

**ESCAPE FROM DIDACTICISM:  
ART AND IDEA IN THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN,  
FANNY BURNEY AND MARIA EDGEWORTH**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the conflict between art and idea in the novels of Jane Austen and some of her contemporaries. 'Idea' stands for the convictions which drove eighteenth century novelists to be didactic, even, as with Mary Brunton, to assert that the novelists' 'art' - the characters and their stories - was merely a vehicle for conveying religious truths. Yet the art of the novel had powerful pulls of its own which made it a difficult vehicle to control for these purposes.

The central part of the thesis explores the difficulties involved when novelists attempted directly to convey 'truths' about subjects on which they held strong convictions for example about upbringing. Maria Edgeworth's Belinda provides a case study of the problems encountered when the subject of education is tackled head-on; Fanny Burney's Camilla is an equally illustrative example of similar problems which occur when the codes of behaviour enjoined by the courtesy books clash with the requirements of a novel. A critical examination is made of the claim that Jane Austen was influenced by the advice-book tradition and that Mansfield Park for example has a courtesy-book heroine. Detailed accounts of how Mansfield Park and Persuasion differ from the courtesy-book novel support the apparently orthodox, even old-fashioned, critical position (which I defend against the charge of 'social conditioning') that Jane Austen was a better novelist than Fanny Burney or Maria Edgeworth because she responded more whole-heartedly to the artistic possibilities of novel writing. In essence the case is that Jane Austen was more interestingly multivoiced than these contemporaries. One result of this multivoicedness is that, unlike Edgeworth, Bage or Brunton, Austen avoids the appearance of contributing to an intellectual debate.

Chapters 6 and 7 develop the theme that Jane Austen's Chawton novels become interestingly multivoiced because of the development of narrative techniques using dialogue and 'substitutes for dialogue'. In particular it is proposed that the development of free indirect discourse, and other modes of what I have called 'character indexation' of narrative, makes possible a supple relationship between narrator and main characters and hence between what is said and what is shown in the novels about moral issues.



Abbreviations used:

<u>Northanger Abbey</u>	NA
<u>Sense and Sensibility</u>	S&S
<u>Pride and Prejudice</u>	P&P
<u>Mansfield Park</u>	MP
<u>Emma</u>	E
<u>Persuasion</u>	P

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Grounding of a Thesis

In 1993, it seems to be necessary, in however compressed a way, to indicate where one stands, particularly on the question of the very feasibility of interpreting an author's text, or of whether 'an author's text' can have any meaning. In my own case I should not have been happy with a blunt admission that I believed no grounds can be adequate and that the most one could achieve is a reasonably well-written contribution to an intellectual game or joke. I did, and still do, believe in the general validity of sensitive readings of worthwhile texts. For my thesis these texts are realistic novels with more or less lifelike characters. I was encouraged therefore to find reputable modern critics who, while aware of the dangers of using words like 'worthwhile', 'sensitive', 'realistic' and 'lifelike' in these contexts, were willing to engage with sceptics on their own ground.

I needed to concern myself with theoretical or metacritical issues because of the particular nature of my thesis, which is an attempt to pin down the nature of Jane Austen's greater psychological realism in comparison with her contemporaries, particularly Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth. This kind of literary critical enterprise is open to fundamental criticism. There is, for example, the marxist line of attack which sees 'essential individuality' as a bourgeois fiction; it is a symptom of the 'empiricist fallacy' which fails to recognise that what we

may take to be objective reality is merely the effect of our social conditioning.

Lennard J. Davis, (whose views will be discussed in chapter 7 below) in his radically sceptical work, Resisting Novels, takes as an example the supposed 'recognition' of the 'essential individuality' of Mr Bennet in Pride and Prejudice. In Davis's view there is far too little evidence - far too few words allotted to Mr Bennet - for any 'character' to be established. We have been fed a few trigger words and from our own minds, or class-based situation, we supply the rest.

A similar accusation of 'social conditioning' comes from critics such as Dale Spender who regard a claim that Jane Austen was a better novelist than, say, Mary Brunton, as being the result not of careful reading but of the dominance of male critics, who have ensured over the last hundred and fifty years that Jane Austen should be regarded as a one-off, an inexplicable exception to her female contemporaries.

I recognise the force of this type of criticism and I agree that it is fallacious to seek the definitive meaning of an author's text as if it had and retained a relationship with a fixed, pre-existing reality. On the other hand, I do not believe that interpretation, of literature or of any other aspect of human life, is merely self-regarding; and I hoped to find some support against radical scepticism and thoroughgoing relativism.

I found a provisional resting point in the critical positions of A. M. Duckworth (particularly his essay 'Prospects and Retrospects') and Stanley Fish (particularly his, Is There A Text in this Class?). What went some way to quell my unease was that

both critics agreed that there could be no determinate reading of literary texts - the text is always partly a function of interpretation - but that they did not reach radically sceptical conclusions from this premise. Duckworth, for example, accepts that there can be qualified determinate readings. By this he seems to mean that we can detect in a text those parts which invite multiple or even contradictory interpretations and, in relationship to our own time, we can, as he puts it, repair the indeterminacies. He believes that even a 'classic' author like Austen will leave 'indeterminacies to be repaired in her work' and, more positively, he suggests that, 'only specific instances' can determine 'whether the critical repair of indeterminacy generates meaning or points to aesthetic failure on the author's part.'

Duckworth therefore, differs from the radically sceptical critics who deny all 'closure', that is the possibility of any determinate reading. For instance, in talking of Sense and Sensibility he claims, in Saussurian terms, that it is not just a mass of signifiers with nothing signified: 'While Sense and Sensibility is not a nut whose kernel can be easily extracted, neither is it an onion the peeling of which reveals nothing except the infinity of its own envelope' (p. 18).

These ways of looking at criticism may be considered only mildly comforting. Combined with the views of Stanley Fish, however, they can be more reassuring. What Duckworth called

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1. 'Prospects and Retrospects', Jane Austen Today, ed. Joel Weinsheimer, (University of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 14.



'readings for a particular temporal disposition', (p. 20) Fish refers to more simply as 'persuasive' rather than 'demonstrative' readings.' He falls back on a concept of 'interpretive communities' which provide authority for a core of agreement. But these interpretive communities are not offered as completely solid ground: they are not, in his words, 'either monolithic or stable' (p. 347). Like Kuhnian paradigms in the context of 'normal science'<sup>2</sup> they can, and at some time will be overturned by revolutionary changes in our world picture. On the other hand, they are proof against radical scepticism and relativism, since, at any particular time, they are all we have got; there is no other ground for us, no vantage point from which we can express radical doubt; they are the only grounds from which future changes can develop. As Fish puts it, in literature as in life, 'Interpretation is the only game in town'.

This is fair enough, provided one does not assume that future change in literary criticism implies progress, as it may for revolutionary science. At least Duckworth and Fish imply that it is worthwhile to develop and deploy interpretive skills. However, it was in John F. Burrows's Computation into Criticism that I found a more positive validation for my approach to texts. His research suggested that our interpretive processes are not

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1. Is There a Text In This Class? (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 365.

2. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, (Chicago University Press, 1970). For a critical discussion of Kuhnian paradigms see, Margaret Masterman, 'The Nature of a Paradigm', Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, eds. Imre Lakatos & Alan Musgrave, (London, New York: CUP, 1970), 59-89.



just authorized by temporarily valid interpretive communities in the academic world - a sort of shared subjectivity - but have the authority of normal mother-tongue usage in daily life.

What Burrows attempts to do in Computation into Criticism is to take the speech of all the characters in Jane Austen's main novels who speak around two thousand words or more and, using a computer programme, to examine aspects of their speech. He carries out various statistical exercises to see how the speech patterns recorded correlate:

- a) with those of other characters in the same novel;
- b) with a character's own usage in different segments of a novel;
- c) with those of characters in other Austen novels.'

He also uses four novels by twentieth-century authors to make further contrasts. Burrows is, in effect, testing our confidence that we can 'place' a particular idiolect. What is startling is that he decided, in his own words, to 'test to destruction'. He removed from what he fed into the computer programmes all lexical words, the nouns, verbs etc, which we normally consider to be the most helpful in making literary judgements, and retained only the thirty, twenty, or in some projects, the twelve and three most common words. That is, instead of dealing with words like 'sensibility', 'delicacy', 'decorum', he fed in only grammatical words - prepositions conjunctions, personal pronouns etc. Could we, he was asking, still establish an idiolect of a Jane Austen

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1. Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method, (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1987).

character by considering the usage of words like, 'all', 'we', 'that', 'our', 'us'? In trying to find the point at which the shape of an idiolect would cease to be identifiable, he found that, 'Jane Austen's language has withstood a most unreasonable trial and shown an astonishing tensile strength' (p. 105).

What Burrows' work is supporting, it seems to me, is a contention that the development of close reading of literary texts is very far from being a self-deluding display of social conditioning - conditioned responses to key words for example - and is more also than a tuning-in to the appropriate academic interpretive community; it has the authority of normal mother-tongue usage, in which our powers of discrimination reach down much deeper into the language than we are consciously aware. In other words, while we are influenced by social conditions, including no doubt our place in the class struggle and our position in a male dominated society, there are nevertheless linguistic influences that run deeper and more powerfully than these.' As Burrows puts it, 'If social conditioning is envisaged ... in such terms as exclude all but gross, long-lasting influences like social rank and sexual category, the evidence of

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1. As I understand it, the study of linguistics leads uncontroversially to the conclusion that linguistic competence, including our interpretive strategies, is under-determined by our conscious experience. Infant linguistic competence is, for example, not explained by language input. What are controversial are the various hypotheses - 'deep structures'; 'language acquisition devices' - which attempt to account for the disparity between input and output.

the very common words transcends it' (p. 94).'

One of the claims I am making in my thesis (chapter 7 below) is that it is Jane Austen's more developed use of free indirect discourse that enabled her better than her contemporaries to transcend the influence of the all-powerful, usually didactic, narrator's voice. Free indirect discourse, as I use the term, is a hybrid or mingling of reported and direct speech forms. Most interestingly it is used, as in the famous dressing table episode in Emma, so that, alongside the narration, or the narrator's voice, we hear the voice of an involved character. Because the voice of the character is not expressed in direct speech mode, we seem to hear that voice not merely alongside, but sometimes taking over from, the narrator. Burrows calls this 'character narrative' and has, in one of his statistical exercises, traced the development of what he terms the 'thought idiolects' of some of Austen's major characters.

Clearly one is open to the temptation to detect this kind of free indirect discourse more readily in Austen's novels than in those of her two contemporaries. Here, Burrows' work on 'thought idiolects' is reassuring, for it shows that there is no reason in principle why my bias in favour of Jane Austen should be wrong. In principle it is possible, by our normal powers of discrimination, to pick up from very slight clues these variations of voice. Burrows concludes, for instance, that in Jane Austen's later Chawton novels, the heroines are given

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1. See chapter 6, pp. 264-65.

something like, 'a second idiolect more or less akin to their speech idiolects but adapted to the expression of ideas too private, or as with Emma, too outrageous for open utterance' (p. 166). He goes on, 'In differentiating among thought idiolects, Jane Austen's characterisation extends into regions where she has few, if any, predecessors' (p. 175). My own particular interest is in how the voices heard in the thought idiolects and the associated character narrative modify the omniscient narrator's voice.

