible*, *rational*, *prudent*, *delicacy*, *firmness*, *integrity*, *principle*, *rectitude*, *resolution*, *self-command*, and *steadiness*.¹² It is Austen's repeated and careful application of these terms to character that encourages the reader to adopt them as his own tools for character analysis. For example, in the following passage, Austen, through her narrator, employs conceptual terms in describing Bingley and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*:

Between Bingley and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in spite of a great opposition of *character*. —Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the *easiness*, *openness*, *ductility* of his *temper*, though no *disposition* could offer a greater contrast to his own, and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Darcy's *regard* Bingley had the firmest reliance, and of his *judgment* the highest opinion. In *understanding* Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever. He was at the same time *haughty*, *reserved*, and *fastidious*, and his *manners*, though *well bred*, were not *inviting*. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence. (*PP*, 10; emphasis added)

Readers accept the narrator's assessments of character, here, because they reflect the behavior of Bingley and Darcy as observed earlier in the scene at the Meryton assembly. Austen has also allowed the narrator to describe each character from a variety of approaches, as suggested in *temper*, *disposition*, *regard*, *judgment*, *understanding*, and *manners*. In fact, the reader, who is even further enlightened about Darcy by the narrator's remarks concerning Bingley's temper, concludes that Bingley likes an easy, compliant friend. On the other hand, he also values Darcy for his *regard* and *judgment*. Finally, it is obvious that each values the other for very different and perhaps, mutually flattering reasons (one is flexible and can be led; the other, masterful). At the same time, *haughty*, *reserved*, and *fastidious* (describing Darcy at the close of the passage) contrast significantly with *easiness*, *openness*, and *ductility* (at the beginning), as the narrator points out that Darcy is well-bred, but not inviting. Thus, the reader accepts the first half of the

¹¹Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen*, p. 55.

¹²Page, pp. 67-76.

evaluation, because he has come to trust the narrator; and he will also accept the second half, because he himself has already *seen* such behavior in Darcy. By repeatedly balancing her characters' actions and speeches in conceptual terms, Austen brings "both the universal and local into focus."¹³ She rates individual actions on a general scale to reveal "the general principles that underlie . . . individual variety."¹⁴ After first providing her reader with examples of the behavior of her characters, she then allows the narrator to introduce these characters in conceptual terms. By this twofold approach to character, Austen assures the reader that her characters have been carefully measured by her reliable standards of behavior. When the narrator points out that Colonel Fitzwilliam is ". . . about thirty, not handsome, but in person and address most truly the gentleman [who enters] into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred man" (*PP*, 118), the reader knows at once that the Colonel measures up to this evaluation, because Austen has favorably compared him, in several respects, with all other gentlemen of well-bred demeanor.

Austen's conceptual terms, because of her manner of employing them, take on a "life of their own . . . as absolutes," making universal the experience which they designate.¹⁵ Because of their abstract qualities, these terms appear to be "fixed by reason alone and therefore [are] eminently shareable with others."¹⁶ Thus, as absolutes, fixed by reason, they are "freed from the fluxations of merely personal opinion" until they "command assent" from the reader.¹⁷ In other words, Austen's reader takes for granted the standards implied by these terms and tends to accept them. In fact, Austen often refines a reader's understanding of them. For example, when the narrator remarks that Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* has "neither genius nor taste," the context (both the situation and the phrases used to describe it) clearly reveals what is meant by a lack of genius and taste. The narrator informs the reader that after Elizabeth had played several pieces on the pianoforte at Sir William Lucas's party,

. . . she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked

¹³Litz, p. 51.

¹⁴Babb, p. 9.

¹⁵Babb, p. 9.

¹⁶Babb, p. 9.

¹⁷Babb, p. 9.

hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it has given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have insured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with more pleasure, though not playing half so well. (*PP*, 16)

Noting that Mary "was always impatient for display" and that she had "a pedantic air and conceited manner" emphasizes her lack of taste. Moreover, the comment that her hard work was motivated by vanity and a desire for accomplishments (but not from any love of music) also points up her lack of genius. This evaluation is then rounded out by a comparison of her musical talents with Elizabeth's skillful performance, which was easy and unaffected and a pleasure to hear.

On the other hand, Austen may expand a reader's concept of a term by employing it in a variety of ways. For example, *elegance* has been noted as one of her more flexible words, used to describe "manners, mind, language, air, and the physical appearance of people or things," or to suggest the proper balance between adequate and too much, "an optimum point just short of excess."¹⁸ Indeed, the concept of *elegance* is of much significance to *Emma* in which it implies a "quality . . . that the heroine both admires in others and seeks to exemplify herself."¹⁹ For example, when Emma first encounters Harriet, she concludes that the woman lacks only "a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect" (*E*, 20). She also determines that she herself will undertake to supply what Harriet lacks by making her a friend, particularly because Harriet's "inclination for good company and power of appreciating what was elegant and clever [e.g., Emma herself] showed that there was not want of taste" (*E*, 22). Emma honestly admits that Jane Fairfax, whom she dislikes,

. . . was very elegant, remarkably elegant, and she had herself the highest value for elegance . . . Jane's was a style of beauty of which elegance was the reigning character, and as such [Emma] must, in honour, by all her principles, admire it; elegance which, whether of person or of mind, she saw so little in Highbury . . . There, not to be vulgar was distinction and merit. (*E*, 132)

¹⁸Scholes, p. 382.

¹⁹Page, p. 57.

The narrator, also, points out that Jane enjoyed "the rational pleasures of an elegant society" while she lived with the Campbells (*E*, 130). When Churchill agrees that Jane is elegant, Emma concludes that "there must be a very distinct sort of elegance for the fashionable world if Jane Fairfax could be thought only ordinarily gifted in it" (*E*, 154). On the other hand, she feels that Mrs. Elton, who is said to be "elegantly dressed," lacks true elegance—"ease, but no elegance." Nevertheless, she considers that Mrs. Elton's "person was rather good; her face not unpretty; but neither feature nor air nor voice nor manner were elegant" (*E*, 213). Thus, when Mrs. Elton is "astonished" at finding Mrs. Weston "so very ladylike" (she had been Emma's governess), Emma springs to Mrs. Weston's defense, pointing out that the "propriety, simplicity, and elegance [of Mrs. Weston's manners] would make them the safest model for any young woman" (*E*, 220). Unfortunately, Mrs. Elton misses the hint, and her manners remain unchanged. Moreover her elegance is merely superficial when she appears at a Hartfield dinner only "as elegant as lace and pearls could make her" (*E*, 231). As for Mr. Elton, Emma had earlier judged him a "young man whom any woman not fastidious might like." Although she knew that he was considered handsome and that his person generally was much admired, she sensed in him "a want of elegance of feature which she could not dispense with" (*E*, 29). When he proposes to her, she is shocked by his "presumption in addressing her," because she considers him her inferior "in talent and all the elegancies of the mind" (*E*, 110). Finally, when he invites most of Highbury to a ball, persons whom Emma considers her social inferiors, she flatly avows that "his indifference to a confusion of rank [borders] too much on inelegance of mind" (*E*, 157). Thus, in *Emma*, by using *elegance* as a standard for correctness, taste, and culture, Austen expands the reader's concept of the term.

At the same time, she may also refine a reader's understanding of a word by means of a character's definition. For example, one observes Mr. Knightley as he defines *amiable* while counseling Emma about Frank Churchill:

"No, Emma; your amiable young man can be very amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very *amiable*, have good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy toward the feelings of other people—nothing really amiable about him." (*E*, 120)

In a similar way, both Henry Tilney and his sister Eleanor in *Northanger Abbey* define *nice* when they tease Catherine over her use of the word:

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

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

"While, in fact," cried his sister, "it ought only to be applied to you, without any commendation at all. You are more nice than wise." (*NA*, 91)

Thus, Austen, encourages the reader's interest in a precise use of conceptual terms.

By means of another approach to character, she also invites the reader to utilize her conceptual terms in analyzing behavior and evaluating action. It is important to realize that she always considers character more significant than physical appearance. Some suggest that Austen's reader knows Emma's mind and character far better than Emma does because of this emphasis upon character.²⁰ As far as Emma's physical appearance is concerned, the reader merely learns that she is "handsome" (*E*, 5) and has "the true hazel eye" (*E*, 32). A further example of this emphasis upon character occurs in *Emma* when Austen introduces John Knightley, as follows:

Mr. John Knightley was a tall, gentlemanlike, and very clever man; rising in his profession, domestic, and respectable in his private character; but with reserved manners which prevented his being generally pleasing, and capable of being sometimes out of humour. He was not an ill-tempered man, not so often unreasonably cross as to deserve such a reproach; but his temper was not his great perfection; and, indeed, with such a worshipping wife, it was hardly possible that any natural defects in it should not be increased. The extreme sweetness of her temper must hurt his. He had all the clearness and quickness of mind which she wanted, and he could sometimes act an ungracious or say a severe thing. (*E*, 76-77)

Manners, temper, and mind—one learns much about Knightley's character, but little about his physical appearance—"tall" and "gentlemanlike" being vague projections. Because Austen is so much more concerned with human conduct than with physical appearances, the reader must also be similarly concerned and make use of her conceptual terms in analyzing character.²¹ In doing so, he finds that Austen's so-called "admirable characters" are most helpful, because they employ these same terms for the same purpose.

²⁰Page, p. 57.

²¹Page, p. 58-59.

Page observes that her admirable figures usually make "serious use of abstract language," whereas her foolish and simple ones exhibit concrete vocabularies.²² For example, Mr. Knightley (an admirable character) consistently has concern for the conduct of others (especially Emma's); whereas Mr. Woodhouse (a foolish person) talks about gruel, boiled eggs, apple tarts, and the necessity of changing one's stockings after being in the rain. Emma (who is in Knightley's category) is very much concerned about character and conduct (even though she is often mistaken in her ability to discern the motives of others); whereas Harriet treasures a piece of court-plaster and the stub of one of Mr. Elton's old pencils. Clearly, Austen's language ". . . provides labels correspond to realities that can be detected by observation and reflection."²³ Lodge proposes that her

. . . subtle and untiring employment of this vocabulary, the exact fitting of value terms to events, the display of scrupulous and consistent discrimination, have a rhetorical effect which . . . cannot long be resisted without picking up the habit of evaluation and resigning, for the duration of the novel at least, the luxury of neutrality.²⁴

Austen compels the reader to evaluate behavior. The very act of identifying it, of attaching labels to it, makes it intelligible and worthy of consideration. Therefore, the correct application of Austen's conceptual terms to character is an important responsibility of the reader.

ii. Irony

Austen's use of irony to point out the disparity between appearance and reality, considered by some to be the "underlying motif of her novels," greatly influences the reader.²⁵ In her novels, irony is "not merely an attitude [but] a method of presentation, organization, analysis, and judgment."²⁶ Although it may take many forms, her verbal irony is that which initially attracts the reader, causing him to focus perceptively upon character and event. Here, "the proper signification of the words constitutes the appearance; the designed meaning, . . . the reality," and Austen's readers find it appealing

²²Page, p. 59.

²³Page, p. 85.

²⁴Lodge, p. 99.

²⁵Babb, p. 242.