In this thesis I am proposing that in Jane Austen's novels there is a kind of multivoicedness which is not so apparent in Fanny Burney or Maria Edgeworth. If one is correct in asserting that some novels are more multivoiced than others, then it is clear that one must be reasonably confident about one's ability to detect and differentiate voices. Again, it has been most useful to be able to ground my work, however wrong I may be in particular instances, on the conclusions of a rigorous critical approach which confirms that we are in principle able to discriminate voices from relatively small inputs of language. Burrows, for example, confirms from his own position, a traditional judgement about Austen's mature skills in Persuasion:

... only in the hands of a mature genius are those potentialities developed to the point where 4,000 and 6,000 words - the size of Anne Elliot's two idiolects - are enough not merely to establish and differentiate a character ... those few words are enough to unite the two idiolects as the two voices of a unique personality. (p. 211)

The multivoicedness in Jane Austen's novels allows her not only to be less didactic than her famous contemporaries, but also to



introduce successfully into domestic comedy 'strong' themes such as contingency and moral luck. These issues are addressed in chapters 6 and 7 of the thesis.

### Courtship Behaviour and Upbringing

In the first six chapters I examine those contexts in which the strong opinions held by the authors could induce a didactic tone. During the eighteenth century, 'conduct' or 'courtesy-books' set out rules of behaviour which went beyond what we now think of as etiquette. It is not surprising that novelists should be concerned with these rules of behaviour and should hold strong opinions about them and about what lay behind them. For example, the rules governing the actions of characters in the courtship periods of their lives supplied a major theme in many novels. Richardsons's Sir Charles Grandison and Elizabeth Haywood's Miss Betsy Thoughtless are two obvious and influential examples of novels where courtship behaviour is dealt with in a very specific, and didactic, way.

Since the thesis is focused on novels written after 1790, it is necessary also to take account of the connected issues of sensibility, sentimentality and the education of young women as they were addressed in the polemics of the last decade of the eighteenth century. In particular it seems appropriate to connect the ubiquitous question of the importance of first love in choosing a marriage partner with the underlying theme of how far sensibility ought to be governed by reason.

The related theme of upbringing provides, as Marilyn Butler



points out, a particular difficulty for authors trying to balance art and idea in their novels.' Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney and Jane Austen involve themselves, with differing degrees of conscious commitment, in the perennial debate about the relative importance of nature and nurture in character formation.

It can be shown that in both these contexts - courtship behaviour and upbringing - Jane Austen is less didactic than her contemporaries although she, almost of necessity, has to address the same issues. Marilyn Butler has influenced all recent critical views by her persuasive arguments that Jane Austen was influenced by, and involved in, the late eighteenth century 'War of Ideas'.<sup>2</sup> It seems to me, however, untenable to place her firmly in a particular ideological camp. In the terms of this thesis, the predominance of art over idea seems in the end to work against such a placement.

### Free Indirect Discourse

Throughout the thesis, and particularly in the final chapter, the term free indirect discourse (FID) is used to refer to a mode of discourse which mingles narration with the voice, or echoes of the voice, of a character.

In Roy Pascal's, The Dual Voice, three contenders for a label

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1. Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography, (Oxford, New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 333.

2. Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1975, rpt. 1989).

to this mode are critically discussed: '*Le Style Indirect Libre*' is rejected because in its main formulations the 'dual voice', that duality of narrator and character which 'may be heard as a tone of irony, or sympathy, of negation or approval underlying the statement of the character', is neglected or understated. (*Die*) *Erlebte Rede* (Experienced Speech) is also rejected because its main users fail 'to recognise the narratorial function' of the mode, preferring to stress its subjective force only.

Pascal claims that the functioning of the mode is, 'so intricate and complex a fusion of narratorial and subjective modes that it is impossible to find a name that would adequately designate it' (p. 21). He considers the best compromise to be free indirect speech, accepting the difficulties involved in the grammatical pinning down of both 'free' and 'indirect'. Pascal preferred 'speech' to 'style' because, while 'style' is 'usefully ambiguous' over the question of whether we are always dealing with spoken language or articulate thoughts, it fails to convey the concept of 'a discourse'. Other critics such as Brian McHale have taken Pascal's reasoning one step further and have adopted the name free indirect discourse.<sup>2</sup> This term, with its abbreviation FID, is used in this thesis.

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1. The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its functioning in the European Novel, (Manchester Univ. Press: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), p. 17.

2. 'FID: A Survey of Recent Accounts', PTL, 3 (1978), 249-287, p. 250. Graham Hough and J. A. Dussinger are among those who also use the term FID.

CHAPTER ONE

ADVICE BOOKS AND THE  
COURTESY NOVEL

The first chapter examines some of the ways in which eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century novelists, including Jane Austen, were influenced by, or interacted with, sentiments and precepts expressed in the advice books known as *conduct books*.<sup>1</sup> Conduct books give us an idea of how women were perceived in the eighteenth century and of what was prescribed as acceptable behaviour. The precepts by which young women were taught to govern their behaviour during the courtship period of their lives was of particular relevance to writers of what might loosely be defined as the eighteenth-century novel of manners. At the same time, novelists in this genre were also having to consider the emotional development of young women, for example, the effects of 'sensibility' and 'imagination'. These latter issues involve complexities of human nature and character development which go beyond the simple didacticism of advice books.

#### 1. Courtship Behaviour for Women

Samuel Richardson had shown how conflicts arising from the courtship of his heroines could generate the necessary suspense and narrative twists of the novel. He had schooled his readers

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1. Rita Goldberg draws a distinction between 'the Puritan code of practical morality' which lay behind the conduct books written in the seventeenth century and their more secular eighteenth-century successors which she calls courtesy books.

Sex and the Enlightenment: Women in Richardson and Diderot (London, New York: CUP, 1984), p. 28.

In this thesis I will be concentrating on advice manuals written in the eighteenth century, and in accordance with the accepted free critical usage, the two terms may be seen as interchangeable.



not only to expect in these contexts certain kinds of complexity and dénouement but also to be involved in a continuing debate on the underlying moral issues.'

In the seventeenth century, conduct books had been aimed at both men and women. In them the institution of marriage was regarded with great respect, so that they often presented a more egalitarian view of the rights of the sexes than would be found in the eighteenth century. This was particularly true of the relative duties of husband and wife. For example, Goldberg quotes from William Gouge, 'one of the sternest puritan writers':

Though the ancient Romans and Canonists have aggravated the womans fault in this kinde farre above the mans, and given the man more priviledges than the woman, yet I see not how that difference in the sinne can stand with the tenour of Gods word. I deny not but that more inconveniences may follow upon the woman's default than upon the mans. ... Yet in regard of the breach of wedlocke, and transgression against God, the sinne of either party is alike ... Their power also over one another in this respect is alike. If on just occasion they abstaine, it must be with mutuall consent. If the husband leave his wife, she is as free, as he should be if she left him.<sup>2</sup>

The same sentiment expressed by William Bage in his novel Hermesprong 1796, was regarded by then as radical. It is not certain when the change to a single-sex audience took place, but Goldberg sees the publication of The Ladies Library 1714 as a landmark. The emphasis on obedience to authority, passivity and

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1. Robert T. Jones, 'A Gauntlet Thrown Out', Samuel Richardson: Passion and Prudence, ed. Valerie G. Myer, (London, USA: Vision Press Ltd, 1986), 135-44.

2. Sex and the Enlightenment: Women in Richardson and Diderot (London, New York: CUP, 1984), p. 48, quoting from Of Domestic Duties.



purity, which had been addressed to both sexes in the early conduct books, was during the eighteenth century to become recommended most particularly to a female audience.

Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, also refers to The Ladies Library which she believes to have been largely plagiarised from Richard Allestree's popular The Ladies Calling 1675. Her fellow critic, M. A. Doody, regards the work as a 'succinct and thoughtful statement of the most acceptable views in the late seventeenth century'.<sup>1</sup> Brophy believes it to be typical of the ideas conveyed in its eighteenth-century successors. Allestree like Steele in The Ladies Library, regarded modesty as women's 'primary virtue'. Modesty should be supported by the qualities of 'meekness', 'compassion', 'affability' and 'piety'.<sup>2</sup> Many contemporary commentators have noted that, 'on the essentials of their approach the [conduct] books show little disagreement':

Nearly all commend traditional feminine virtues ...  
The prime female virtues are modesty, faithfulness, prudence, delicacy and humility. ... A double standard is accepted and commended without the need for justification.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Marian E. Fowler suggests:

Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth there is a very high degree of conformity among courtesy-book

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1. A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson, (New York, London: OUP, 1974), p. 16.

2. Women's Lives and the 18th Century English Novel, (Florida: University of South Florida Press, 1991), pp. 6-7.

3. William St. Clair, The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family, (London, Boston: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 506.

writers and novelists as to the qualities which the model female should possess; .....  
Foremost among her virtues is her modesty, which includes reserve, timidity, and diffidence.'

Modest behaviour, though in practice this quality appears to be defined only in negative terms as the mean between prudery and coquettery<sup>2</sup>, indicated above all that a woman was to be chaste. As the eighteenth century developed the conflation of modesty and sexual behaviour appears to have become almost total. As Ruth Bernard Yeazall points out by 1792,

... the idea that modesty was not a 'sexual virtue' clearly represented a minority position, ... To think about 'modesty' was automatically to think of the modest woman, and to think about this woman was above all to imagine a certain account of heterosexual relations. Indeed 'virtue' itself had largely become sexual virtue: ...'<sup>3</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter it is important that the primary virtue - modesty or chasteness - was seen to be particularly under threat during the courtship period of a woman's life. As Yeazall puts it,

the literature of modesty was in large part a literature that sought to advise women on how best to get themselves chosen, men how best to choose, and both parties that an affectionate marriage was itself the most satisfying goal of life.  
(pp. 33-34)

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1. 'The Courtesy-Book Heroine of Mansfield Park', Toronto Quarterly, 44, (Autumn 1974), 31-46. p. 34.

2. The contradictions underlying recommendations about female virtues are described by Yeazall (below) and her fellow critic, Mary Poovey in Jane Austen and the Proper Woman Writer.

3. Fictions of Modesty. Women and Courtship in the English Novel, (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 8.

Examples of modesty being spoken of specifically in the context of courtship can be found throughout the eighteenth century.

Yeazall points out that the most frequently reprinted section of Gisborne's Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, 1797, 'dwells anxiously on the problem of how to see a daughter safely through the crucial transition period' of courtship (p. 44).

John Bennett also talks of that 'critical age' during which he feels the 'keenest apprehensions for [his putative daughter's] safety' (Letters 2: 160, Yeazall, p. 44).

It seems that both Gregory and Bennett exemplify a tradition of conduct-book writing which regards feminine 'delicacy' as the guarantor of modesty. John Bennett in his Letters to a Young Lady 1789, for example suggests that his pattern woman has such 'true, female delicacy, that the most licentious man living would not dare to use a double entendre in her company, ...' (Yeazall p. 43). Similar terminology may be found in Dr John Gregory's famous and popular work: 'Virgin purity is of that delicate nature ...' The use of terms like 'delicacy' and the ubiquitous recommendations that women be soft, amiable and pleasing - Dr Gregory speaks for example of that 'natural softness and sensibility of disposition' (p. 11) - were seen by some notable polemicists of the 1790's to have become debased.

We learn too from the conduct-book writers that female virtue was not just a private, but a public affair. For a woman to be

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1. A Father's Legacy to His Daughters, (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1786), p. 35. (See also his chapter on 'Friendship, Love and Marriage').



virtuous her reputation in public life had to be beyond reproach.

Already in the seventeenth century Allestree states that,

Women of honour must be always concerned to vindicate their sex, .... there is required not only innocence but prudence; [women must] abstain, as from all real evil, so from the appearance of it too ... [they are] to deny themselves the most innocent liberties when any scandalous inference is like to be deduced from them: ... (Brophy, p. 8)

Novelists in the eighteenth century appear to have agreed with the precepts of the conduct books concerning most of these issues. Modesty or chasteness was the primary virtue; a woman's modesty was most vulnerable, and for the novelist most interesting, during the courtship stage of her life.

Most novelists dealt with in this thesis stress the need for woman to maintain a public as well as private reputation for virtue. In The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless, 1751, the maintenance of reputation is shown to be as important to a woman as the maintenance of actual innocence: damage to either will jeopardise her chances in the marriage market. Here the heroine's brother replies to Betsy's assertion that she is still sexually innocent with the following:

'What avails your being virtuous! I hope, and believe, you are so: but your reputation is of more consequence to your family; the loss of one might be concealed, but a blemish on the other brings certain infamy and disgrace on yourself and all belonging to you.' .....

'Indeed, sister, ... a woman brings less dishonour upon a family, by twenty private sins, than by one publick indiscretion.'

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1. Eliza Haywood, The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless, (London, New York: Pandora Press, 1986), III, ix, 352.

Whatever the author's view on this matter, the novel depicts a world in which for a female an unblemished reputation is as important as her actual chastity. In doing so she indicates the dangers which arise when virtue is judged by its public manifestations; for when public signs of virtue are all-important, how is one to be certain of separating true from factitious modesty?

There were, to support woman's 'delicacy', prescribed codes of behaviour during courtship intended to help ensure that neither reputation nor innocence be tarnished by her suitors. Two of Betsy's virtuous contemporaries provide models of what this virtuous behaviour should be. The prudence and modesty which guide Harriet Loveit and Mabel, (later Mrs Loveit) lead to their being rewarded by marriages to honourable men early in the novel. By contrast, Betsy, who is just as amiable and virtuous as these two exemplary characters, is undermined by her vanity which prompts her to regard her suitors as sources of amusement and gratification:

Poor Miss Betsy, as the reader has had but too much opportunities to observe, was far from setting forth to any advantage the real good qualities she was possessed of: on the contrary, the levity of her conduct rather disfigured the native innocence of her mind, and the purity of her intentions; ... (II, viii, 195)

Her disregard of the rules of conduct governing courtship and her lack of concern about reputation are shown in the novel to lead to dire consequences.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the rules purporting to govern courtship behaviour was that the woman was not allowed to



show signs of affection or favour to a man until he had made his intentions clear to her. In this manner she guarded her virginity and the 'psychological equivalent' of this, her 'delicacy of mind'.<sup>1</sup> Readers of Richardson and some of his predecessors and successors will be familiar with these codes, and in Fanny Burney's Camilla 1796 they are set out clearly and famously by one of her mentor characters, Mr Tyrold:

where there are two parties, choice can belong only to one of them: ... let her ['any modest and reasonable young woman'] call upon all her feelings of delicacy, all her notions of propriety, to decide: Since Man must choose Woman, or Woman Man, which should come forward to make the choice? Which should retire to be chosen?<sup>2</sup> (III, v, 358)

This is clearly a rhetorical question for the answer is not in doubt. Mr Tyrold goes on to speak of the way society regards women who break the courtship rules; a punishment not always just, but, in his opinion, in some senses justifiable. He continues:

Never from personal experience may you gather, how far from soothing, how wide from honourable, is the species of compassion ordinarily diffused by the discovery of an unreturned female regard. That it should be felt unsought may be considered as a mark of discerning sensibility; but that it should be betrayed uncalled for, is commonly, however ungenerously, imagined rather to indicate ungoverned passions, than refined selection. This is often both cruel and unjust; yet, let me ask - Is the world a proper confidant for such a secret? Can the woman who has permitted it to be abroad, reasonably demand that

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1. Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist, (Oxford, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986, rpt. 1987, 1989), p. 110.

2. Camilla or A Picture of Youth, eds. E. A. and L. D. Bloom, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, [1st issued as a World's Classic ppbck, 1983, rpt. 1989]), III, p. 358. (Subsequent references abbreviated to CM).

consideration and respect from the community, in which she has been wanting to herself? (III, v, 361)

A good illustration of the embarrassment which these rules were intended to prevent is provided in Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. Lady Olivia has come, uninvited to England, to see Sir Charles: 'Do you wish me, Sir, to stay in England till your return?' Harriet, who is present at this interview, notes that this is not a 'prudent' question since, 'it must either subject her [Lady Olivia] to a repulse; or him, by a polite answer, to give her hope.'

It is fit, . . . that your own pleasure should determine you. It did, pardon me, madam, in your journey hither. She reddened to her very ears. Your brother, Ladies, has the reputation of being a very polite man: Bear witness to this instance of it. I am ashamed of myself! If I am unpolite, madam, my sincerity will be my excuse; at least to my own heart. (SCG, IV, xxi, 368)

Recently a number of critics have attempted to show that some female authors of this period found unacceptable the rules demanding that women should always be the passive players in courtship rituals. (This type of criticism will be considered when Burney's Camilla is examined in chapter 2 below.) Yet the novelists examined in this thesis appear in general to have been supporters of these rules for women. Maria Edgeworth, for example, shows clearly in this extract from Patronage that this issue is linked to the more general admonition that women must

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1. The History of Sir Charles Grandison, ed. with introd. by Jocelyn Harris, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1972, [1st published as a World's Classic ppbck, 1986]), IV, p. 368. (Subsequent references abbreviated to SCG).

govern their feelings with reason. The date of this example also indicates that, whatever dissenting views emerged on this matter in the 1790's, in the early decades of the nineteenth century the most acceptable and common view was that women should play a passive role in courtship. Mrs Hungerford and Rosamond Percy both hope that Rosamond's sister Caroline will form an attachment to Colonel Hungerford. In spite of their hopes and encouragement, Caroline follows a prudent line. She points out to her sister that:

'Neither your wishes nor Mrs Hungerford's ... can or ought to decide, or even to influence the event, that is to be determined by Colonel Hungerford's own judgment and feelings, and by mine. In the mean time, I cannot forget that the delicacy, honour, pride, prudence of our sex, forbid a woman to think of any man, as a lover, till he gives her reason to believe that he feels love for her.'

But Colonel Hungerford has so far not 'shown' her any 'preference'. Rosamond, still determined that the Colonel would be a perfect match for her sister, suggests that what Caroline is in fact saying is that,

'a woman of sense, delicacy, proper pride, honour, and prudence, must, can, and ought to shut her eyes, ears, understanding, and heart, against all merit and all powers of pleasing a man may possess, till said man shall and do make a matrimonial proposal for her in due form - ...'

Caroline replies,

'I never thought any such thing, ... A woman need not shut her eyes, ears or understanding to a man's merit - only her heart.'

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1. Patronage, Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth.  
18 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1833), XV, xviii, 303.



Rosamond allows this to be,

'perfectly true- in general; but surely you will allow that there may be cases in which it would be difficult to adhere to the letter as well as the spirit of this excellent rule'.

and she goes on to suggest that such an exception be permitted in the case of Colonel Hungerford.

'Dangerous exceptions!' said Caroline. 'Every body is too apt to make an exception in such cases in their own favour: ... Consider what evil I should bring upon myself, if I became attached to a man who is not attached to me; if you saw me sinking, an object of pity and contempt, the victim, the slave of an unhappy passion.' 'God forbid', cried Rosamond ... but ... she added, 'This is a vain fear. With your strength of mind, you could never be reduced to such a condition.'

Caroline's reply is significant since it suggests, not that women are victims of a set of rules, but that these rules may be the means by which they establish their own self-esteem and happiness.

'Who can answer for their strength of mind in the second trial, if it fail the first? If a woman once lets her affections go out of her power, how can she afterwards answer for her own happiness?' (I, xviii, 303-306)

Her reply also shows that underlying this issue is the perceived need to govern the feelings. The attempts of novelists like Mary Hays, who wished explicitly to criticise the position of woman in society, including her passive role in courtship, are hampered by their equal concern to show the necessity for women to govern their feelings. In Emma Courtney 1796, Mary Hays's heroine transgresses the courtship rules and declares her love to Harley before being certain of his intentions and situation. The author's attitude to her heroine's decision is not wholly clear, for, on the one hand, we are told that these rules are part of 'a



pernicious system of morals,' which teaches ... that hypocrisy can be virtue!'; yet, on the other, the rationalizations which Emma makes to reassure herself are treated ambiguously. Emma reasons that she has 'nothing to apprehend [from those] principles of rectitude of honour, of goodness, which gave birth to... [her] affection' (I, 155). Yet the novel shows very clearly that Emma had, on the contrary, everything to apprehend. While the novel continues to make clear that women's position in society is constricted, we are told at the same time that Emma's behaviour is deviant - the result of her upbringing, her later environment and associations aligned to a naturally strong sensibility. In the end, the reader may be tempted to sympathise with Harley when he tells Emma of the effects on him of her pursuit. Admitting that he had indeed been susceptible to Emma, he goes on to explain:

'-I imposed on myself those severe laws of which you causelessly complained. - Had my conduct been less rigid, I had been lost - I had been unjust to the bonds which I had voluntarily contracted; and which, therefore, had on me indispensable claims. I acted from good motives, but no doubt, was guilty of some errors - yet, my conflicts were even more cruel than yours - I had not only to contend against my own sensibility, but against yours also.- ' (II, 182)

Attitudes to women's behaviour during courtship appear then, towards the end of the eighteenth century, to be subsumed by the wider issue of the need for women to govern their feelings. The following section will look at the views of some writers in the 1790's who see education as the key to this issue.

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1. Emma Courtney, 2 vols. (New York, London: Garland Press Inc., 1974, [facsimile of 1796 edition]), I, p. 155.

ii. Female Education - Accomplishments and Sensibility

In The Polite Lady; or, A Course of Female Education, in a Series of Letters from a Mother to a Daughter, 1760, the anonymous author 'speaks for a female virtue ... [which] is not quite so subordinate to the "Art of Pleasing"...' 'True modesty' the work suggests requires more than 'soft Attractions of Behaviour sweet' recommended by many conduct book writers: modesty for this author consists not 'in following the fashion, but in following reason.'

The publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 1792, marks a decade in which the implicit criticism noted in The Polite Lady was debated in more explicit terms. Wollstonecraft for example states that,

All writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; ...<sup>2</sup>

She sees James Fordyce's popular works as typical of that trend in conduct book writers which insists that women be pleasing, passive and ignorant: 'as they [Fordyce's publications] have contributed to vitiate the taste, and enervate the understanding of many of my fellow creatures, I could not pass them silently over' (p. 160). She suggests that the overwhelming concern with public

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1. Yeazall p. 7, quoting from The Polite Lady, pp. 227-28.

2. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, eds. Janet Todd, & Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London: Pickering Chatto Publishers, 1989), V, p. 91. (Abbreviated in subsequent references to Vindication).

manifestations of female virtue have had a detrimental effect on the cultivation of true virtue. She goes on to reject the traditional view of modesty as a virtue to be cultivated more especially by women than men. Wollstonecraft argues further that woman will become truly modest only when sensibility is guided by reason. As things stand, 'in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment' (p. 92). Along with many of her contemporaries in this decade she questions the type of education currently recommended for females, an education which encourages the cultivation of sensibility as opposed to the understanding:

the sexual distinction respecting modesty has proved fatal to virtue and happiness. It is, however, carried still further, and woman - weak woman - made by her education the slave of sensibility, is required, on the most trying occasions, to resist that sensibility. (p. 195)

William St Clair, sees Wollstonecraft's criticism of earlier conduct-book advice, and particularly her attack on those who emphasised the development of female sensibility without attention to the reasoning faculties, as part of a general expression of doubt during the 1790's about the efficacy of young women's education. He points out that events which appear to threaten the status quo of society often lead to women's behaviour being perceived as a problem. It is, he suggests, significant that an increasing number of advice books for young women were published after 1793: that is, in the wake of 'the outbreak of the war, the Terror in France, the treason trials and the anti-Jacobin panic'. He notes that:



Many of the [advice] books complain of falling moral standards. Most acknowledge that women's education has advanced in the recent past, but they are dubious about the benefits and warn against going too far. The main difference is between those who concentrate on 'accomplishments' - which include conversation and manners, as well as needlework, music, drawing and dancing - and those who want to build up understanding in order to give the accomplishments a more secure base. (p. 507)<sup>1</sup>

The critic D. D. Devlin has also noted in The Novels and Journals of Fanny Burney, that writers concerned with female education appeared during the last decade of the eighteenth century to form a united front of 'intelligent radical' and 'intelligent conservative' (p. 71). Like William St. Clair, Devlin believes that Wollstonecraft, a political radical, shared on this topic much common ground with those who were apparently her opponents, such as Hannah More: both fall into the category of, 'those who want to build up understanding in order to give accomplishments a more secure base' (William St. Clair, p. 507). 'Accomplishments' in other words, should be supportive of genuine female virtues.

As William St Clair puts it, Wollstonecraft may be seen as 'reinforc[ing] a protest that was already widely asserted and widely accepted', rather than 'as having devised a new philosophy' (p. 509).

Devlin, in contrast to St Clair, stresses in particular the perceived threat of the sentimental movement as the cause of this

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1. The author sees a correlation between the fall of the value of 3% consols (government stock) and the increased publication of advice books between 1780 - 1820. They are both, he suggests, 'indicators of wider worries of the propertied classes about the possibility of revolution.' (The Godwins and the Shelleys, pp. 508-510).



rapprochement between radical and conservative polemicists. The shared concern was that sentimental novelists and those writing in the wake of thinkers like Shaftesbury and David Hume placed too much emphasis on the power of feelings. For example, Hume's expounding of the passions as the main motivating force in human psychology had placed too much emphasis on the passions. The selective use of passages such as, 'that reason alone can never be a motive of any action of the will ... that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will', could be used to support a variety of views. Hume was cited uncritically, as having supported or advocated 'irrationality'. In fact, Hume distinguished clearly between the 'calm' as opposed to the 'violent' passions; the 'calm' passions were shown as motivating actions which we would normally regard as 'reasonable'.

Diverse writers found common ground in stressing the need for women's education to ensure that sensibility was tempered by reason. Along with Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More and Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth attack those contemporary systems of female instruction which see education merely in terms of acquiring accomplishments. Hannah More, for example, writes:

Few of the accomplishments, falsely so called, assist the development of the faculties: they do not exercise the judgment, nor bring into action those powers which fit the heart and mind for the occupations of life; they do not prepare

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1. A Treatise on Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Brigge, (OUP, 1958), p. 413.

See also John Mullen, Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the 18th Century, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

women to love home, to understand its occupations, to enliven its uniformity, to fulfil its duties ...'

Many of these writers were also, and perhaps more urgently, concerned because the reasoning faculties, which accomplishment-based curricula failed to develop, were required in order to counteract the dangers of 'sensibility' in young women. For example, Hannah More devotes a chapter of Strictures to 'the dangers of an ill directed sensibility':

Flippancy, impetuosity, resentment, and violence of spirit, grow out of this disposition, which will be rather promoted than corrected by a system of education on which we have been animadverting; in which system, emotions are too early and too much excited, and tastes and feelings are considered as too exclusively making up the whole of the female character; in which the judgment is little exercised, the reasoning powers are seldom brought into action... (ibid., p. 246)

Richard Lovell Edgeworth continues in Practical Education:

Without repeating here what has been said in many other places, it may be necessary to remind all who are concerned in *female* education, that peculiar caution is necessary to manage female sensibility; to make, what is called the heart, a source of permanent pleasure, we must cultivate the reasoning powers at the same time that we repress the enthusiasm of *fine feeling*.<sup>2</sup>

The following quotation from Hannah More's Strictures exemplifies the force of the criticism which suggested that

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1. Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, The Works of Hannah More, 11 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), III, pp. 277-78, (subsequent references to Strictures).

2. Practical Education, 2 vols. (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), I, pp. 296-97.

educators helped to promote ungoverned or factitious sensibility  
in women:

Some popular authors on the subject of female instruction, had for a time established a fantastic code of artificial manners. They had refined elegance into insipidity, frittered down delicacy into frivolousness, and reduced manner in minauderie (affectation) ... Another class of contemporary authors turned all the force of their talents to excite *emotions*, to inspire *sentiment*, and to reduce all mental and moral excellence into *sympathy* and *feeling*. These softer qualities were elevated at the expense of principle; and young women were incessantly hearing unqualified sensibility extolled as the perfection of their nature; till those who really possess this amiable quality, instead of directing, and chastening, and restraining it, were in danger of fostering it to their hurt, ... while those less interesting damsels, who happened not to find any of this amiable sensibility in their hearts, but thought it creditable to have it somewhere, fancied its seat was in the nerves - ... (p. 52)

Mary Wollstonecraft's similar criticism of the cult of sensibility encompasses a wide range of targets including Rousseau's Emile, as well as the English courtesy books of Dr James Fordyce and Dr John Gregory. All are deemed guilty of creating systems of education or conduct which encourage women to be pleasing rather than rational beings. In Vindication she gives an illustration of the enervating effects of the cult of sensibility which may bring to mind Lady Bertram in Mansfield Park.

I once knew a weak woman of fashion, who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a distinguishing taste and puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly. I have seen this weak sophisticated being neglect all the duties of life, yet recline with self-complacency on a sofa, and boast of her want of appetite as proof of delicacy that extended to, or, perhaps, arose from, her exquisite sensibility; ... (pp. 112-13)



In the middle of the eighteenth century, Johnson had defined 'sensibility' as, 'quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy'. (The potential synonymity of sensibility and delicacy - particularly when the latter connotes spontaneous moral intuitions - will be of relevance to discussions in this thesis, for example, chapter 5, p. 220 below - ). A modern critic, John Mullan, argues in this context that if Richardson made the novel respectable in the mid-eighteenth century, then he did so, not just because of 'the fixation of his text upon virtue', but because of 'the association of sensibility with moral rectitude.' The feminine model of virtue Richardson describes is, 'realized in the capacity to feel and display sentiments, a capacity that is called sensibility' (Sentiment and Sociability, p. 61). Jane Spencer, also, suggests that in the 1760's heroines could still be depicted as being 'virtuous less from reasoning and fixed principle, than from elegance, and a lovely delicacy of mind; naturally tender'. She goes on to say that (even in seduction novels) of this period, the

ideal sentimental heroine has a special way of avoiding the dangers of her delicacy and tenderness. In her, sensibility is so pure and refined a force that its spontaneous manifestations are completely in accord with the strictest code of decorum. ... The moral code, far from being a check on sensibility, is actually its object.

(The Rise of the Woman Novelist, pp. 123-24)

But when Wollstonecraft wrote Vindication she saw no such necessary connection between 'sensibility' and 'the moral code':

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1. Samuel Johnson, Dictionary, 4 vols. (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1818, [corrtns. by the Rev. H. M. Todd]).



she uses a pejorative term 'sentimental' as a reminder that sensibility can itself be a dangerous weakness:

Another instance of that feminine weakness of character, often produced by a confined education, is a romantic twist of the mind, which has been very properly termed *sentimental*. (p. 255)

By the late eighteenth century, 'sensibility' no longer appears to have much connection with moral sense. It is interesting that both Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft display in the course of their writing careers considerable ambivalence towards the complex nexus of values associated with the term. Their works written in the 1790's however show that both writers feel that 'sensibility' has in common usage become associated almost entirely with a capacity for feeling, usually evinced in the display of emotion. 'Delicacy' also, by this time, appears more often to be used, not in the context of mental innocence or chastity - delicacy, mental and physical, had been regarded as the shield of chastity - but of physical softness and weakness.

### iii. Sir Charles Grandison as a Courtesy Novel

Sir Charles Grandison 1753-1754, and Burney's novels, Evelina 1778, Cecilia 1782, and Camilla 1796, have been seen by some critics as representing a genre in which conduct-book material has intentionally been incorporated into a 'novel' or narrative format. Joyce Hemlow has called this genre the 'courtesy novel'.<sup>1</sup>

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1. 'Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Book', PLMA, 65, (1950), 732-61, p. 757.

M. A. Doody, in A Natural Passion, also sees a discernible tradition of novels drawing on material from the conduct books. She suggests that the female novel early in the eighteenth century can be divided into two types; 'the seduction/rape tale and the courtship novel' (p. 18). The latter type of novel 'intentionally bears out the precepts of the conduct books': Mary Davy's The Reformed Coquet: Memoirs of Amoranda (1724) is cited as one of the most influential of these novels. In a later chapter Doody suggests that new conventions were already being accepted by the writers of conduct novels before Richardson wrote Sir Charles Grandison.

The worldly wise heroine of the earlier stage-comedy, brilliant and victorious, gives way to a more introspective type of female character, yet the novel heroines possess shrewdness, dignity, and wit, which keep them from resembling the lachrymose female characters of the new sentimental drama. (A Natural Passion, p. 306)

Mrs Barker's Galasia, the heroine of A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies, 1723, is a country girl who, far from being the object of fun as in a Restoration Comedy is, in Mrs Barker's novel, 'a person who arouses the reader's interest and respect' (ibid., p. 306).

Doody continues,

The writers of courtship novels had shown how a female could be presented as the observing centre of interest, in social situations which are not lurid or sensational (as in the seduction tales) but governed by a refined and subtle code of moral behaviour. They had also begun to give their histories a thematic unity by dealing with the problems and behaviour of various couples in *courtship* and marriage. (ibid., p. 307) (my italics)

With regard to Sir Charles Grandison, Doody points out that in this novel,

Richardson intended to instruct, and, in his gallery of marriages and courtships, to point out right and wrong behaviour according to social duties, and particularly according to the standards of behaviour relevant to women. Since he here accepts society as good, the standards are those which society at its best approves - ... the standards of the conduct books. (ibid., p. 309)

Jocelyn Harris also points out that Richardson was familiar with conduct manuals, 'making frequent mention of them in his letters and works'. She notes that these have had an influence on the narrative of Sir Charles Grandison:

Stylistically, the pattern in Grandison of maxim, illustrative scene, and commentary is traceable to the conduct books, probably by way of Defoe's Family Instructor (1715) and Religious Courtship (1722) ... From these too may come the repetition of valuable points, the careful explicitness and the accommodation to the most incapable mind. ....

Just as the main characters frequently play purely functional and didactic roles, so subsidiary characters are introduced to provide their foils or to allow of expostulation: Everard the gambler, the rakes, the Danby father and children ... Others show proper behaviour at different times of life: the maid in Emily, the spinster in Lady Gertrude, the matron in Lady Grandison and Lady D, ... old age in Mrs Shirley, ....

This tight, externally imposed frame places the characters in tidy groups that match and oppose, and it insists upon the limited general notion of character for which

Sir Charles Grandison ... has been most criticised.

(Introduction to Sir Charles Grandison, op. cit., xviii - xix)

Harris qualifies her endorsement of this criticism by asserting that, at times, 'Richardson's delight in particular characters was at least as strong as his moral purpose when he sought to make them "real"'.