²⁶W. C. Craik, *Jane Austen: The Six Novels*, p. 64.

because it leaves something for them to do.²⁷ As she employs irony, it has a distancing effect upon the reader, the ironic turns in her language enabling him to maintain the correct emotional distance from which to make impartial judgments of character. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, when the narrator observes that "Miss Bingley's congratulations to her brother, upon his approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere" (PP, 264), one finds himself at a comfortable distance from which to judge impartially the extent of Miss Bingley's hypocrisy. At other times, Austen's irony evokes within the reader feelings of amusement in addition to a sense of sympathetic understanding. When Darcy and Elizabeth, in *Pride and Prejudice*, meet unexpectedly and their embarrassment makes conversation difficult, one learns that they are awaiting the arrival of Elizabeth's aunt and uncle. Austen's narrator informs the reader that, to Elizabeth, it seems "time and her aunt moved slowly" (PP, 175), emphasizing the wry humor of the situation and, especially, Elizabeth's embarrassment.

The pervasiveness and variety of Austen's ironic language produce what Hough describes as a "continual effervescent quality . . . that gives [her] work its special flavour."²⁸ Her reader is, at first, attracted to this quality in her writing and, later, is encouraged to exercise his powers of perception regarding character. Often, the author needs no more "than a single word out of key with its context to signal her purpose."²⁹ Indeed, much of her verbal irony is created by an unexpected emphasis upon word or phrase, usually in the form of oxymoron, as in the earlier mentioned "busy idleness" of Mrs. Allen (NA, 56), Mrs. Bennet's "querulous serenity" (PP, 164), Mr. Woodhouse's "happy regrets and fearful affection" (E, 82), or Elizabeth's "delight of unpleasant recollection" (PP, 146), to name but a few.

Booth notes Austen's use of a word or phrase belonging to different stylistic levels in creating an ironic effect.³⁰ For example, in the opening sentence of the last chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen writes, "Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters" (PP, 265). In this sentence, the phrase, *got rid of*, obviously conflicts with the level of language to be found in the rest of the statement. It is ironic because it expresses so well Mrs. Bennet's purpose in

²⁷G. C. Sedgewick, *Of Irony: Especially in Drama*, pp. 5-6.

²⁸Graham Hough, "Narrative Dialogue in Jane Austen," *Critical Quarterly*, 12 (1970), 210.

²⁹Page, p. 196.

³⁰Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, p. 69.

life—the disposing of her daughters in marriage to whomever she could, in any way that she could. Moreover, it probably suggests her failure to appreciate Jane and Elizabeth, truly her “two most deserving daughters.”

It has also been demonstrated that Austen uses, with some frequency, what has been called the “slightly grand epithet” to refer to ordinary matter in achieving an ironic effect.³¹ For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the narrator refers to Miss Bingley as Darcy’s “faithful assistant” (PP, 26), a phrase meant to suggest her scrambling efforts to become Mrs. Darcy (always sharing his activities, even to reading the second volume of a book while he reads the first). Austen, again, employs the so-called grand epithet in the following passage describing Mr. Bennet’s relationship with his wife:

To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, *the true philosopher* will derive benefit from such as are given. (PP, 162-63; emphasis added)

The phrase, *the true philosopher*, conveys several meanings at once, e.g., Mr. Bennet’s regard for himself, and his deficiencies as a true philosopher.

Occasionally, she will juxtapose an hyperbolic statement and one of candour and reason for an increased ironic effect, particularly in *Northanger Abbey* when, with some frequency, she parodies the conventions of popular fiction.³² For example, one is told that Catherine’s trip to Bath with the Allens “. . . was performed with *suitable quietness* and *uneventual safety*. *Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero*” (NA, 14; emphasis added). Here, Austen is pointing up the absurdity of the conventions of popular fiction, first, in the juxtaposition of these two sentences, and, secondly, in her use of such phrases as *uneventful safety* and *one lucky overturn*.

At times, Austen may employ clichés ironically. In a letter to a niece, Anna Austen, who was writing a novel, she objects to the serious use of a trite expression:

Devereux Forester’s being ruined by his vanity is extremely good; but I wish you would not let him plunge into “a vortex of dissipation.” I do not

³¹Andrew H. Wright, *Jane Austen’s Novels: A Study in Structure*, p. 42.

³²Craik, p. 28.

object to the thing, but I cannot bear the expression; it is such thorough novel slang, and so old that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened.³³

She was often inclined, however, to make use of “thorough novel slang” or clichés when offering the reader an insight into a character’s weakness. For example, with clichés, she may emphasize a character’s overly dramatic attitude. In *Northanger Abbey*, when Catherine becomes upset because John tricks her into riding in his gig and causes her to break her promise to go walking with Henry and his sister, the narrator grandly states (in the best tradition of the sentimental novel): “And now I may dismiss my heroine to the sleepless couch, which is the true heroine’s portion; to a pillow strewed with thorns and wet with tears” (NA, 75). The dismissal serves the double function of parodying the conventions of popular fiction and of suggesting Catherine’s excessive reaction to the episode. When she later meets Henry at the theatre, she apologizes. Then, the narrator explains:

Before they parted . . . it was agreed that the projected walk should be taken as soon as possible; and, setting aside the misery of his quitting their box, she was, upon the whole, left one of the happiest creatures in the world. (NA, 79)

One smiles at Austen’s ironic use of *misery* and her concluding cliché, both of which imply Catherine’s youthful tendency to exaggerate.

On the other hand, Austen’s characters who utter clichés at once expose their shallow feelings and understanding. When Bingley, in *Pride and Prejudice*, leaves Netherfield, Mrs. Bennet expresses disappointment, saying, “Well, my comfort is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart, and then he will be sorry for what he has done” (PP, 156-57). This is strange comfort, indeed. Moreover, when Lydia elopes with Wickham, Mary Bennet says to Elizabeth, “This is the most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation” (PP, 198). On another occasion, she prompts Mr. Collins to send a letter, meant to comfort Mr. Bennet:

Let me advise you . . . to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affections for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence. (PP, 203)

³³William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters, A Family Record*, p. 359. The letter is dated 28 September 1814.

By assigning cliché-ridden dialogue to characters, Austen ironically exposes their shortcomings.

On the other hand, she often uses clichés in an ironic sense when depicting characters' affectations. One recalls, in particular, Mrs. Elton's comment that her husband, during their courtship, became so impatient over delays "that he was sure . . . it would be May before Hymen's saffron robe would be put on . . ." (*E*, 245); or her ironic evaluation of Harriet Smith's activities, whose collection of riddles was the "only mental provision she was making for the evening of life" (*E*, 57). Moreover, Mr. Collins' proposal to Elizabeth is a morass of clichés, overstatement, and confused syntax; and his convoluted sentences, designed to betray his lack of tact and any real feelings, are climaxed when he exclaims, "Now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection" (*PP*, 75).

Wright, who has studied Austen's use of the ironic device, antiphrasis, points out that "by forcing the words to stand self-contradicted," she alerts the reader to a description which he might otherwise overlook as being conventional.³⁴ For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, she prompts her narrator to comment that

. . . so pure and uncoquettish were [Isabella's] feelings, that, though [she] over-took and passed the two offending young men . . . , she was so far from seeking to attract their notice that she looked back at them only three times. (*NA*, 38)

One knows, by this time, that Isabella's feelings are not at all "pure and uncoquettish," but by her ironic use of these terms, Austen makes certain that the reader knows the exact nature of Isabella's actions.

Lascelles, who has studied Austen's use of irony, identifies a device which she calls the "counterfeit connexion" wherein Austen creates a "deliciously bland appearance of logical connexion."³⁵ To illustrate Austen's management of this ironic device, Lascelles cites Mr. Woodhouse's comment to Emma concerning his first encounter with Mrs. Elton: "Well, my dear, considering we never saw her before, she seems a very pretty sort of young lady" (*E*, 221). Clearly, there is no logical connection between the first and last portions of this comment, and Austen intentionally uses it as a fitting utterance for Mr. Woodhouse.

³⁴Wright, pp. 185-86.

³⁵Lascelles, pp. 144-45.

Closely resembling the effect of the "counterfeit connexion" is Austen's use of syntactical anti-climax for ironic purposes.³⁶ In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, when Isabella writes to Catherine, asking her to intercede in her behalf with Catherine's brother, the reader is at once as aware as Catherine of Isabella's insincerity because of Austen's use of syntactical anti-climax in the construction of the letter:

I am quite uneasy about your dear brother, not having heard from him since he went to Oxford, and am fearful of some misunderstanding. Your kind offices will set all right: —he is the only man I ever did or could love, and I trust you will convince him of it. The spring fashions are partly done; and the hats the most frightful you can imagine. (*NA*, 180)

The letter continues in almost endless fashion. However, a more subtle example of Austen's use of this device occurs in *Emma*, when Mrs. Churchill (a most unpleasant person) conveniently expires, and Austen has the narrator report the effect of this news upon Highbury in the following manner:

It was felt as such things must be felt. Everybody had a degree of gravity and sorrow; tenderness toward the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends; and in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried. (*E*, 307)

Austen's use of *curiosity* at the end of the passage immediately destroys the sympathetic attitude which she has established in the beginning. Because Mrs. Churchill has been presented as a thoroughly unpleasant character, the reader senses, here, that *curiosity* is probably the sincere reaction to the news of her death.

Austen occasionally paraphrases the speech patterns of the characters for ironic effect. When she has removed all intervening material by means of her narrator, the character stands condemned by his or her own words. For example, in *Emma*, when Mrs. Elton picks strawberries in Mr. Knightley's patch, she exclaims:

The best fruit in England—everybody's favourite—always wholesome. These the finest beds and the finest sorts. Delightful to gather for oneself—the only way of really enjoying them. Morning decidedly the best time—never tired—every sort good—hautboy infinitely superior—no comparison—the others hardly eatable—hautboys very scarce—Chile preferred—white-wool finest flavour of all . . . delicious fruit—only too

³⁶Wright, p. 188.

rich to be eaten much of—inferior to cherries—currants more refreshing—only objection to gathering strawberries the stooping—glaring sun—tired to death—could bear it no longer—must go and sit in the shade. (*E*, 284-85)

The narrator explains, "Such, for half an hour, was the conversation," and in that short time, Mrs. Elton has contradicted almost every opinion she has expressed.