It is clearly impossible to fit Richardson's work neatly into categories such as 'courtesy novel', 'realistic novel' or 'romance'. Nevertheless we can agree with Harris that he often incorporates into his scenes material which has no other

'rationale' than illustrating 'the rules laid down in conduct books' (p. xviii) and that this material is found alongside, for example, elements of romance seen most clearly in the Italian scenes. In these scenes characters are caught up in luridly dramatic episodes involving torture, suicide, and assassinations. Romance also finds its way via 'the aristocratic and heroic traditions' into the English domestic setting. Sir Charles himself is 'impossibly handsome and outrageously able'. Harriet, a heroine who is 'impossibly beautiful and physically delicate, ... suffers passively at home [while her] lover endures perils and trials of his fidelity abroad' (ibid., p. xvii). The critic John Mullan in Sentiment and Sensibility, agrees that it is in the Italian episodes that Richardson 'repeats those images which distinguish, if any are going to, the excitements of eighteenth-century romances'. His contention is however that these elements are more pervasive and potentially disruptive than this localised identification would suggest. It is not only in the Italian episodes that romance sits uncomfortably with didacticism.

Sir Charles Grandison is not adequately encompassed by the sub-category of courtesy novel or even by the wider category of exemplary fiction, particularly if this is taken to imply that the narrative provides a simple rehash of conduct-book wisdom. Richardson's convincing characters interacting within an imaginatively realised framework create tensions and complexities which would not arise in a mere illustration of a polemical treatise. In the context of the conduct-book themes dealt with below these tensions will become evident. As Joanna Clare Dales points out, Richardson claimed that he was 'dealing realistically



with people in natural situations in such a way as to give guidance to his readers for their conduct in everyday life'.<sup>1</sup> However, ambiguities can also be seen to arise from the format of the novel itself. To gain and keep his readers' attention, even for domestic instruction, it would clearly be advantageous to construct a plot where startling, even extravagant, developments gripped the reader through a desire to know what happens next. Such plots, involving characters who, almost by definition, could not be commonplace in their virtues or defects, were to be found in the romantic love stories of the very kind which puritans abhorred. 'The love cult was particularly subversive of the virtues fostered by puritanism (and by the conduct books) - sobriety, prudence and self-control (Dales, p. 6). Consequently, Richardson and his followers:

took pains to deprecate the hyperbolic language with which passion (implicitly sexual passion) was described by (those they regarded as) irresponsible writers. And (most particularly) they took pains to assert the vincibility of first love. (ibid., p. 7)

This meant that the first display of passion by a young woman, (especially if this resulted from love at first sight) need not be sacrosanct and that 'esteem' might be regarded as a better, more reasonable, basis for marriage. And yet both Richardson and later novelists writing exemplary fiction 'show a keen sympathy with what they seek to undermine' (ibid., p. 7). 'Their hero/heroines are bound to the conventions which demand that ideal characters should

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1. The Novel as Domestic Conduct Book: Richardson to Austen, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Cambridge, 1970, p. 6.

be deeply susceptible to passion, however much they may need later to be chastened' (ibid., p. 8). As Samuel Johnson, in general a powerful defender of Richardson, points out in Rambler 4, the modern novels were potentially more dangerous than the old romances.

In the romances formerly written, every transaction and sentiment was as remote from all that passes among men, that the reader was in very little danger of making any application to himself; the virtues and crimes were equally beyond his sphere of activity.<sup>1</sup>

The treatment given to first love and its relationship to marriage further illustrate the type of difficulty faced by Richardson in incorporating elements of romance (and carrying the expectations of this genre) within an exemplary work. Judging from extrinsic evidence such as his Rambler 97, Richardson supported the view that, on this issue, sensibility - the dictates of the heart - should be modified by rational, prudential considerations. 'That a young lady should be in love, and the love of the gentleman undeclared is an heterodoxy which prudence, and even policy must not allow.'<sup>2</sup> Yet, within the narrative of Sir Charles Grandison, he is less able to make his position clear. When, for example, it seems that Sir Charles may marry Clementina, Harriet Byron, who is strongly attached to him and has admitted her love, feels it will now be impossible for her to marry even the eligible Earl of D.

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1. Rambler 4, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1969), III, 19-25.

2. Rambler 97, 'Advice to Unmarried Ladies', The Works of Samuel Johnson, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1969), IV, 153-59.

Both Sir Charles and Mrs Shirley believe that Harriet should not allow these feelings to prevent her from both giving and receiving married happiness. The venerable Mrs Shirley is also the main spokesperson for the corollary of this view: that esteem rather than love is a sound basis for a successful marriage. Yet although these two paradigm figures support Richardson's view on the 'vincible' nature of a first love, the reader may still find the actual treatment of the theme ambiguous. (As will be discussed below, problems also arose in reconciling Harriet's objections to the prudential line taken by Charlotte, Mrs Shirley and Sir Charles himself).

In the 1750's it seems that, although there was always a danger of conflict between the demands that a heroine should combine sensibility, including susceptibility to passion, with a high degree of delicacy and prudence, it was still possible, as in the character of Harriet Byron, to combine these requirements. By the time Burney wrote Cecilia in 1782, however, sensibility appears to be regarded with greater suspicion. The acceptable sensibility of the heroine is set alongside the less acceptable manifestations of this quality in characters like Belfield, who is seen to be the victim of sentimental delusions.

The difficulty of combining sensibility, which continued to be regarded as the potential basis of all that was best in the female character - a view shared by novelists as diverse as Edgeworth and Mary Brunton and polemicists as diverse as More and Wollstonecraft - with a high degree of prudence became increasingly difficult. Maria Edgeworth's elevation of prudence in Belinda illustrates one means of resolving the difficulty but at the price of producing a



heroine who is not sympathetically 'sensible'. Caroline Percy in the later Patronage illustrates another, slightly different, attempt to overcome this difficulty; yet even this heroine invites some criticism of her adherence to a stern line of stoical philosophy. Mary Brunton's works also show signs of strain in attempting to resolve these tensions within a story in which the heroine must be seen to respond convincingly to the affections of the hero whom she will necessarily marry at the conclusion of the novel. Austen's Sense and Sensibility also illustrates the difficulties and dangers of attempting to depict the strong, though at times erring and possibly factitious, feelings which motivate Marianne Dashwood alongside an equally convincing depiction of the better disciplined, though equally strong, sensibility of her sister. It seems that the highly valued qualities of openness and candour were seen as dangerously close to uncontrolled spontaneous feeling. (This issue is discussed further in relation to Camilla, Belinda and Sense and Sensibility in chapters 2 and 4 below).

If Sir Charles Grandison is considered to be a 'courtesy novel', the central protagonist, Harriet Byron, is sometimes cited as one of the first courtesy-book heroines.<sup>1</sup> And ostensibly she can be read as having all the graces and virtues which constitute the courtesy-book ideal: she manifests modesty through her diffident and reserved behaviour and delicacy both of mind and body through her virgin innocence. But on top of these primary virtues the

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1. Marian Fowler (op. cit., p. 16 above) suggests Harriet Byron is the first of a line of courtesy-book heroines which includes Juliet Granville, Mary Brunton's Laura Montreville and Charlotte Smith's Celestina, p. 32.

ideal heroine should be equipped for a quiet domestic life, and we learn that Harriet is a highly skilled domestic manager (SCG, V, xiv, 543-45). It is noticeable that Harriet is also clever and, as Charlotte points out, capable of making sharp and witty ripostes. But, since neither wit nor intellectual curiosity were deemed compatible with modest behaviour, Harriet rarely exhibits either of these qualities. Here, Charlotte comments on Harriet's response to raillery from her Uncle Selby:

She never forgets that the railler is her uncle; yet her delicacy is not more apparent, than that she is mistress of fine talents in that way; but often restrains them, because she has far more superior ones to value herself upon. And is not this the case with my brother also? - not so, I am afraid, with your Charlotte. (SCG, V, xiii, 517)

Other characters, but most particularly Sir Charles, who is a scrupulous judge of feminine delicacy, find 'blended' in Harriet's 'mind and behaviour ... true dignity, delicacy and noble frankness'. What is interesting about Harriet's delicacy or sensibility is that, in this novel, it is allowed to co-exist along with a high degree of frankness.

Some contemporary and early critics of Richardson felt this blend was not compatible and saw Harriet as a flawed heroine. The incompatibility was seen to emerge primarily over attitudes to courtship rules. The episode in which, under pressure from Charlotte Grandison and Lady L, Harriet confesses that she loves their brother is often cited as an instance of this incompatibility. Harriet does not know at this point whether Sir Charles returns her sentiments; she is, therefore, breaking one of the fundamental rules governing courtship behaviour. M. A. Doody

mentions Walter Scott as a critic who found Harriet's behaviour in this instance unacceptable for a heroine, particularly one who is in 'competition' with Clementina. He goes on to claim that Harriet, 'literally forms a league, in Sir Charles' family, and among his friends, for the purpose of engaging his affections ... [she betrays] a secret which every *delicate mind holds sacred*' (A Natural Passion pp. 311-12).

Doody justifiably points out that Scott's argument fails to take into account the forced rather than voluntary nature of Harriet's confession. Richardson, who did not consider her action to be indelicate, says in a letter to Lady Bradshaigh: 'Could the most punctilious have paraded more than she did, if they would not have absolutely denied the Truth' (Selected Letters, p. 255). Scott's reading overlooks too the judgements which are implied by our being given the parallel histories of both heroines in the course of the narrative. Harriet's honesty appears to be more acceptable and beneficial than the repeated and self-destructive efforts of Clementina to conceal her love. Nor does Scott take into account Mrs Shirley's opinion on this matter. As she is a figure whose virtuous behaviour gives her considerable moral status in the work, her views are perhaps offered to guide the reader's judgements. In this instance, Mrs Shirley is shocked by the indelicate behaviour of the Grandison sisters, and believes Harriet has acquitted herself well. The reader may feel that since Harriet and eventually Clementina admit their love for a character of almost preternatural goodness this may be considered an exceptional case. (In the later Camilla it is clearly stated in Mr Tyrold's sermon (Camilla) that, however worthy the object, feelings should never be



shown until it is certain they will be reciprocated).

Richardson, in this novel, seems willing to adjust the rules sufficiently to imply that frankness and truthfulness are not incompatible with delicacy. For example, the Countess of D who hopes Harriet will marry her son, asks some very awkward questions about Harriet's feelings for Sir Charles. Harriet's response produces the following comment: '- Such a delicacy and such a frankness mingled, have I never seen in young woman -' (SCG, IV, v, 287).

However, this adjustment of the rules does not extend to instances of 'greater indiscretion'. Charlotte, for example, would not make an eligible wife for a male character who has scrupulous standards of delicacy. Sir Charles, worried by a comment his younger sister makes about Mr Beauchamp, tells Harriet that his friend's delicacy would prevent him thinking of Charlotte in matrimonial terms (III, xix, 113). Later, Harriet angered by Charlotte's levity during her marriage service to Lord G, comments to Lucy:

What a victim must that woman look upon herself to be, who is compelled, or even *over-persuaded*, to give her hand to a man who has no share in her heart? Ought not a parent or guardian, in such a circumstance, ... to be chargeable with all the unhappy consequences that may follow from such a cruel compulsion? ... But this is not the case with Miss Grandison. Early she cast her eye on an improper object. Her pride convinced her in time of the impropriety. And this, as she owns, gave her an indifference to all men. ... As she played with her passion till she lost it, she may be happy, if she will: ... (IV, xvi, 347).

It can be claimed that the exploration of the tension between the demands of delicacy and prudence with those of sensibility and candour constitutes one of the distinctive strengths of

Richardson's novel. There is some justice in this claim - this exploration certainly distinguishes Sir Charles Grandison from a simple courtesy novel, but it is also true that Richardson is not always in control of the conflicts.

Some characters, including Harriet and perhaps Sir Charles himself, recognise the problems which are created by these opposing demands. In a letter to Lucy, Harriet reflects: 'Nothing surely, can be delicate, that is not true, or that gives birth to equivocation...' (III, 1). Yet in considering her own position with the Grandison family and Sir Charles she asks,

And are there some situations, in which a woman must conceal her true sentiments? In which it would be thought immodesty to speak out? - Why was I born with an heart so open and sincere? But why, indeed, as Sir Charles has said in his Letter relating to the Danby's, should women be blamed, for owning modestly a passion for a worthy and suitable object? (III, 1)

There are other ways in which the attempt to define the parameters of delicacy, prudence and punctilio can be shown, under pressure from the drive of the plot, to get out of control. For example, the following passage shows how the exemplary character, Sir Charles, in arguing for a necessary speedy marriage to Harriet, is caused to obscure what he has said earlier on the subject.

For much of the novel Sir Charles appears to be the authority on standards of ideal female behaviour. He regards the excessive affectation of modesty in women as a fault, yet he is also an advocate of scrupulous female delicacy (IV, 354). In a letter to Dr Bartlett he discusses Lady Olivia's behaviour during her visit to England. 'When a woman gets over that delicacy, which is the test or bulwark as I may say of modesty - modesty itself may soon

lie at the mercy of an enemy' (IV, xvii, 354).

While his confidence in Harriet's standards of delicacy and modesty are justifiably much greater, some readers may feel that he allows himself too much license with these concepts during his own courtship. (It could be suggested that this episode provided Richardson with an opportunity for showing the reader that Sir Charles is capable of passionate feeling; yet Sir Charles' motivation remains unclear, since the reader also knows that he is under pressure from Clementina's family to conclude a hasty marriage settlement, avoiding 'all punctilio'). Sir Charles' candour about his feelings for Harriet and about the situation regarding Clementina and her family all make his decision quite acceptable to Mrs Shirley: she feels that 'every point of delicacy has been answered' (VI, viii, 19). Harriet is less certain, and while she willingly accepts Sir Charles' offer of marriage, his undue haste seems to her, 'too early an urgency'. She reflects, 'And can a woman be wholly unobservant of custom, and the laws of her sex?' ... particularly when these 'customs have their foundation in modesty' (VI, xxv, 100).

Harriet is also prompted to reflect on modesty, prudence and prudery; this may remind the reader that earlier in the novel, Sir Charles has himself questioned Charlotte's distinction between prudery and modesty.

Take care, Lady G. - ... for I am afraid, that MODESTY, under this name, will become ignominious, and be banished the hearts, at least the behaviour and conversation, of all those whose fortunes or inclinations carry them often to places of public resort. (IV, xviii, 354)



The frankness with which Harriet confesses her feelings to Sir Charles suggests that her fears about the haste of the settlement are not solely the result of excessive punctiliousness or of affectation. Yet, in his attempts to persuade her to settle on an early day, Sir Charles insists that she is falsely motivated: 'And if, madam, you can so far get over observances, ['dull and cold forms' a few sentences earlier], which perhaps, on consideration, will be found to be punctilios only, ...' (VI, xviii, 57). The following extract illustrates Sir Charles' domineering behaviour:

His air was so noble; his eyes shewed so much awe, yet such manly dignity, that my heart gave way to its natural impulse - Why, Sir, should I not declare my reliance on your candour? My honour, in the world's eye, I entrust to you: But bid me not do an improper thing, lest my desire of obliging you should make me forget myself.

Was not this a generous resignation? Did it not deserve a generous return? But he, even Sir Charles Grandison, endeavoured to make his advantage of it. Letters from Italy unreceived! as if he thought my reference to those a punctilio also.

What a deposit! - Your honour, madam, is safely entrusted. Can punctilio be honour? - It is but the shadow of it. What but *that* stands against your grant of an early day? - Do not think me misled by my impatience to call you mine, ... Is it not the happiness of *both* that I wish to confirm? And shall I suffer false delicacy, false gratitude, to take place of the true? - ... Let me request from you the choice of some one happy day, before the expiration of the next *fourteen* - ...

He looked to be in earnest in his request: Was it not *almost* an ungenerous return to my confidence in him?  
(VI, xxix, 126-27)

In the following paragraph he admits to having taken lodgings 'at a place of public entertainment' only a short distance from Harriet, 'with some view, ... that the general talk ... would help to accelerate the happy day'. Harriet's parenthetical comment to Lady G, 'it is well he is a good man' (VI, 127), relates this episode to

an earlier one during which Sir Charles persuaded Harry Beauchamp's step mother to allow his friend to return to England. And indeed the reader has probably been aware for some time that Sir Charles' overbearing language is redolent of the tone he more justifiably adopts to deal with the petulant Lady Beauchamp. Sir Charles continues to spell out for Harriet the implications of his having taken public lodgings: 'But, madam, to continue my daily visits from thence, when my happiness is supposed to be near, will not perhaps look so well.' He means it would not look so well for Harriet's reputation if the marriage were not to take place within the short time he prescribes. This leads on to a consideration of the place of punctilio, which, within the context of what has been said earlier in the novel, shows Sir Charles' argument here to be one of expedience only.

[We are to be studious of looks, it seems] - Indeed I would not be thought to despise the world's opinion: .....  
- Consider, my dearest life, that if you regard punctilio merely; punctilio has no determinate end: Punctilio begets punctilio. (VI, xxix, 127-28)

At one stage in his explanation of his behaviour he asks parenthetically to be pardoned for his 'ingenuousness'; but the effect of his 'explanation', as he must have known, is thoroughly disingenuous.

Attempts to draw the boundaries between 'real delicacy' and 'punctilio' frequently occur in the works of Richardson's successors. For example, Maria Edgeworth has a great deal to say about 'punctilio' and the parameters of delicacy in Patronage, 1814. The distinction is in this novel more convincing intellectually, if more banal in dramatic terms, than that drawn by

Richardson's characters in the previous century. For neither Lady Jane Granville nor Caroline Percy was being as disingenuous as Sir Charles Grandison. Lady Jane, who is convinced she 'knows the world', is dismayed that Caroline Percy elevates sincerity and honesty above delicacy, particularly where real delicacy is not distinguished from punctilio. Caroline thinks it wrong to give no warning to a would-be suitor whom you intend to refuse until he actually makes his proposal; Lady Jane believes that delicacy must not be risked. 'Stay till you are asked' is the rule she cites: 'Till a gentleman thinks proper, in form, to declare his attachment, nothing can be more indelicate than for a lady to see it'. 'Or, in some cases, [replies Caroline] more disingenuous, more cruel than to pretend to be blind to it' (II, 335). In the debate which follows, set out in free indirect speech - for brevity rather than to track the consciousness of either of the participants - Lady Jane denies at first that there is any real difference between delicacy and punctilio, the latter being necessary 'as the guard of female delicacy' (II, 336). Caroline will not accept this:

She asked whether, after all, the plea of delicacy and punctilio was not sometimes used to conceal the real motives? Perhaps ladies, in pretending to be too delicate to see a gentleman's sentiments, were often, in fact, gratifying their own vanity, and urging him to that declaration which was to complete the female triumph. (II, xxxiv, 336-37)

It is not surprising that this retort angered Lady Jane, since a little earlier she had made it clear that she did regard a number of refusals ('killing your man') as a sign of triumph for an eligible woman (II, 336-37).



Jane Austen is, by the time Pride and Prejudice was published in 1813, much more willing to treat such issues with a degree of levity. In this novel it is the foolish Mr Collins who appears 'to understand' these controversies and it is Elizabeth Bennet who indignantly refuses to give them any serious consideration:

'I am not now to learn', replied Mr Collins, with a formal wave of his hand, 'that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man they secretly mean to accept ... I am therefore by no means discouraged ... and still hope to lead you to the altar ere long.'

'Upon my word sir', cried Elizabeth, 'your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you I am not one of those ladies *if such young ladies there are who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time.*'

A little later Elizabeth also puts the term 'delicacy' in a more brutal context:

'In making me the offer, you must have satisfied the delicacy of your feelings with regard to my family, and may take possession of the Longbourn estate whenever it falls, without any self-reproach.' (p. 107)

#### iv. Narrative Features of the Courtesy Novel

The structure of the narrative of the courtesy novels follows a broadly similar pattern and certain distinctive features can be discerned. Doody suggests that Sir Charles Grandison shares many of these features, and cites, Miss Betsy Thoughtless, as providing a particularly interesting contemporary comparison. (A Natural Passion, pp. 308-309). Joyce Hemlow, and Jocelyn Harris, who have also written about courtesy novels, are agreed that the following features mark this particular genre.

There is a *symmetry of exemplary illustrations*: prudent behaviour in courtship is matched by foolish behaviour in similar circumstances.' In The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless, the careers of Miss Forward and Mademoiselle Roquelair show what the heroine might become, while the characters of Mabel (Mrs Loveit) and Harriot Loveit illustrate what she ought to be.

There is *character parallelism*: descriptions of successful marriages are set against contrasting pictures of disastrous alliances. (This type of character parallelism can be seen in a particularly marked form in later works of exemplary fiction such as Edgeworth's Patronage 1814, and the novels of Mary Brunton).

Characters of the 'highest probity' are used as '*choric voices*' (Doody, p. 308) declaiming maxims inspired by the conduct book and giving quantities of good advice. In many cases these choric voices endorse in similar terms the advice and judgements enunciated by the narrator. Again The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless provides a good illustration of this: the narrator's warnings to Betsy are echoed by the virtuous figures of Lady Trusty, Mr Goodman, Mr Trueworth, Francis Thoughtless and Mabel (Mrs Loveit).

The courtesy novel also makes great use of *secondary characters* as foils to make the major characters 'shine more brightly' (Hemlow, p. 759) in their virtues, or stand out more egregiously in their defects.

'Warning lessons' may also be spelt out by the narrator, to

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1. Jocelyn Harris, Introduction to Sir Charles Grandison, vii-xxiv. (op. cit., p. 21 above).

hammer home the 'disastrous careers' of those who have allowed themselves to be led by the wrong impulses. 'Admonitory letters may be introduced at will' (Hemlow, p. 759).

The courtesy novel might be seen as a sub-set of a more general category of exemplary female fiction. Women writers, from Mary Davis through to novelists such as Maria Edgeworth and Mary Brunton, contributed to this category. It encompasses a kind of fiction which may employ some, if not all, of those features set out above as typifying the courtesy novel. The *raison d'être* of works as diverse as Patronage 1814, Discipline 1815 and Self Control 1810/11 lies in illustrating the authors' polemical views; and in the context of novels which fall within the novel of manners, this involves the depiction of ideal female behaviour. Edgeworth, who uses her novel Patronage as a vehicle for conveying ideas about upbringing from her father's treatise, Professional Education, presents her heroine Caroline Percy as a model female produced by a correct upbringing; Brunton, by contrast, is primarily concerned with illustrating her religious views, but she too works through the medium of tales of exemplary or reformed heroines.

The problem with 'exemplary tales', as Mary Brunton herself was well aware, is that the story itself may lead the author into complexities of human nature which subvert the main didactic intentions. Courtesy novels, even when constrained by the structural patterns described above in this section, are concerned with expressing and evoking human emotions which cannot always be kept safely in bounds. Nevertheless, a marked difference can be noted between the novelists who accepted the potential of the genre



and those who wished their polemical or didactic views to predominate. The difference is seen not only in a greater reliance on the structural features set out above but also in the 'univocality' of a novel when it is mainly a vehicle for didactic purposes.