Although Austen may confine her use of irony to a word or phrase in an otherwise bland passage, as has been illustrated, she may also allow it to dominate an entire passage. The following excerpt from *Northanger Abbey* will serve to demonstrate this sustained irony in her novels. In this episode, Catherine, her brother James, Isabella, and her brother James have just returned from a walk:

When they arrived at Mrs. Allen's door, the astonishment of Isabella was hardly to be expressed, on finding that it was too late in the day for them to attend her friend into the house: "Past three o'clock!" It was inconceivable, incredible, impossible! And she would neither believe her own watch, nor her brother's, nor the servant's; she would believe no assurance of it founded on reason or reality, till Morland produced his watch, and ascertained the fact; to have doubted a moment longer *then* would have been equally inconceivable, incredible, and impossible; and she could only protest, over and over again, that no two hours and a half had ever gone off so swiftly before, as Catherine was called on to confirm: Catherine could not tell a falsehood even to please Isabella; but the latter was spared the misery of her friend's dissenting voice, by not waiting for her answer. Her own feelings entirely engrossed her; her wretchedness was most acute on finding herself obliged to go directly home. It was ages since she had had a moment's conversation with her dearest Catherine; and, though she had such thousands of things to say to her, it appeared as if they were never able to be together again; so, with smiles of most exquisite misery, and the laughing eye of utter despondency, she bade her friend adieu and went on. (*NA*, 56)

In this passage (in reality Austen's paraphrase of Isabella's speech pattern), the author reveals many character traits. In the first section, she emphasizes Isabella's determination to attach James Morland (only his watch will convince her of the exact time). Moreover, in her repetition of *inconceivable*, *incredible*, and *impossible*, she exposes Isabella's predilection for the hyperbole. In the middle of the passage, the reader finally encounters Catherine with grand relief, because plain, unaffected Catherine, who may be dazzled by Isabella but who will not lie for her, is a most welcome change. However, Isabella's hyperbolic statements continue throughout the passage ("ages," "thousands of things to say," "never

to be together again"), and Austen concludes the passage masterfully by alluding to Isabella's insincerity, in two well-chosen oxymorons ("smiles of exquisite misery," and "the laughing eye of utter despondency"), thus leaving the reader with no doubts about Isabella, nor Catherine by contrast.

A similarly ironic passage occurs in *Pride and Prejudice* in which Mr. Collins, who has been rejected by Elizabeth, is warmly received by Charlotte Lucas:

His reception . . . was of the most flattering kind. Miss Lucas perceived him from an upper window as he walked toward the house, and instantly set out to meet him accidentally in the lane. But little had she dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited her there.

In as short a time as Mr. Collin's long speeches would allow, every thing was settled between them to the satisfaction of both; and as they entered the house, he earnestly entreated her to name the day that was to make him the happiest of men; and though such a solicitation must be waved for the present, the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained. (*PP*, 85)

The clichés littering this passage suggest Mr. Collins' speech habits. Austen implies that he normally thinks in terms of throwing himself at Charlotte's feet, of earnestly entreating her, and of desiring her to name the day that was to make him the happiest man alive. Moreover, Austen enlivens the passage with ironic word choices ("[Charlotte] instantly set out to meet him accidentally in the lane"; and "in as short a time as Mr. Collin's long speeches would allow"). The final sentence is possibly the most heavily ironic in the entire passage. Clearly, Charlotte wants a home (an establishment), even if Mr. Collins comes with it. Her desire for him is "pure and disinterested," because it is his house which she openly covets. On the other hand, Mr. Collins wants a wife—any woman will do. Indeed, Miss Lucas is the third woman whose hand he has sought within a week. Thus, by means of the sustained irony in this passage, Austen removes her reader to the proper distance from which to make impartial judgments of character.

One final aspect of Austen's use of irony remains to be considered because of its significance to the involvement of her reader. Weighing the "subtlety and range" of her ironic language, Hough detects a "playfulness" in her methods which, he is convinced, is the result of an "unself-conscious delight in virtuosity, in exercising a

skill with the utmost delicacy and variety of which it is capable."³⁷ Moreover, it occurs whenever Austen is using irony to distinguish between appearance and reality or to expose hypocrisy, adding to her reader's enjoyment, who is willingly performing what the language requests as he probes beneath the surface of character.

II

CHARACTERIZATION

Austen conditions her reader's responses to her characterizations in a number of ways, mainly, however, by emphasizing character rather than physical appearances. She compels the reader to accept real rather than ideal characters and invites him to focus upon the manners of speech and careful word choices which accompany her characterizations. Moreover, because many of her characters, especially the major ones, often exemplify thematic concerns, it is through them that she exercises the reader's perceptions, judgments, and sympathies.

That she is more interested in character than physical appearance is demonstrated in the episode that occurs toward the end of *Northanger Abbey* in which the narrator recounts the marriage of Eleanor Tilney to a nameless young man whom Austen's reader has not encountered in the narrative. In fact, the little information that pertains to him has come by way of his laundry list which Catherine, during her "Gothic phase," has discovered in a "mysterious" cabinet and has promptly mistaken for a lost manuscript of some tortured being. By means of the narrator, Austen describes this young man as follows:

[Eleanor's] husband was really deserving of her; independent of his peerage, his wealth, and his attachment, being to a precision the most charming young man in the world. Any further definition of his merits must be unnecessary; the most charming young man in the world is instantly before the imagination of us all. (NA, 210)

There is, of course, an obvious parody, here, of the conventions of popular fiction, in which unbelievably suitable mates for young ladies appear miraculously at the opportune moment. Nevertheless,

³⁷Hough, p. 211.

this approach to character is consistent, in two ways, with Austen's usual method of character portrayal. First, she details her character's merits and, then, refuses to divulge the merest hint about physical appearances, explaining that "the most charming young man in the world is instantly before the imagination of us all." For that matter, Austen never describes in any detail the physical appearances of her heroines. For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, she states initially that Catherine Morland "had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without much colour, dark lank hair, and strong features," and concludes, "so much for her person" (NA, 9). If Austen, here, is satirizing the lengthy descriptions of heroines in popular fiction, as some scholars believe, her ignoring the convention stimulates the reader's interest.³⁸ In contrast to her vague references to Catherine's less than ideal physical appearance, Austen provides the reader with several paragraphs which describe Catherine's heart, disposition, manners, and mind, and in the remainder of the novel, attends to the development of Catherine's character, never mentioning her physical appearance beyond a few references to sparkling eyes.

Austen's other heroines receive similar treatment. In *Pride and Prejudice*, when Darcy first encounters Elizabeth Bennet, he finds her "tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt [him]" (PP, 7). Austen, then, informs the reader that

... when they next met, he looked at her only to criticize. But 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 was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression in her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had 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. (PP, 15)

By the time that they meet accidentally at Pemberley, Darcy thinks her one of the "handsomest women of [his] acquaintance" (PP, 185), yet none of his comments creates a very precise picture of Elizabeth, although each is a major source of the reader's information about Elizabeth's physical appearance. Here, Austen's method is appropriate, however, because Darcy's changing attitude about Elizabeth's appearance parallels his growing love for her. Thus, his comments suggest both Elizabeth's appearance and his own change of heart.

³⁸Booth, *Fiction*, p. 127.

In the opening sentence of *Emma*, Austen, through the narrator, informs the reader that Emma is "handsome," the only comment in the novel about her physical appearance. The reader, therefore, must derive a concept of Emma's appearance from the comments of Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley in the fifth chapter. Following a lengthy discussion of Emma's character, Mrs. Weston exclaims, "How well she looked last night!" Mr. Knightley replies, "Oh! you would rather talk about her person than her mind, would you?" Then, from Mrs. Weston's additional enthusiastic comments, the reader learns that Emma has "the true hazel eye—and so brilliant" and the "bloom of full health and such a pretty height and size." Mr. Knightley adds, "I have not a fault to find with her person Considering how handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it" (E, 32-33). Thus, the reader must dwell upon character rather than appearance. On the other hand, it may be that these heroines are not necessarily beautiful. Catherine is not; but Elizabeth is to the man who loves her. And Emma is "handsome." Yet the reader is never given descriptions of their faces, hair styles, and dresses, although he is fully apprised of their minds, manners, and hearts. The truth of these descriptions, always stated in conceptual terms, is further supported by the heroines' actions. Although Austen's characters lack the glamor of ideally perfect heroes and heroines, they interest the reader because they are human, never perfect, neither entirely good nor bad.³⁹ In fact, the complexity of human beings is one of the important lessons which Catherine Morland must learn in *Northanger Abbey*. When she emerges from her Gothic delusions in which she fancies that General Tilney has murdered his wife or, at best, has kept her prisoner in her room for many years, Catherine reaches the following conclusion:

Charming as were all of Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the Midland counties of England, was to be looked for. . . . Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. Upon this conviction, she would not be surprised if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney, some slight imperfection might hereafter appear; and upon this conviction she need not fear to acknowledge some actual specks in the character of their father, who, though cleared from the grossly injurious suspicions which she must ever

³⁹Margaret Shenfield, "Jane Austen's Point of View," *Quarterly Review*, 296 (1958), 306.

blush to have entertained, she did believe, upon serious consideration, to be not perfectly amiable. (NA, 166-67)

Commenting upon Austen's mixed characters, Ryle suggests that they are fashioned more after the "Aristotelian pattern of ethical ideas" than a Calvinist pattern, because they differ "from one another in degree and not in kind."⁴⁰ Austen's characters seem "alive all over" and, for this reason, are like real people, full of human contradictions and inconsistencies.⁴¹ Nor are her characters of one sex less mixed than those of the other. When Henry Tilney, in *Northanger Abbey*, talks with Catherine, he states:

I should no more lay it down as a general rule that women write better letters than men, than that they sing better duets, or draw better landscapes. In every power, of which taste is the foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes. (NA, 21)

Just as taste, or the lack of it, is equally divided between Austen's men and women, so are the other virtues and the weaknesses of the mind and heart. Mr. Collins' mind is hardly any stronger than Mrs. Bennet's. Good-hearted Mrs. Allen's interest in finery differs little from kind Mr. Woodhouse's interest in health. Moreover, Lydia's sense of guilt and remorse is every bit as absent as Wickham's. None of Austen's virtues and vices is the sole province of one sex. Her men and women are "equally responsible, both morally and socially, for their actions."⁴² Because virtue, vice, and accountability are equally divided between the sexes, her characters are realistic.

Neither are the members of one social class more unmixed in character than those of the other social classes. Although she does not attempt to portray members from all levels of society, she does concern herself with a small variety whose members are class conscious. Nevertheless, admirable qualities (or their opposites) have no connection with social rank in Austen's novels. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, with her impertinent questions and managing propensities, is as crass and unpleasant, in her own way, as is Mrs. Elton (the former Miss Hawkins from a Bristol manufacturing family) in hers. At first, Darcy feels that Elizabeth's London business relatives are severe drawbacks to her desirability, but after he meets them, he respects them. Although Emma is put off by Robert Martin's appearance, Mr. Knightley detects a soundness of character in the

⁴⁰Gibbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, pp. 114-15.

⁴¹Ryle, p. 115.

⁴²Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, p. 74.

young farmer, because his "manners have sense, sincerity, and good humor to recommend them; and his mind has . . . true gentility . . ." (E, 54). Austen's characters appeal to the reader because they display a mixture of strengths and weaknesses to be found in real people, regardless of sex or social position. This realistic quality of her characters is enhanced by her use of irony, as earlier demonstrated. Paulson notes that irony in the portrayal of character creates "a kind of verisimilitude," a psychological reality.⁴³ Shenfield points out that Austen's use of irony in presenting character consists entirely of "showing the individual's picture of himself (which is always quite false) and, at the same time, hinting at the true character of the individual."⁴⁴ Austen's reader sees Catherine, Elizabeth, and Emma as they are, at the same time knowing that Catherine sees herself as a heroine in a Gothic romance, that Elizabeth sees herself as an astute judge of character, and that Emma sees herself as a matchmaker, gifted with an insight into the true state of everyone's heart.

Austen's use of irony to emphasize realism in behavior extends beyond her characters' visions of themselves to include that which happens to them. Such events are the ordinary, non-glamorous kinds which a reader might expect to encounter in the course of a life-time; they are not the material of romances. For example, when Henry Tilney, in *Northanger Abbey*, proposes to Catherine, Austen, through the narrator, reports that Catherine

. . . was assured of his affection; and that heart in return was solicited, which, perhaps, they pretty equally knew was already his own; for, though Henry was not sincerely attached to her, though he felt and delighted in all the excellencies of her character and truly loved her society, I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own. (NA, 204)

This particular romance obviously has not received ideal treatment by Austen, nor are Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* the material of conventional romance. Instead of experiencing the traditional love-at-first-sight, Elizabeth and Darcy, who at first intensely dislike each other, only gradually come to experience

⁴³Ronald Paulson, Introduction, *Fielding: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 6.
⁴⁴Shenfield, p. 298.

love (PP, 190-91). Moreover, Austen uses this same approach in managing Emma Woodhouse's romance. She allows Emma to fall in love, not with the dashing young Frank Churchill with whom she expects to fall in love, but with Mr. Knightley, sixteen years her senior, a man who has scolded and lectured her constantly throughout her young life, and who still recognizes her faults in spite of his love for her. Obviously, this is a far more practical and realistic love than that of popular fiction in which the lover views the loved one through rose-colored glasses. Austen knows that Emma requires this kind of practical love, and although she allows this character to show improvement, the changes in Emma are not "total, unshaded, or unqualified."⁴⁵ Nor would Austen's readers have admired Emma as much as they probably do had she been allowed to emerge as "a mere prig." She is one of Austen's thoroughly mixed characters in which "altruism and self-interest are intimately blended."⁴⁶ Thus, because the changes in Emma's character are not total, she is realistic. Nor is Mr. Knightley, for that matter, presented as a perfect character. His initial evaluation of Frank Churchill, biased by jealousy, eventually changes when he finds no reasons for envy. Austen, through her narrator, comments ironically upon this situation:

[Mr. Knightley] found [Emma] agitated and low. Frank Churchill was a villain. He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desparate. She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill, then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow. (E, 344)

By treating the very good and wise Mr. Knightley with sympathetic irony, Austen creates another realistic figure. Actually, one suspects that there is no totally sympathetic character to be found in any Austen novel, because she mixes all of her characters with "a little absurdity" that serves as the leavening for their more admirable qualities.⁴⁷ At times, the reader may discover himself, like Mr. Knightley, "doating on [her characters], faults and all" (E, 368).

Austen gives a great amount of attention to the speech habits of her characters, showing much concern for their thoughts, word choices, and mannerisms. Although most novelists make use of an omniscient narrator and block characterizations, few depend entire-

⁴⁵John Hagan, "The Closure of *Emma*," *SEL*, 15 (1975), 553.

⁴⁶Hagan, p. 553.

⁴⁷Lascelles, p. 216.

ly upon these devices in portraying character, but often allow the actions and conventions of their characters to verify the information given by the narrator or contained in the block characterizations.⁴⁸ The speeches which Austen devises for her characters coordinate with the material which she provides in her block characterizations, in at least three ways. First, she often reverses the conventional pattern and engages her characters in a lengthy dialogue before providing the reader with information by means of a block characterization as, for example, she presents Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*. Consequently, the reader is prepared to accept the narrator's evaluation of these characters when it finally occurs in the final paragraph of the chapter because it coincides with his own opinions derived from overhearing the Bennets' earlier conversation. In fact, the subject of the Bennets' conversation tells the reader much more about them than the narrator reveals in his later commentary. Thus, his comments merely put into perspective what the reader has already overheard.

If Austen first introduces a character by means of block characterization, she immediately allows the character to speak for himself and to exemplify the traits which she has just described. For example, in *Emma*, she introduces Mr. Woodhouse through her narrator, noting that on the eve of Miss Taylor's wedding, he

. . . composed himself to sleep after dinner, as usual, and [Emma] had then only to sit and think of what she had lost . . . She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful.

The evil of the actual disparity in their ages (and Mr. Woodhouse had not married early) was much increased by his constitution and habits; for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time. . . [Emma was melancholy] till her father awoke and made it necessary to be careful. His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed, fond of everybody that he was used to and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable . . . and from his habits of gentle selfishness and of being never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself, he was very much disposed to think Miss Taylor had done as sad a thing for herself as for them. . . Emma smiled and chatted as cheerfully as she could to keep him from such thoughts; but when she came, it was impossible for him not to say exactly as he had said at dinner: "Poor Miss Taylor! I wish she were here again. What a pity it is that Mr. Weston ever thought of her!" (E, 6-7)

⁴⁸Martin Steinman, Jr., "The Old Novel and the New," in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, pp. 293-94.

Throughout the scene that follows, Austen allows Mr. Woodhouse in his conversation to exhibit the traits mentioned in the narrator's previous commentary. Page notes that Mr. Woodhouse's speeches are largely a collection of "idle wishes and imaginary difficulties" often phrased in a negative form.⁴⁹ While the reader listens to Mr. Woodhouse confirm the narrator's observations, his reaction to Emma is also being shaped, as he notes her patience with Mr. Woodhouse and her sincere efforts to elevate her father's spirits.

Austen may also use a character's speeches to develop the greater part of the portrait. For example, in *Emma*, through her narrator's initial description of Mr. Knightley, she merely informs the reader that

Mr. Knightley, a sensible man about seven- or eight-and-thirty, was not only a very old and intimate friend of the [Woodhouse] family, but particularly connected with it as the elder brother of Isabella's husband. He lived about a mile from Highbury, was a frequent visitor, and always welcome . . . Mr. Knightley had a cheerful manner which always did [Mr. Woodhouse] good. (E, 9)

To this most sketchy portrait, the narrator, now and then, adds only brief comments, noting, for example, that Mr. Knightley "was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (E, 10). Nevertheless, the main impression of Mr. Knightley which the reader eventually receives is derived from this character's speeches which consistently reveal him to be interested in those matters of behavior which the narrator has already urged the reader to regard as highly important. Thus, through their conversations, Austen's characters "may reveal lack of taste or discretion, a brash moodiness, or a more serious indifference to right conduct and sound principles."⁵⁰ For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, the word choices exhibited by Isabella Thorpe and her brother John reveal that they are artificial and thoughtless people. Isabella's conversations consist of one hyperbole after another: "dearest," "sweetest," "prettiest," "amazingly," "excessively," "horrid." When she announces that she has been waiting "these ten ages at least," in reality it has been only five minutes. She describes a friend of hers as "one of the sweetest creatures in the world . . . as beautiful as an angel." However, this particular friend is not admired by most men, nor even by Isabella, who confesses

⁴⁹Page, p. 142.

⁵⁰Page, p. 150.

that there is "something amazingly insipid about her" (NA, 30-32). Page observes that Isabella's brother John shows "a fondness for the cant terms of the man of fashion, the dandy or blood."⁵¹ Certainly, John's speeches are liberally outfitted with oaths and colloquialisms, like "tittuppy" for *unsteady* (NA, 54). He also exhibits poor taste when referring to older people, remarking on one occasion that his mother's "quiz of a hat" makes her "look like an old witch" (NA, 40); and when speaking of Mr. Allen, he states, "Old Allen is as rich as a Jew—is he not?" (NA, 52). He even says of Catherine, "She is as obstinate as—", leaving the narrator to explain that "Thorpe never finished the simile, for it could hardly have been a proper one" (NA, 85). Every time the Thorpes speak, the reader's opinion that they are vain, silly, shallow people is strengthened. Their utterances are especially indecorous when compared to the speeches of Henry and Eleanor Tilney, or even Catherine, who exhibits a youthful immaturity but not affectation. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins' pompous speech strengthens the reader's conception of his character. His sentences are long, involved conglomerations of threadbare, insecure phrases, and Mary Bennet's pedantic utterances are little better. Lydia's slangy phrases ("A little sea-bathing would set me up for ever" *PP*, 185) imply a lack of self-restraint, a trait that is verified, even before her elopement with Wickham. On the other hand, Darcy's speech is formal, yet sincere, and free of clichés. Elizabeth's speech is lively and witty, so much so that Austen often uses her to puncture Darcy's starchy manner: "There is a fine old saying, which every body here is of course familiar with—'Keep your breath to cool your porridge,'—and I shall keep mine to swell my song" (*PP*, 16). Or she may use her wit to keep events in perspective. When, for example, the arrival of Lady Catherine's carriage at Mr. Collins' personage has thrown the household into an uproar: "And is that all?" cried Elizabeth. "I had expected at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lady Catherine and her daughter!" (*PP*, 110).

In *Emma*, Mr. Woodhouse's use of "inflated language" ("a vast deal of rain," or "it rained dreadfully hard" *E*, 9) emphasizes his most "limited universe."⁵² Mrs. Elton's conversation marks her as ill-bred and pretentious, referring to her husband as "Mr. E." and to Mr. Knightley as "Knightley" (*E*, 220). Her pretensions are further suggested by her use of foreign phrases (*caro sposo*, *E*, 220; and

⁵¹Page, p. 153.

⁵²Page, p. 143.

carte-blanche, *E*, 281), and by the rapturous terms with which she describes Maple Grove, the seat of her brother-in-law, Mr. Suckling. In contrast, there is the "plain, unaffected, gentlemanlike English" of Mr. Knightley (*E*, 356) which avoids the vulgar, "the hackneyed and the merely fashionable . . . and does not succumb to the temptation to call little things by big names."⁵³ Page points out, however, that Austen never exploits the idiosyncracies of a character's speech "for their own sake, but to enlist speech in the cause of a more refined character-portrayal."⁵⁴ Page further observes that, for the most part, she builds her characterizations in dialogue "by hints rather than by emphatic strokes; and the scale of variation is so finely adjusted that even slight departures from the norm" can influence a reader's reaction to character.⁵⁵ Thus, dialogue is an important tool in characterization.

Austen may also shape her reader's responses to characters by attending to their conversational manners. Harding has noted, for example, that the speeches of some of Austen's less admirable characters are not generally a "part of a true conversational interchange."⁵⁶ In *Northanger Abbey*, Mrs. Allen is one who seldom has a real conversation with anyone. On one particular occasion, the narrator confides in the reader that Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe appeared to be engaged

. . . in what they called conversation, but in which there was scarcely ever any exchange of opinion, and not often any resemblance of subject, for Mrs. Thorpe talked chiefly of her children, and Mrs. Allen of her gowns. (NA, 28)

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins' speeches also rarely mesh within the conversational fabric, especially when he is talking *at* (he never talks *with*) sensible characters. When he proposes to Elizabeth, he has no inkling of the person to whom he is proposing. Moreover, because he is not trying to engage in any form of a two-way communication, he does not believe her refusals. When she pleads to be listened to "as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart" (*PP*, 76), he merely thinks she is being coquettish. Finally, the reader is told that Mr. Collins' problem is one of "wilful self-deception [to which] Elizabeth would make no reply, and im-

⁵³Page, p. 158.