It may be helpful to refer at this stage to the distinctions made, as early as Plato, between 'diegetic' and 'mimetic' reporting, and by literary theorists in the twentieth century, between the 'linear' and the 'pictorial' styles of novel writing. David Lodge uses these terms in a recent critical work:

One of the most venerable distinctions in general poetics is that drawn by Plato in Book III of *The Republic*, between diegesis (description of actions by an authorial narrator) and mimesis (representation of action through the imitated speech of characters).

The linear style of reporting preserves a clear boundary between the reported speech and the reporting context (that is, the author's speech) in terms of information or reference, while suppressing the textual individuality of the reported speech by *imposing its own linguistic register, or attributing to the characters exactly the same register as the author's*. (my italics)' (ibid., p. 29)

All novelists must in varying degrees be both diegetic and mimetic: (even the epistolary novel which comes as close as possible to being as purely mimetic as drama, cannot, if only by its narrative linkages, avoid the diegetic presence of an author). All novels must also be a mixture of linear and pictorial modes. Nevertheless it is clear that the elements of the mixture vary

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1. After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism, (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 29.

considerably between types of novel as well as between authors. The discourse of exemplary fiction (as, for example, the courtesy novel) will be linear in mode: the authorial voice will tend to dominate in a manner which can be termed 'univocal'. Attempts to make the work less univocal, more pictorial (or more 'mimetic') may well fail because when embodied voices [the characters] enter into dialogue with one another they may be neither distinctive nor powerful enough (insufficiently mimetic) to carry equal weight with an author narrator who is mainly concerned to illustrate moral lessons.

CHAPTER TWO

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ART  
AND IDEA IN EXEMPLARY  
FICTION:  
TWO CASE STUDIES.



This chapter will consider what might be termed two post 1790 courtesy novels - Burney's Camilla and Edgeworth's Belinda - to see how far their authors are successful in combining the expectations carried by their modes of fiction with the drive to exemplify strongly held opinions about right conduct and appropriate upbringing.

### 1. CAMILLA - A COURTESY BOOK NOVEL?

Camilla (1796) is regarded by some critics as being strongly aligned to the tradition of courtesy-book novels. Joyce Hemlow, for example, suggests that 'even more' than Evelina or Cecilia, Camilla 'betrays the influence of the moral and utilitarian ideas of the courtesy books and books on the education of youth' ('Fanny Burney and The Courtesy Books', p. 758). Fanny Burney herself described Camilla as comprising 'sketches of character and morals put into action', and her didactic intentions are underlined by illustrative chapter headings: for example, 'The Progress of Dissolution' - describing Mrs Berlinton's fall into vice -, 'The Dangers of Disguise', 'A Sermon', 'Strictures upon the Ton'. The book also exemplifies many of the structural features already noted (pp. 48-52 above) as being associated with fiction influenced by advice books. That is, it includes *choric-voice* commentary, as well as narrator comment, on events and characters; it has *mentor figures* offering, in interviews and letters, moral guidance

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1. The Journals and Letters of Frances Burney, ed. Joyce Hemlow and Others, 12 vols. (Oxford, 1972 - 1984), III, p. 117.

to the central protagonists. Furthermore, the characters are grouped in ways which present them as contributing to what might be thought of as 'case-studies' within the courtesy-novel tradition. Thus the careers of Lionel and Eugenia Tyrold are set against that of their sister Lavinia to provide a study of what happens to those who have 'followed the wrong systems of education' (Hemlow, p. 759). Similarly, the accounts of the upbringing of Hal Westwyn and Clermont Lynmere are given in parallel and the results contrasted. Mrs Berlinton, as an egregious example of excessive sensibility, provides a foil to Camilla to bring out her central role as a heroine who must learn to govern her 'impetuous sensibility' (V, 882) and an 'imagination which submit[s] to no authority' (I, 84). Joyce Hemlow further suggests that in terms of creating an effective narrative format for giving instructive lessons, Camilla is in one important respect more successful than Sir Charles Grandison. For it is by the 'maxims of the courtesy books', that Edgar gauges the worth of his future wife;

[Camilla's] plot [is] retarded or advanced, not by means of extraneous incidents, but by the conduct of the heroine. ... Deportment or behaviour is at the centre of the action itself, as it ought to be in the courtesy novel. ... Madame d'Arblay in this respect excelled even Richardson, for the *éclaircissement* of Sir Charles Grandison depended not on the behaviour of Harriet Byron, which was perfect in the beginning, but on the elimination of the Italian complications.  
(*Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books*, pp. 760-61)

This narrative format gives us some idea of what kind of work Burney intended Camilla to be. J. C. Dales in a doctoral dissertation, 'The Novel as Domestic Conduct Book' has no doubt that Camilla was intended as a courtesy novel in the reformed-coquette tradition: 'Camilla has to pass through a series of tests to prove that she is no coquette, (or) spendthrift ... before she may appear worthy of her

lover' (p. 323); and until recently critics' have read Camilla in this way as didactic in intention and conservative in tone.

The defensive caution and conservatism [of Camilla] show themselves in many ways. She [Fanny Burney] does not want the book to be called a novel; it is to be 'sketches of characters and morals, put into action, not a romance'. It will be a story carefully contrived, 'all wove into one' to inculcate moral lessons ...<sup>2</sup>

Recently, however, there have been some noticeable voices of dissent: two critics have suggested that beneath the surface events of Camilla there is a sub-text: one, Margaret Anne Doody, believes that the readings offered by previous critics are oversimple and have arisen because Camilla is seen 'through a haze of expectation and presuppositions'.<sup>3</sup> She suggests that it is these presuppositions which have bound us to the idea that Camilla is a courtesy novel in the tradition of the 'coquette reformed novel' popularised by Mary Davis in 1724. For Doody, Camilla is not a treatise on female conduct, nor does it justify 'fathers and elders at the expense of a faulty (if teachable) heroine'; rather, it is 'a novel that shows a world of fallible human beings playing mental games and tricking themselves and each other' (p. 215).

In the context of this chapter, Doody's views are particularly

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1. For example, critics such as Marilyn Butler, Joyce Hemlow, E. Bloom, L. Bloom, Martha G. Brown, writing over the last 20 years, have read the novel in this way.

2. The Journals and Letters of Frances Burney, III, p. 117 quoted by D. D. Devlin, The Novels and Journals of Fanny Burney, (London, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1987), p. 101.

3. Frances Burney, The Life in The Works, (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: CUP, 1988), p. 206.



challenging since they imply that, within her stated aims ('a story carefully contrived to inculcate moral lessons') Burney achieved a novel which transcended the 'moral lessons': that is she successfully integrated art and idea.

Doody's reading gives a place to the influence of gothic and other narrative elements. These elements invite, Doody suggests, a 'feminist post-Lacanian' reading which shows the work's 'affinity' with 'magic realism' (ibid., p. 269). For, in 'its play with the mythic and the violent, [Camilla] points ahead, not so much to Jane Austen's novels as to Jane Eyre and Bleak House, and to modern and post-modern novels of our own times' (ibid., p. 273). She also attributes radical intentions to the author, claiming that Burney is in part concerned with undermining the passive and subservient role in which tradition, as for example expressed in conduct books, placed young women.

In proposing such subversive intentions, Doody has to reject a body of convincing biographical and other contextual evidence which suggests that, even had Burney wished to engage in a wholesale protest against the position of young women in society, she would not, at this stage in her career, have risked expressing them in so public a format.<sup>1</sup> What is more, Burney's explicit statements about her moral purpose as a novelist do not support the theory that she was subverting the moral code or even subsuming that code within artistic aims.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Joyce Hemlow illustrates Burney's awkward relationship with the English Court in 1796, 'Fanny Burney and The Courtesy Books', p. 760.

2. Katharine J. Rogers, Frances Burney, The World of Female Difficulties, (London, New York, Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 105.

Doody claims that, 'many questions and issues raised within [Camilla] are truly open questions, and that many issues are raised through paradoxes' (ibid., p. 220). In other words the moral issues are not simply 'inculcated'.

[The] essential paradox of the central action is to be found in the conduct-book views which constitute the two opposing rules. [that is, the rules governing behaviour during courtship] (ibid., p. 230)

Edgar and Camilla are, by this reading 'manoeuvred by their advisers ... chiefly clerical seconds' into accepting orthodox social custom. Doody continues, 'They leave their innocence and learn to treat one another as adversaries and opponents' (ibid., p. 233). The courtship rules, which 'limit' the options open to male and female, are set out by Doody as follows:

*A. Camilla's Rule.*

A young woman must never allow her love for a young man to become visible, especially to the object of it, until he has made an unreserved declaration, that is, a proposal of marriage.

*B. Edgar's Rule.*

A man must never propose to a woman unless he is sure her heart is now entirely his own. She must also be capable of loving him devotedly and must never have loved another man. This rule - gain the other's heart before giving anything of yours - is frequently inculcated and explained by Dr Marchmont. (ibid., pp. 230-31)

A, 'Camilla's Rule' - finds its clearest expression in Mr Tyrold's sermon where he echoes orthodox views expressed repeatedly in the advice-book tradition. The second rule which Doody sets out - 'Edgar's Rule' - was certainly inculcated by Dr Marchmont, but, outside this novel, did not have the general force and acceptance of 'Camilla's Rule'. The characters of Edgar and, above all, the particular rigidity

and misogyny of Dr Marchmont, elevate to a 'rule' a pattern of behaviour not generally followed by male characters in novels (or presumably in life). Male characters usually trusted to their intuition and their luck in making the first move without being quite sure 'her heart is [entirely] his own'. But just as a spirit of pragmatism ensured that Dr Marchmont's rule of conduct was not generally followed, the general acceptance of 'Camilla's rule' was itself grounded on pragmatic considerations.

Among the radical departures of Camilla from conservative values would be, if we accept Doody's reading, the abandonment by Fanny Burney of any acceptance of courtship rules as pragmatically necessary. Yet in the novels written by Burney before Camilla, as with the novels of most of her contemporaries, 'Camilla's rule' was generally endorsed: in spite of occasional criticism, it was accepted because of the spirit behind it. It was accepted by authors seeking to establish limits to untrammelled feeling; it was also accepted because it was concerned with the protection of women, who had the cards stacked against them.

In her final novel, The Wanderer 1814, Burney's Elinor Joddrel flouts the conventions governing women's behaviour during courtship. The hero, Harleigh, who, with full endorsement from the events of the narrative, considers Elinor to be in error because she is 'completely governed by impulse [and] considers her passions as her guides to glory', finally sums up her behaviour:

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1. The Wanderer or Female Difficulties, eds. M. A. Doody, R. L. Mack & P. Sabor, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1991), I, xix, p. 188.



'When Elinor, who possesses many of the finest qualities of mind, sees the fallacy of her new system; when she finds how vainly she would tread down the barriers of custom and experience, raised by the wisdom of foresight, and established, after trial, for public utility; she will return to the habits of society and common life, as one awakening from a dream in which she has acted some strange and improbable part. -' (V, xcii, p. 863)

In Doody's reading of Camilla, however, the courtship rules are for Fanny Burney unambiguously restrictive: they ensure that the natural inclination which would lead to the union of characters like Edgar and Camilla will necessarily be perverted. Such a reading would make Camilla a more wholehearted criticism of accepted codes of behaviour for young women than the works of professed 'radical' writers whose stated intentions were to criticize the role of women in society: for many of these latter (Mary Hays provides a good example), in dealing with the restrictive difficulties encountered by women during courtship, were unable to reach unambiguous conclusions about how women should behave in the context of first love or courtship. The problem for such authors, as I suggest it was also for Burney, was that they were equally, if not more, concerned to emphasise the dangers and unacceptability of ungoverned passion. This strong concern or commitment united both 'radical' and 'conservative' writers.