⁵⁴Page, p. 140.

⁵⁵D. W. Harding, "Character and Caricature in Jane Austen," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, p. 88.

⁵⁶Harding, p. 88.

mediately and in silence withdrew . . ." (PP, 76). A similar situation develops when Mr. Collins, upon learning that Mr. Darcy is Lady Catherine's nephew, feels obligated to pay his respects. Austen explains that, while Elizabeth watched, Mr. Collins

. . . prefaced his speech with a solemn bow . . . Mr. Darcy was eyeing him with unrestrained wonder, and when at last Mr. Collins allowed him time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Mr. Collins, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and Mr. Darcy's contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length of his second speech, and at the end of it he only made him a slight bow, and moved another way. (PP, 68-69)

When Mr. Collins returns to Elizabeth, he boasts, "Mr. Darcy seemed much pleased with the attention. He answered me with the utmost civility . . ." (PP, 69). As a man wholly concerned with appearance and form, Mr. Collins hardly grasps the reality of other people or their responses to him. For that matter, in *Emma*, Mrs. Elton, who is filled with a desire to talk and occupied with a sense of her own importance, does not require any real exchange in conversation. When she first visits Hartfield, for example, she compares it, endlessly, to Maple Grove (her brother-in-law's estate), staircase for staircase, room for room, tree for tree, to which "Emma made as slight a reply as she could; but it was fully sufficient for Mrs. Elton, who only wanted to be talking herself" (E, 215). Thus, one observes Austen's versatility in shaping her reader's responses through the conversations of her characters.

It has been pointed out, as well, that Austen permits many of her characters to exemplify some aspect of her theme in every novel. Through the characters' understanding of theme, Austen is further able to expand the reader's awareness of her objectives by providing him with numerous opportunities in which to observe a variety of opinions. In all of her novels, she is concerned with the subject of reality, and many of her characters, knowingly or otherwise, create fictions for themselves or are imposed upon by the fictions of others. For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland has a twofold problem with fictions: she must learn, somehow, to distinguish between fiction and reality; and she must learn to understand people.⁵⁷ Completely immersed in a world of Gothic romance, she allows her imagination to run wild when she is invited

⁵⁷Luann Beach, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Jane Austen's Novels," Unpublished Dissertation, Stanford, 1971, p. 204.

to Northanger Abbey as Tilney's house guest. Here, she eventually becomes aware of "real-life fictions" and realizes, finally, that human beings, unlike the figures in Gothic tales, have mixed characters. On the other hand, Henry Tilney fictionalizes, too, but consciously so, and always for the delight in it. Meeting Catherine for the first time, he pretends to offer her "the proper attentions of a partner" and asks all of the standard questions about her visit to Bath and offers standard, affected replies, before explaining, "Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again" (NA, 19-20). Although some of Austen's other characters also fictionalize, "they are either unaware of it or unwilling to admit doing so."⁵⁸ For example, John Thorpe, who fancies himself a rake, is described by the narrator as ". . . fearful of being too handsome unless he wore the dress of a groom, and too much like a gentleman unless he were easy where he ought to be civil, and impudent where he might be allowed to be easy" (NA, 36). Although he never quite succeeds in projecting his rakish image, he is an accomplished liar. Indeed, his fictions about the wealth and importance of Catherine's family promote his match with Catherine, while his fictions about her poor and disreputable family succeed in having her expelled from Northanger Abbey in the best Gothic tradition. James Morland is duped by Isabella's promotion of herself as a romantic heroine until Frederick Tilney causes her to break the engagement. It is exceedingly helpful of Austen to take time to acquaint the reader with most of these characters' reading tastes. For example, Thorpe finds *The Monk* "a tolerably decent" novel, and he thinks that Mrs. Radcliffe's books "are amusing enough; . . . worth reading; some fun and nature in them" (NA, 39). One suspects him of being as deficient in literary taste and knowledge as he is in truthfulness. Both Henry and Eleanor Tilney have read and enjoyed *The Mysteries of Udolpho* for what it is (an entertaining fiction), but they do not confuse its narrative with reality (as Catherine does), or with "nature" (as Thorpe always seems to be doing). Thus, by means of these characters in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen permits the reader to observe a variety of problems related to a confusion of fiction with reality.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen examines human perception that is hampered by pride, or lack of it. Both Darcy and Elizabeth, for example, are portrayed as proud individuals with much self respect and a strong sense of responsibility. Austen points out,

⁵⁸Beach, p. 199.

however, that both must first overcome what she calls improper pride. Because of his natural reserve and haughty nature, Darcy insults Elizabeth at the Meryton assembly, and she is immediately blinded to his real worth. Because she takes pride in her ability to discern character, she persists in her error until Darcy overcomes his proud objections to her inferior background, although he is still proud enough to be confident of success when he proposes and states his case so badly that she brands him as being ungentlemanly and crushes his so-called improper pride (*PP*, 260).

Even the secondary characters in *Pride and Prejudice* exemplify Austen's theme as they display many varieties of improper pride. Lady Catherine, full of aristocratic pride, blunders into one foolish situation after another. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, proud of their newly gained status, conveniently forget their backgrounds in trade. At the same time, all three of these characters, in turn, parody Darcy's pride in rank. Mr. Collins demonstrates the effects of pride upon the weak-minded and takes much pride in his gross acts of servility to Lady Catherine. Moreover, his pomposity muddles his speech, and colossal self-esteem prevents him from showing consideration for the feelings of others. Sir William Lucas's excessive self-esteem stems from his having been knighted. Although it has given him a distaste for his business and an inflated concept of his own importance, it has not made him haughty, surprisingly enough. Rather, he takes pride in being civil to everyone. Mary Bennett, who takes pride in her ability to speak in a learned fashion on all subjects (even the subject of pride), suffers from an inflated notion of her abilities. Even modest and amiable Mr. Bingley exhibits some traces of distorted pride. Finally, Georgiana Darcy, who is not at all proud, is so shy and inexperienced in social matters that her manners often suggest that she is proud.

On the other hand, in this novel, the absence of pride (that is, the lack of self-respect) leads to problems. Charlotte's lack of self-respect permits her to sacrifice "every better feeling to worldly advantage" (*PP*, 88) when she marries Mr. Collins, having no affection nor respect for him. Also lacking in self-respect, Lydia humiliates her family by eloping with Wickham. Moreover, the fact that Mrs. Bennet can take pride in Lydia's hasty marriage reveals much about the nature of her pride. Wickham lacks pride enough to deal honorably with others. Mr. Bennet's lack of pride results in his irresponsible attitude toward his family. In Jane and the Gardiners, pride takes the form of reasonable, balanced self-respect. Thus, in these novels, Austen shapes her reader's concept of pride by the varieties of at-

titudes expressed by her characters.

In *Emma*, Austen shifts to an examination of human perception that is clouded by the imagination. At one point in the narrative, she has Mr. Knightley recall a line from Cowper—"Myself creating what I saw"—which most aptly describes the state of mind of the majority of her characters in this novel. Emma's problem is, of course, the central one. Although she is convinced that she is a most perceptive individual, she does not understand that her imagination distorts everything that she sees. She *imagines* that Mr. Elton loves Harriet; that Jane Fairfax loves Mr. Dixon; that Frank Churchill is love with her and that she has a slight affection for him; that Frank loves Harriet. At the same time, the imaginations of those around her also distort reality. Jane Fairfax loves Frank Churchill, but *imagines* he is beginning to regret their relationship. Frank loves Jane, but *imagines* Emma understands that he is merely courting her to conceal a secret engagement. Mr. and Mrs. Weston *imagine* (as does Mr. Knightley) that Emma loves Frank, and Mrs. Weston *imagines* that Mr. Knightley loves Harriet. Mrs. Eaton *imagines* that everyone is impressed with her talk about Maple Grove and *imagines* herself the center of Highbury's social world.

Although all of these characters display highly active imaginations, Emma possesses the most lively. It creates abundant problems for her and those around her. Clearly, she is "misled by her willful imagination as much as by deceptive appearance."⁵⁹ Always, she insists upon seeing things that do not exist, whereas Mr. Woodhouse insists upon *not* seeing things that do exist. Between Emma's willfully creative imagination and Mr. Woodhouse's wilfully negative imagination Austen has placed Mr. Knightley, whose imagination is the least colorful of all, even though it misleads him in understanding Emma's feelings for Frank. Unlike Emma and Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley consciously examines his perceptions to determine if they have been colored by his imagination. Thus, in *Emma*, Austen, by means of characterization, explores a variety of problems that occur when imagination interferes with an individual's perception.

Austen may often intentionally mislead the reader into accepting, at first, an attitude about character which is precisely the opposite of the one which he should eventually adopt. For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, although one knows that John Thorpe considers himself quite a rake, it is apparent that he "imposes little on even the

⁵⁹Beach, p. 130.

inexperienced heroine and not at all on the reader."⁶⁰ In fact, during their first encounter, Catherine, in spite of her youthfulness and diffidence, discovers that she dislikes his manners. By the time of their third meeting,

. . . the extreme weariness of his company, which crept over [her] before they have been out an hour, and which continued unceasingly to increase till they stopped in Putney Street again, induced her . . . to distrust his powers of giving universal pleasure. (NA, 56)

Although, at first, both Catherine and the reader conclude that Thorpe is a boorish man, not above lying, but nonetheless harmless, the startling revelation that his lying to General Tilney prompted the latter's erratic treatment of Catherine makes the reader suddenly realize that, until this point in the narrative, he has completely misjudged Thorpe's character. In his opinion, Thorpe is a boor as well as a petty villain. Although Austen has carefully laid the groundwork for this second opinion, she has managed it with craft, and the reader, smugly believing that he has already measured Thorpe's character, is quite capable of being taken unawares. Berger is convinced that Thorpe's change from inept rake to petty villain "is one of [Austen's] several ironic reminders . . . that works of fiction may educate their readers as well as their heroines."⁶¹

In her portrayals of Wickham and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen more subtly examines her reader's powers of discernment. For example, Wickham, at first, appears to have charm, is sociable, and evidently has the good taste to like Elizabeth. On the other hand, Darcy appears to be cool and reserved, and insults Elizabeth upon their first encounter. The contrast between these two men is one which the reader and Elizabeth feel strongly. Moreover, because Wickham enters the scene shortly after the appearance of the stuffy and pompous Mr. Collins, he confirms the notion that "in this novel only characters without inflated notions of wealth and rank can be rational, unprejudiced, and attractive."⁶² The additional fact that he dislikes Darcy earns him "an almost certain passport to Elizabeth's and the reader's affections."⁶³ Thus, when he complains of unjust treatment at Darcy's hands, the reader is prepared to believe him. Berger suggests that "Elizabeth's questions and Wickham's replies deftly disarm the reader of any likely

⁶⁰Carole Berger, "The Rake and the Reader in Jane Austen's Novels," *SEL*, 15 (1975), 531.

⁶¹Berger, p. 532.

⁶²James Sherry, "Pride and Prejudice: The Limits of Society," *SEL*, 19 (1975), 615.

⁶³Sherry, p. 615.

objections to Wickham's story"⁶⁴ Consequently, when Elizabeth concludes that Wickham's account is true (PP, 59), the reader agrees with her. This opinion is further strengthened when Jane defends Darcy, and when Miss Bingley (whose pettiness and snobbery the reader has already observed) attacks Wickham; particularly when Miss Bingley launches her attack "with an obvious falsehood," saying to Elizabeth, "I find that the young man forgot to tell you, among his other communications, that he was the son of old Wickham, the late Mr. Darcy's steward" (PP, 66). As Berger states, "after this display of malice . . . [the reader is] free to discount anything further she has to say."⁶⁵ Sherry argues that Darcy's companionship with Miss Bingley and her equally snobbish sister leads the reader to condemn Darcy through "a form of guilt by association."⁶⁶ Only when Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter does she, and the reader, realize that Wickham's conduct has been faulty:

She was not struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct She remembered also, that till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, he had told his story to no one but herself; but that after their removal, it had been every where discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr. Darcy's character, though he had assured her that respect for the father, would always prevent his exposing the son. (PP, 142-43)

Berger notes that, here, "the reader may discover . . . these improprieties and inconsistencies have also escaped his notice, even though they were available for detection."⁶⁷ In effect, Austen has created for the reader a situation similar to Elizabeth's, so that the reader suddenly sees "himself in the same position as the heroine who, having prided herself on her discernment, finds that it has not withstood the influence of prejudice."⁶⁸

Mr. Bennet also tests the reader's judgment of character. Until late in the narrative, the reader's opinion of Mr. Bennet has developed without prompting from the narrator or guidance from the other characters. Until this point in the tale, he has felt encouraged to like Mr. Bennet, for several reasons. First, Mr. Bennet

⁶⁴Sherry, p. 615.

⁶⁵Berger, p. 537-38.

⁶⁶Sherry, pp. 613-14.

⁶⁷Berger, p. 537.

⁶⁸Berger, p. 539.

has shown the good sense to value Elizabeth and to see Mrs. Bennet for what she is. Then, his witty style reminds the reader of Elizabeth and the narrator. Finally, he is alert and perceptive, a character whose traits are admired in the novel. However, when Elizabeth admits that Darcy has been fair in his comments about her family's behavior, and when she further openly admits her father's irresponsibility, the reader begins to reassess his former opinions about Mr. Bennet. Following Elizabeth's vain effort to persuade her father to prevent Lydia's trip to Brighton, the narrator admits that Elizabeth

... had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife. (PP, 163)

These are strong words, indeed, but the real seriousness of Mr. Bennet's abdication of his parental responsibilities strikes the reader fully when Lydia elopes with Wickham. Even Mr. Bennet himself realizes his error, now:

Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing and I ought to feel it . . . I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough. (PP, 205)

Of course, as he predicts, the impression does pass away: "When the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in seeking [Lydia] were over, [Mr. Bennet] naturally returned to all his former indolence" (PP, 212). After the Lydia episode, however, the reader is ever so much more aware of Mr. Bennet's paternal shortcomings and irresponsible behavior. It may be Austen's intention, here, to invite her readers to enjoy Mr. Bennet's brand of irony "even while she undermines it dramatically by widening the social contest of his actions and by rendering their effects upon those to whom he owes paternal affection."⁶⁹ Certainly, her portrayal of Mr. Bennet exercises the reader's perceptions and judgment.

⁶⁹Mary A. Burgan, "Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels," *JEGP*, 74 (1975), 542.

Frequently, Austen tests the reader's ability to experience sympathy for a character. With Miss Bates, in *Emma*, she provides a moral test for the reader as well as Emma. The rattling, rambling conversation of kind-hearted Miss Bates, at first, tends to convince the reader that she is meant to be a humorous caricature. However, Harding explains that Austen, here, is "going behind the ridiculous features of the caricature" to reveal a character deserving of sympathetic attention.⁷⁰ Several times, Austen "unexpectedly [gives] Miss Bates the moral advantage in a social situation with the effect of taking down a peg those . . . who have felt comfortably superior to her."⁷¹ One such instance occurs when Miss Bates accepts the blame for Frank Churchill's knowing that Mr. Perry intends to set up his own carriage. Although Frank was aware of Perry's intention, because Jane Fairfax had mentioned it to him in their private correspondence, he could not reveal his source of information. Although Miss Bates admits that she knew about the plans, she tried to keep them a secret, because Mrs. Perry held her confidence. She confesses in the following manner:

I never mentioned it to a soul that I know of. At the same time, I will not positively answer for my having never dropped a hint, because I know I do sometimes pop out a thing before I am sure. I am a talker, you know: I am rather a talker; and now and then I have let a thing escape me which I should not. I am not like Jane; I wish I were. I will answer for it, she never betrayed the least thing in the world. (E, 274-75)

Miss Bates's expression of fairness and honesty, here, prompts the reader to see her in a different light. She is no longer a foolish person, but a woman endowed with a conscience and the courage to admit her faults and accept her responsibility. When Emma, with her lively wit, pokes fun at her, Harding observes that, like Austen's readers, she "has let herself be trapped into regarding Miss Bates simply as a figure of fun."⁷² However, Austen makes it clear that Miss Bates also has feelings which are capable of being hurt. It is a fact to remind Emma and the reader "that Miss Bates is after all a person."⁷³ Although Mr. Knightley agrees with Emma that, in Miss Bates, "what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended, he, nevertheless, tells Emma:

⁷⁰Harding, pp. 102-103.

⁷¹Harding, pp. 102-103.

⁷²Harding, p. 103.

⁷³Harding, p. 103.

Were [Miss Bates] a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its change; I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to, and if she lives to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion . . . You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour—to have you now, in thoughtless spirits and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—before your niece, too—and before others, many of whom (certainly *some*) would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her. (*E*, 298)

This stinging rebuke brings Emma to tears. Because she senses that she has lost his respect, she also feels that her heart is accusing her of her transgressions. Thus, the reactions of Mr. Knightley and Emma reinforce the reader's growing awareness of Miss Bates as a realistic character most deserving of sympathetic understanding.

Through her methods of characterization, therefore, Austen, in the variety of ways just examined, is able to shape and direct her reader's responses to character, inviting him to consider the personality behind appearances. She appeals further to his interest in human behavior through her mixed characters that exemplify the strengths and weaknesses of all humanity. Moreover, she carefully constructs the speech patterns of her characters so as to expand her characterizations and, thereby, enhance the reader's conceptions of them as individuals. Her characters' thoughts, word choices, and conversations significantly affect her reader's perceptions, judgment, and sympathies. Finally, by allowing her characters, in the course of the narrative, to exemplify some aspect of her major theme, Austen expands the reader's awareness of her narrative purpose.

III

NARRATIVE METHOD

Austen, by means of her narrative method, prompts the reader to analyze and evaluate his own perceptions. Through her narrator's shifting perspective, she creates a double view for the reader, deftly combining scenes of dialogue with commentary on the characters to provide the reader with both objective and subjective material to synthesize. Her shifting narrative perspective, furthermore, enables the reader to view her fallible heroines with a proper balance of

sympathy and judgment. Her narrator preserves this balance in a variety of ways, prominent among which are an ironic arrangement of events and the use of direct and indirect apology and criticism. Watt points out that Austen's shifting perspective recalls the techniques of Richardson and Fielding.⁷⁴ Although her narrator is clearly no participating letter writer, Austen, nevertheless, projects through him a sense of "psychological immediacy," reminiscent of Richardson, by "shifts in point of view and extended inside views" of her main character.⁷⁵ Moreover, she maintains, through her narrator, a detached attitude, somewhat like that of Fielding's narrator, and supplies her reader with objective evaluations of characters and action. Rhetorically, her narrator's shifting perspective is an effective device that involves the reader in three levels of judgment. In general, her extended inside views of a heroine's thoughts and emotions evoke sympathy in the reader, whereas her external views allow the reader to exercise his judgment in evaluating the heroine's perceptions. Because Austen confronts her reader with this dual perspective, he, in turn, must construct a third view for himself so as to reconcile the material which he has been given. Important to an understanding of how Austen's dual view causes the reader to sort out his own perceptions are her techniques in support of her narrator's flexible perspective and their subsequent effect upon the reader's responses.

Because Austen's heroine is always the center of her narrative focus, the reader sees much of the narrative from the heroine's point of view. Although he is only on occasion allowed a glimpse into the thoughts of Austen's other characters, he is frequently taken into the mind of the heroine by means of a device known as the narrated monologue (*erlebte Rede*) which may have originated with Austen.⁷⁶ In this technique, a writer blends direct and indirect discourse to produce an effect not unlike that of "experiencing consciousness in the third person."⁷⁷ It is a device that occurs in all of her novels when Austen is depicting a heroine's "moments of inner crisis."⁷⁸ One example occurs in *Northanger Abbey*, when General Tilney suddenly and without explanation orders Catherine from his house. On this occasion, one observes the narrator's comments as

⁷⁴Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, p. 296.

⁷⁵Beach, p. 3.

⁷⁶Dorrit Cohn, "Narrated Monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style," *Comparative Literature*, 18 (1966), 107.

⁷⁷Helen Dry, "Syntax and Point of View in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 16 (1977), 89.

⁷⁸Cohn, p. 107.

they lead into and out of the material which suggests Catherine's actual thoughts:

She tried to eat . . . but had no appetite and could not swallow many mouthfuls. The contrast between this and her last breakfast in that room gave her fresh misery, and strengthened her distaste for everything before her. It was not four and twenty hours ago since they had met there to the same repast, but in circumstances how different! With what cheerful ease, what happy, though false security, had she then looked around her, enjoying everything present, and fearing little in future, beyond Henry's going to Woodston for a day! Happy, happy breakfast! For Henry had been there; Henry had sat by her and helped her. These reflections were long indulged undisturbed by any address from her companion, who sat as deep in thought as herself; and the appearance of the carriage was the first thing to startle and recall them to the present moment. (NA, 190-91)

If all material between the opening and closing sentences of this passage were to be replaced with a narrator's remark that Catherine missed Henry and thought about their last breakfast together, the passage would no longer have its initial effect, nor would it appeal as strongly to the reader's sympathy.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, by means of another narrated monologue, Austen permits access to Elizabeth's thoughts at the time of her meeting with Darcy at Pemberley. Although Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner make several favorable comments about Darcy,

. . . Elizabeth heard not a word, and wholly engrossed by her own feelings, followed them in silence. She was overpowered by shame and vexation. Her coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange it must appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man! It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself in his way again! Oh! why did she come? or, why did he thus come a day before he was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of his discrimination, for it was plain that he was that moment alighted from his horse or his carriage. She blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting. And his behaviour, so strikingly altered,—what could it mean? That he should even speak to her was amazing!—but to speak with such civility, to enquire about her family! . . . She knew not what to think, nor how to account for it. (PP, 172)

In this passage, the reader senses the extent of Elizabeth's embarrassment as Austen, by means of the narrated monologue, shows Elizabeth moving from embarrassment to regret to wonderment.

In *Emma*, Austen allows the reader to probe the thoughts of the heroine more frequently than in her other novels. Because Emma is such a fallible character, it is important that the reader understands

her strong and weak points. For example, after she realizes that she has been completely mistaken about Mr. Elton's intentions toward Harriet, she sorts out her thoughts in the following manner:

The hair was curled and the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable. It was a wretched business indeed. Such an overthrow of everything she had been wishing for. Such a development of everything most unwelcome! Such a blow for Harriet! That was the worst of all. Every part of it brought pain and humiliation of some sort or other; but compared with the evil to Harriet, all was light . . . How could she have been so deceived! He protested that he never thought seriously of Harriet—never! She looked back as well as she could, but it was all confusion . . . The picture! How eager he had been about the picture! And the charade! And an hundred other circumstances—how clearly they had seemed to point at Harriet! To be sure, the charade, with its "ready with"—but then, the "soft eyes"—in fact it suited neither; it was a jumble without taste or truth. Who could have seen through such thick-headed nonsense? (E, 108-109)

The following several paragraphs consist of additional narrated monologue, interrupted only occasionally by the narrator with remarks like "She looked back as well as she could," which function rather like stage directions. Readers are asked to consider the sincerity of Emma's contrite attitude as well as her snobbery in feeling that Mr. Elton's proposal is an offense to her pride. By means of such intimate views of Emma's thoughts, Austen reveals this character's virtues and shortcomings, clearly demonstrating that she is a mixture of kindheartedness and pride, a repentant woman, yet filled with a desire to meddle with the lives of others. Having such access to Emma's private thoughts allows the reader to know Emma better than she knows herself. Regardless of how sincere her repentance may be, Emma's pride and managing propensities are so apparent that the reader may well expect to find her in further difficulties before long.

On the other hand, Austen presents the external views of her characters in scenes of dialogue. Noting the dramatic qualities of her dialogue, Page points out that she was an "enthusiastic theatregoer, . . . fond of reading plays, and during her early years had . . . many opportunities of enjoying amateur theatricals."⁷⁹ It is possible that some of this activity is responsible for the quality of her dialogue. Rarely does Austen's narrator, when introducing such passages of dialogue, include descriptions of facial expressions or vocal tones.

⁷⁹Page, p. 114.

Indeed, as Craik notes, Austen's "powers of creating conversation—the actual cadences of the speaking voice—are such that incidental details of gesture and grimace are superfluous."⁸⁰ The weight of an entire scene always rests upon dialogue, as Austen demonstrates in the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*. Any additional commentary from the narrator regarding this scene would have been extraneous.

Although Austen does not rely entirely upon scenes of dialogue in her novels, she employs the device frequently and, thus, places additional demands upon the reader's judgment, because the narrator is never present to provide supplementary information. Here, the reader must exercise his powers of observation in drawing his own conclusion. Indeed, Lynch argues that Austen always reveals respect "for the reader and his judgement by 'showing' rather than 'telling' him much of her story, by allowing characters to reveal themselves much in the manner of characters in a drama."⁸¹ Actually, because of her frequent scenes of dialogue, her readers are like spectators at a drama, and she demands of them "a fusion . . . of superior knowledge and detached sympathy," e.g., an ironic attitude.⁸² By constructing scenes of dialogue around her heroine's perceptions, Austen further compels the reader to exercise his own perceptions in his pursuit of this "superior knowledge." For example, the relationship that develops between Captain Tilney and Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* illustrates her method of achieving "an easy balance between dramatic action and psychological exposition."⁸³ In this scene, Isabella, who has been waiting to hear about the Morland's financial arrangements for her coming marriage to James, has decided to attend a ball, but she confides in Catherine that she will not dance. Captain Tilney also attends the affair and declares, within Catherine's hearing, that nothing could induce him to dance. Soon, however, Captain Tilney and Isabella are dancing together. Later, when Catherine and Isabella meet in the pump-room, although Isabella refers frequently to Captain Tilney, Catherine suspects nothing, so that, when the man arrives and utters his half-whispered comment to Isabella—"What! Always to be watched, in person or by proxy!" (NA, 121)—Catherine is taken by surprise, although the reader is

⁸⁰Craik, p. 27.

⁸¹Catherine Mary Lynch, "The Reader as Guest: Jane Austen's Audience," Unpublished Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1974, p. 3.

⁸²Sedgewick, p. 33.

⁸³Litz, p. 71.

not, because he has been kept informed of the growing relationship between Isabella and Captain Tilney by means of the foregoing action and dialogue and can now appreciate the dramatic irony of the situation. Throughout this episode, Austen has reserved her narrator's voice "for the recording of Catherine's naive opinions, leaving the reader free to interpret . . . the action from Catherine's limited point of view and the author's omniscient perspective."⁸⁴ This is a technique vital to the double view which Austen presents in every novel, enabling the reader to see what the heroines see, and even more than they see.

On the other hand, Austen does not always make the task easy for the reader, but compels him, at times, to reach some conclusions for himself, appealing to his intellectual or cognitive interests (his desire to unravel a mystery, to discover reality behind appearances).⁸⁵ Actually, much of the pleasure which a reader derives from an Austen novel is rooted in a kind of "detective story motif."⁸⁶ Just as Austen's heroines "are forever investigating the facade of social reality and attempting to make accurate judgments," so are her readers conducting their own investigations and making their own judgments.⁸⁷ The heroines of *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma* must realize, eventually, that appearance is not reality. The perceptions of each heroine are distorted by illusions. Although there are mysteries in Austen's situations, there are no "mystifications."⁸⁸ It is necessary for her reader to be "allowed to go astray, but he must not be constrained to do so . . ." ⁸⁹ The information which the reader needs in order to make a correct decision is present, but not always obvious, because of the dual vision created by the shifting perspective of Austen's narrator.⁹⁰ Thus, it is the reader's task to sort through his perceptions and distinguish the real from the apparent.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the double view revealed in the narrator's shifting perspective has an additional dimension. Not only does Austen's narrator deftly manipulate the reader's attention between scenes of dialogue and descriptions of Catherine Morland's

⁸⁴Litz, p. 71.

⁸⁵Booth, *Fiction*, p. 215.

⁸⁶Hugh Henneidy, "Acts of Perception in Jane Austen's Novels," *Studies in the Novel*, 5 (1973), 22, quoting David P. Demarest, Jr., "Legal Language and Situation in the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Readings in Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Austen," Unpublished Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1963, p. 191.

⁸⁷Henneidy, quoting Demarest, p. 22.

⁸⁸Hough, p. 211.

⁸⁹Hough, p. 213.

⁹⁰Hough, p. 213.

point of view, but also between examples of the highly artificial conventions of Gothic fiction and the prosaic realities of everyday life. In effect, the reader experiences a "double-double" view, exercises his perceptions, and discovers reality. Austen makes it clear that Catherine must learn to distinguish between fiction and reality. The reader is informed, for example, that, from childhood, Catherine "was fond of all boy's plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rosebush" (NA, 9). Moreover, she was "noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house" (NA, 10). Because Catherine, like Fielding's Joseph Andrews, has been "measured and found wanting," she becomes a more credible character.⁹¹ Although the reader sees matters mainly from her perspective, he tends to think that he is more knowledgeable than she. Moreover, watching and waiting for her to shed her Gothic delusions and encounter reality, he may become distracted and, therefore, seriously underestimate the natures of Austen's other characters—General Tilney and John Thorpe, for example. Furthermore, Austen, at first, encourages him to feel superior to the naive Catherine, but, later, destroys his sense of superiority with the episode involving General Tilney's harsh treatment of the woman. In the final analysis, Austen's reader must adjust his third view.⁹²

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's use of narrative perspective recreates for the reader what Babb calls a "sense . . . of the ambiguities inherent in behavior," compelling the reader to join forces with Elizabeth in judging a number of characters on the basis of public behavior.⁹³ The two most prominent characters to test Elizabeth's and the reader's perceptions are Darcy and Wickham. But Austen is being crafty, here. Because earlier she has shown that Elizabeth takes pride in ability to discern character, the reader is prepared, at first, to accept Elizabeth's judgments. Later, however, Austen reverses her stand and clearly demonstrates that Elizabeth's appraisal of Darcy and Wickham is highly questionable, based as it is upon their quite different initial reactions to this woman. For example, at their first encounter, Darcy insults Elizabeth, and Wickham gives the impression of being attracted to her. At once,

⁹¹Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 291.

⁹²Hennedy, p. 29.

⁹³Babb, p. 113.

Elizabeth concludes that, because Darcy is reserved, he is lacking in good qualities, and because Wickham is open, he is a good man. Moreover, she confides in her sister that there is "truth" in Wickham's "looks" (PP, 60). The reader should have been prepared for this revelation, having been warned previously by Austen (albeit subtly) that Elizabeth, in spite of her ready wit and confidence in her abilities, is not always a sound judge of character. Even if the reader is not surprised, he can hardly be expected to ignore Austen's warning about the unreliability of appearances as a basis for making judgments.

Early in the novel, Austen employs a shifting narrative perspective to provide the reader with an insight into Darcy's mind, enough, at least, to indicate that Darcy is falling in love with Elizabeth. The suspense in this novel depends upon this courtship, and Austen manages these shifts skillfully, permitting the narrator, at times, to make unobtrusive comments on his own. For example, in the following passage, rapid shifts in the narrative perspective occur at the conclusion of a scene of dialogue between Darcy and Elizabeth:

Elizabeth, having rather expected to affront [Darcy], was amazed at his gallantry; *but there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody*; and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger. (PP, 35; emphasis added)

The material contained in italics belongs to the narrator and creates an obvious bridge between Elizabeth's and Darcy's thoughts. Austen is dedicated, here, to heightening the suspense which surrounds this growing relationship. It is necessary that she acquaint the reader with the fact that these two people are falling in love before they themselves realize it, or the suspense will be dissipated.⁹⁴ Halliday notes that, once Austen has publicized the fact that Darcy is falling in love with Elizabeth, "shifts in [the narrator's] thought cease, and [he] then concentrates upon Elizabeth."⁹⁵ Moreover, because Austen has openly demonstrated that Elizabeth's perceptions are distorted by prejudice, a reader who agrees with Elizabeth and adopts her point of view is as deceived by appearances as she has been. Thus, by means of her narrator's shifting perspective, Austen allows the

⁹⁴E. M. Halliday, "Narrative Perspective in *Pride and Prejudice*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15 (1960), 68.

⁹⁵Halliday, p. 68.

reader to experience Elizabeth's distorted perceptions and deceptive appearances as he attempts to synthesize this material into a third view for himself.

Austen, at one time, admitted that, in writing *Emma*, she may have created a heroine whom no one but she would like. Time has proved, of course, that she created a heroine whom readers can like very well, in spite of many shortcomings. Austen leads her reader to an appreciation of Emma by means of the narrator's shifting narrative perspective. The resulting inside views of Emma's thoughts and emotions evoke in the reader a measure of sympathy for the heroine. Booth points out that this device is one of the most "successful . . . for inducing a parallel emotional response between the deficient heroine and the reader."⁹⁶ Emma is charming, indeed, for a number of reasons: her lack of vanity in personal appearance, her sense of humor, and her filial loyalty. On the other hand, she has serious flaws: her social snobbery, her faulty perception, her desire to meddle with the lives of others. If the reader were merely provided with an external view of this character (if he could see her only as Jane Fairfax does), he would have little sympathy for her. However, because Austen expects him to care about what happens to her and eventually be pleased with a happy resolution of her problems, he is given as inside view of Emma that emphasizes her virtues. He is shown her consistent and sincere efforts to keep her querulous father contented and is made aware of her difficult role in maintaining family harmony. In order to achieve a balanced concept of this heroine, however, he must also be made aware of Emma's distorted views and errors in judgment, after which he will treat Emma's faults with the same tolerance he accords his own.

With all of his rightful omniscience, Austen's narrator reports on a conversation, which he has overheard between Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley, regarding Emma's behavior; frequently, he samples the thoughts of others for opinions about Emma; and he provides scenes of dialogue which the reader must interpret for himself. All of his gestures help the reader maintain a much-needed grip on objective reality, enabling him to recognize Emma's shortcomings in spite of real sympathy for her; otherwise, he misses "much of the comedy that depends on Emma's distorted view" and is unable to appreciate the absolute fitness of her predicament in discovering that she has unwittingly encouraged Harriet to love the

⁹⁶Booth, *Fiction*, pp. 228-29.

man whom she loves herself.⁹⁷ Thus, the narrator, by means of one narrative perspective, creates sympathy in the reader for Emma, and by means of another, widens (and strengthens) the reader's perception of this heroine. Moreover, with his dual perspectives, he involves the reader in several other ways. For example, by setting up a "constant interaction between external and internal reality," he offers the reader "a double sense of dramatic events and their interpretation by an individual consciousness."⁹⁸ At first, this sense of duality leads the reader to suspect that, perhaps, Emma's perception of events is faulty, indeed. As his suspicions multiply, he becomes more and more absorbed in the narrative (and amused) as he sorts out his own perceptions and attempts to create a third view for himself. On the other hand, the narrator's dual perspectives involve the reader directly with the theme of the novel, the major movement of which is the heroine's progression from blindness to perception and enlightenment, because the reader, by now, is also progressing from imperception to perception, detecting the heroine's errors in judgment before she discovers them, evaluating character and event for himself, and maintaining a proper balance between sympathy and judgment. Obviously, Austen's narrative method is a complex system subtly employed to shape the reader's perceptions of the heroines.

IV

NARRATOR-READER RELATIONSHIP

Although Austen may involve a reader in the narrative by means of any one of a variety of methods (style, characterization, narrative perspective), perhaps nothing is more effective or useful to her in achieving her goals than the narrator-reader relationship which she establishes. It is important to realize that her narrator is a slightly different figure in each of the novels under consideration. For example, he is a most prominent figure in *Northanger Abbey* where, in addition to his other responsibilities, he is required to parody sentimental popular fiction. On the other hand, he is least apparent in *Emma* where his absence, ironically enough, allows the reader to think that he is experiencing the narrative totally from

⁹⁷Booth, *Fiction*, p. 250.

⁹⁸Litz, p. 146.

Emma's point of view. Finally, his presence must be acknowledged in *Pride and Prejudice*, although he is not always obvious, probably because his playful wit so much resembles that of the heroine. In each of these novels, however, he uses the same methods to establish a rapport with the reader, creating what has been called "a sense of community," or the belief that narrator and reader share communal tastes, values, and feelings. Duckworth observes that Austen's narrator "assumes an easy community with [her] readers,"⁹⁹ and Welty detects a kind of "felicity which must partly lie in the confidence [that these novels] take for granted between the author and her readers."¹⁰⁰ Others attribute this feeling of confidence between writer and reader—this sense of community—to the cultural situation in which Austen wrote, pointing out that "there was only one novel-reading public, and every novelist had this public in mind."¹⁰¹ In other words, Austen's sense of community may be a reflection of what was once a reality. Although it is true that the reading public in Austen's time was not as diverse as it is today, it was, nevertheless, far from being homogenous. Austen was probably aware of "the diverse standards represented by her readership."¹⁰² Indeed, she makes this point clear. For example, John Thorpe, who read and relished *The Monk*, differs in literary taste from Mrs. Morland, who enjoyed Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*. For that matter, there is evidence that Austen was aware of the diversity of tastes among those whom she knew personally. She maintained a list of the reactions of her friends, family, and acquaintances to several of her novels, and the following selection of such comments from "Opinions of *Emma*" demonstrates a variety of literary tastes and values:

Miss Sharp.—Better than *M. P.*, but not so well as *P. and P.* Pleased with the heroine for her originality, delighted with *Mr. K.*, and called *Mrs. Elton* beyond praise—dissatisfied with *Jane Fairfax*.

Cassandra.—Better than *P. and P.* but not so well as *M. P.*

Fanny K..—Not so well as either *P. and P.* or *M. P.* Could not bear *Emma* herself. *Mr. Knightley* delightful Should like *J. F.* if she knew more of her.

My Mother thought it more entertaining than *M. P.*, but not so interesting as *P. and P.* No characters in it equal to *Lady Catherine* or *Mr. Collins*.

Mrs. Digweed did not like it so well as the others: in fact if she had not

⁹⁹Alistair M. Duckworth, "Prospects and Retrospects," in *Jane Austen Today*, pp. 29-30

¹⁰⁰Welty, p. 4.

¹⁰¹Steinmann, p. 287.

¹⁰²Lloyd W. Brown, *Bits of Ivory: Narrative Techniques in Jane Austen's Fiction*, p. 203.

known the author would hardly have got through it.

Mr. Cockerill liked it so little that *Fanny* would not send me his opinion.

Mrs. Dickson did not much like it—thought it very inferior to *P. and P.* Liked it less from there being a *Mr. and Mrs. Dixon* in it.

Mr. Fowle read only the first and last chapters, because he had heard it was not interesting.

Mrs. Wroughton did not like it so well as *P. and P.* Thought the authoress wrong, in such times as these, to draw such clergymen as *Mr. Collins* and *Mr. Elton*.

Mr. Jeffrey (of the *Edinburgh Review*) was kept up by it three nights.¹⁰³

Faced with this kind of evidence, therefore, Brown argues that those who suggest that Austen wrote "with full confidence in . . . her agreement with the reader" (because she could expect her contemporary readership to share her tastes and values), have misinterpreted the situation.¹⁰⁴ He points out that her "easy intimacy with one group of readers . . . is counterbalanced by her awareness of 'outside' tastes in the reading public."¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the illusion which Austen gives of writing for one audience is merely a *created* illusion, a part of her art, a part of her rhetorical strategy for involving the reader in her fictional world.

Austen's development of a narrator-reader relationship based upon a sense of community resembles the relationship which Fielding's narrator creates with his reader. However, Austen's narrator is far less noticeable than Fielding's flamboyant and intrusive figure who continually interrupts the action with comments about the story, the characters, or, for that matter, anything that is only remotely related to the task at hand. But, like Fielding, Austen employs irony and takes a moral stance in her narrator-reader relationship. Unlike Fielding, she usually limits her narrator's obvious intrusions and relies heavily upon irony to communicate his presence to the reader. This method has a special effect on the relationship of narrator and reader. Because of it, the "reader is conscious of the play of mind rather as an enlargement of his own sensibilities than as the mechanism of narration."¹⁰⁶ Irony employed in this manner gives the reader a sense of being "taken beyond [his] usual capacities" to assume his place beside the narrator.¹⁰⁷ Thus, it contributes to the reader's sense of community with the storyteller.

¹⁰³Cited in Austen-Leigh, pp. 328-31. (*M. P.* refers to *Mansfield Park*; *P. and P.* to *Pride and Prejudice*.)

¹⁰⁴Brown, p. 203.

¹⁰⁵Brown, p. 104.

¹⁰⁶John Preston, *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, pp. 111-12.

¹⁰⁷Preston, pp. 11-12.

The narrator's moral stance also significantly influences the narrator-reader relationship. Whereas Fielding's narrator creates a community of values by tacitly assuming that he and the reader share a common moral viewpoint,¹⁰⁸ Austen's narrator establishes and reinforces the reader's sense of a common moral viewpoint by means of his conceptual vocabulary, subtle moral commentary, and aphoristic statements. Behind his use of general and conceptual terms lies the assumption that he and the reader share a common ground of understanding and mutually agree on such matters as "what an unpretentious old-fashioned gentleman's house is like" or "what an attractive intelligent girl is like."¹⁰⁹ Hough argues that "if this is true on the social and material plane, it is even more so on the moral plane."¹¹⁰ The narrator's precise and consistent use of conceptual terms in evaluating character, demonstrated elsewhere in this investigation, encourages the reader to adopt the implied standard, at least for the duration of the narrative.

By means of his moral commentaries, Austen's narrator implies that he and the reader have in common the same moral objectives. Whenever he makes a value judgment, Austen endeavors to verify it in the following scene with strong supportive action. For example, when the narrator describes Mr. Knightley as a man with reserved manners and a temper which "was not his greatest perfection" (*E*, 77), Austen immediately causes Knightley to exhibit these traits in the scene that follows, and thereafter throughout the novel. Constantly being exposed to such treatment, the reader gradually becomes convinced that all of the narrator's judgments are valid.

Finally, Austen's narrator adds to the reader's growing sense of community through his intelligent generalizations and aphoristic statements. Clearly, his witty generalizations are used to unify the reader's sensibilities.¹¹¹ On the other hand, his use of aphorisms implies a "confident assumption that the reader will and can only share [his] norms" and that both the narrator and reader share a common body of knowledge and experience.¹¹² Whether the narrator's generalizations and aphorisms are wise, moral, or ironic, they always imply that he and the reader share a sense of common understanding. Thus, in the final analysis, it is the narrator's per-

¹⁰⁸Alter, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹Hough, p. 208.

¹¹⁰Hough, p. 208.

¹¹¹Babb, p. 13.

¹¹²Isobel Armstrong, *Middlemarch: A Note on George Eliot's Wisdom*, in *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, p. 120.

sonality that holds this relationship together. Obviously, he is both friend and guide to the reader, and sometimes he is the author herself dramatized. In the narrator, the reader finds a "mind and heart that can give [him] clarity without oversimplification, sympathy and romance without sentimentality, and biting irony without cynicism."¹¹³

This investigation has revealed that important to Austen's delineation of character is her consistent and precise employment of conceptual terms, a method with which she encourages the reader to adopt the implied standards for his own use in evaluating character and event. A second, influential practice is her use of irony in a variety of forms and situations. As a source of much pleasure, it encourages the reader to observe more closely and perceptively both character and event.

In numerous ways, Austen further shapes her reader's response by means of her characterizations. Insisting that character is always more important than physical appearance, she invites the reader to consider with care her characters' thoughts, word choices, and conversational manners. At the same time, she enhances the reader's appreciation for narrative concerns by allowing her characters to exemplify various aspects of her themes.

In her narrative method, Austen provides the reader with the necessary objective and subjective materials for synthesis, thereby encouraging him to arrive at balanced concepts of character.

Finally, by means of the narrator-reader relationship, she creates a sense of community between narrator (author) and reader and guarantees a correct understanding of her narrative goals.

¹¹³Booth, *Fiction*, pp. 264-16.

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