Although the rules governing courtship behaviour are set out so uncompromisingly in Camilla, and these rules do appear to turn Camilla and Edgar into adversaries, it is still, in my opinion, an overstatement to say that they constitute the central paradox, or area of conflict, in the novel. Such a reading does not address the manner in which Mr Tyrold impinges on this issue, or the manner in which Camilla's behaviour is presented in the narrative. More generally, it overlooks or understates the failure of Burney to reconcile conflicting



demands of the plot.

The courtship of Camilla and Edgar is marred by the various misunderstandings of all the parties involved. For example, Mr Tyrold's initial admonition to Camilla to conceal and overcome her feelings for Edgar is based on his own partial knowledge; it is his ignorance which serves to keep the couple from coming together. Yet the narrative endorses his advice. We can see how such a contradiction arises if we recognise that two different plots are competing in the text. For, alongside the story in which the two central protagonists are kept apart by the continual misconstruals and misinformation of other characters runs a reformed-coquette tale which is concerned with Camilla's flawed disposition and the need for her to be educated through suffering. While these plots complement one another in so far as the misunderstandings function as marriage-delaying devices, they conflict over the emphasis which should be given to Camilla's character flaw.

The contradiction which arises from these competing elements is illustrated in the episode following Mr Tyrold's chastising of Camilla for not concealing her preference for the apparently uninterested Edgar. Here the reformed-coquette plot dominates, since the narrative provides positive endorsement of the father's advice: immediately after Mr Tyrold has spoken, Edgar, on a visit to the Tyrold's home, is kicked by his horse:

every thing but tenderness and terror was now forgotten by Camilla; she darted forward with unrestrained velocity, and would have given, in a moment, the most transporting amazement to Edgar ... but that Mr Tyrold, who alone had his face that way, stopt, and led her back to the house.

Camilla goes straight to her chamber where she,

flew involuntarily to a window, whence the first object that met her eyes was her father ... Shame now was her only sensation.

Mr Tyrold later approaches her with 'a gravity unusual' and proceeds to reiterate his earlier injunction:

'My dear Camilla', cried he with earnestness, .....  
'Risk not, my dear girl, to others, those outward marks of sensibility which, to common or unfeeling observers, seem but the effects of unbecoming remissness in the self command which should dignify every female who would do herself honour.'  
(III, iii, 346-48)

At this point the reader may well feel sympathy for Camilla and Edgar, who are obviously strongly attracted to one another, and frustration with the developing misunderstandings which look like keeping them apart. Yet the rider to this episode challenges this natural response by emphasising Camilla's dispositional weakness; it endorses Mr Tyrold in his role as a mouthpiece for courtesy-book maxims. For we are now shown the humiliating consequences arising from Camilla's unguarded behaviour towards Edgar: she overhears the maids discussing Miss Margland, Indiana and herself in relation to Mr Mandlebert:

'And she's mortal fond of him, that's true', said Mary, 'for when they was both here, I always see her running to the window, to see who was coming into the park, when he was rode out; and when he was in the house, she never so much as went to peep, if there come six horses, one after t'other. And she was always a saying, 'Mary, who's in the parlour? Mary, who's below?' while he was here; but before he come, duce a bite did she ask about nobody.  
'I like when I meets her', said Molly Mill, 'to tell her Mr Mandlebert's here, Miss; or Mr. Mandlebert's there, Miss;- Dearee me, one may almost see one self in her eyes, it makes them shine so.' (III, iii, 350)

[Camilla could] endure no more ... the persecutions of Miss Margland seemed nothing to this blow: they were cruel, she could therefore repine at them ... but to find her secret feelings, thus generally spread, and

familiarity [sic] commented upon, from her own unguarded conduct, ... (III, 111, 350)

Mr Tyrold continues in his role as a straightforward mouthpiece for courtesy-book wisdom, as his later letter to Camilla illustrates: here she is enjoined to use her 'good sense and delicacy to struggle against' her feelings for Edgar:

Delicacy is an attribute so peculiarly feminine, that were your reflections less agitated by your feelings, you could delineate more distinctly than myself its appropriate laws, its minute exactions, its sensitive refinements ... Carefully, then, beyond all other care, shut up every avenue by which a secret which should die untold can further escape you ... (III, v, 359-60)

In this context, we cannot read 'good sense', 'delicacy' or 'sensitive refinements' in an ironical sense, despite the fact that we know that Mr Tyrold has misunderstood the true state of affairs between Edgar and his daughter. Equally it would be hard to read Mr Tyrold's questioning of the rationale which lies behind courtship codes of behaviour as anything more than a perfunctory nod in the direction of theoretical justice:

We will not here canvass the equity of that freedom by which women as well as men should be allowed to dispose of their own affections. There cannot, in nature, in theory, nor even in common sense, be a doubt of their equal right: but disquisitions on this point will remain rather curious than important, till the speculatist can superinduce to the abstract truth of the position some proof of its practicability. (III, v, 358)

Like Katharine Rogers, we can agree with Doody that Camilla ought not to be accepted at face value (p. 73), but this does not inevitably lead to the conclusion that Burney has deliberately created a text which radically criticises the rules of propriety laid down for women. For Katherine Rogers, Camilla is a relatively unsuccessful



combination of moral ideas with the art of novel writing.

All we can conclude is that conflicting impulses in Burney produced conflicting signals in Camilla. [She] may have meant to suggest that Camilla should not have followed her father's advice and that she is unfairly blamed on the basis of misguided and perfectionist standards. If so, however, the distinction between Camilla's view and the author's should have been made clearer. It would have been possible to indicate .. that an intelligent parental figure may give bad advice. ... Burney never clearly dissociated her moral views from Camilla's. (pp. 106-107)

Whatever Burney meant to suggest, she fails to lead the reader to a clear conclusion: she fails, for example, to expose the failings of Mr Tyrold as a 'major voice of authority' (pp. 106 & 96). Elizabeth Bergen Brophy makes a similar point in Women's Lives in the 18th Century English Novel:

The advice of both Mr Tyrold and Dr Marchmont is based on social realities and certainly echoes the wisdom proffered by conduct books. ... At the end of the novel, Dr Marchmont condemns his own advice, acknowledging 'its injustice, its narrowness, and its arrogance' but Mr Tyrold's advice is never regretted or criticized. Through this novel, then, Burney seems to advocate greater openness and candor for men in courtship but draws back from recommending the same for women. (pp. 108-109)

Rogers finds that there are 'irreconcilable contradictions' in Camilla which result from Burney's 'accepting' and 'protesting against conventional morality' at the same time (p. 95).

I agree with Katherine Rogers that there are narrative contradictions in Camilla, and as I have indicated these seem to result, in part at least, from the competing demands of different types of plot. The reformed-coquette plot with its recourse to the narrative techniques associated with the courtesy novel exacerbates the interpretive difficulties. Burney's use of character commentators, or 'choric voices', in particular is interesting in this respect. It

seems as if Burney intended at first to write a reformed-coquette story but that her desire to show how characters fail to interpret events accurately became of equal or perhaps greater interest. Much of the narrative illustrates the idea summed up in the final sentence of the novel: 'What at last is so diversified as a man? What so little to be judged by his fellows?' (V, 913).

Doody reads Camilla to be 'multivoiced', since Burney uses 'characters to comment on and interpret one another' (p. 256), and, through the use of 'style indirect libre' (free indirect discourse), allows characters ironically to comment on the narrative. Another recent feminist critic, Julia Epstein, similarly believes that in Camilla we can find a significant use of 'style indirect libre' by which Burney 'mimics entry into the consciousness of her characters in order to record their thoughts'. She refers to the 'mind reading quality' of the narrative which, 'seduces readers into the belief that no single character in the work knows as fully as they the particularities of mind and interpretation around the axis of which the plot turns'. She suggests that 'this ... authorial mind reading, when coupled with the self-effacement of the author/narrator, plunges the reader into the character's own uncertainties'.<sup>2</sup> This is a shrewd perception of Burney's attempt to convey the immediacies of the main protagonists' mental processes without using the epistolary method which had achieved this object in Evelina. The question of how far the narrator is effaced even when free indirect discourse is used

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1. See chapter 7, pp 306-309 for a discussion of this term.

2. The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing, (Bristol Classical Press, 1989), pp. 140-41.

extensively is discussed in chapter 7 below, but, as far as Camilla is concerned, it is clear that FID is not the main instrument by which the reader is led into the mind of the main characters. In chapters 9, 10 and 11 of the final volume, which cover Camilla's greatest suffering, the main instrument for showing a mind in turmoil is internal monologue interspersed with narrator comment, explanation and exclamation. FID occurs only very briefly: first, in Camilla's early hopes that her mother might arrive to save her, 'she was known to be but nine miles distant from the rectory, and any commands could be conveyed to her nearly in an hour'. In relative calm she considers the possibilities; these are given in the grammar of reported speech with a flavour of Camilla's own words:

Would not her Mother write? After an avowal such as she had made of her desolate, if not dying condition, would she not pardon and embrace her? Was it not even possible she might come herself? (V, ix, 865-66)

Significantly, however, as soon as we are to understand that Camilla begins again to lose control of her feelings, we are given, not merely the punctuation of directly reported speech, but Camilla's ipsissima verba:

'Oh how,' she cried, 'shall I see her? Can joy blend with such terrour? Can I wish her approach, yet not dare to meet her eye? - that eye which never yet has looked at me, but to beam with bright kindness! - though a kindness that, even from my childhood, seemed to say, Camilla, be blameless - or you break your Mother's heart! ...' (p. 866)

Throughout the worst part of the nightmare, we find no FID until Camilla reaches a further state of relative calm after she realises that Edgar has seen her and is under the same roof:

Edgar, could it be Edgar who was waiting for an answer? ...



who was under the same roof - ... who was now separated from her but by a thin wainscot? (V, xi, 879)

This is once more a brief interlude. Camilla soon loses control and her state of mind is shown, as it has been throughout the nightmare, by the dramatic device of reporting directly the very words which, we conventionally accept, she either spoke out loud or heard within herself. During the nightmare Camilla sometimes hears voices outside herself: 'another voice assailed her'. But from wherever the voices emanate, they are directly reported. The narrator is very much present, orchestrating the dramatic contributions to the nightmare. Camilla never takes over from the narrator to provide the reader with a sense of entering into and tracking her thought processes.

Generally, in line with the courtesy-novel tradition, Burney provides a group of authoritative character commentators who echo and endorse the narrator's stated views and precepts. With some characters, notably the younger participants such as Edgar and Camilla, the reader is apparently permitted to share their perception of events; but it becomes clear that this is not really shared knowledge, since the reader always knows in advance when the perceptions which he appears to share are wrong. Thus the reader retains a privileged spectator role. He is soon made aware for example when Edgar, Camilla, Mrs Arlbery, or any of the other central characters are incorrect in their information, advice or construal of events. This is often done by direct narrator comment. The reader does not experience events mediated through the consciousness of various characters, but looks on, as one after another they misinterpret events. The effect can be contrasted with Jane Austen's Emma, where the reader - particularly the first-time reader - will probably share and give credit to Emma's

perception of events.

Although Mrs Arlbery, Sir Hugh, Lionel Tyrold and some of the minor grotesque characters may be said to have individual voices, all the major commentators sound alike: their main function is to echo and endorse the views of the narrator.

The endorsement of the narrator's stated views by choric commentators is well illustrated in Camilla by considering how the reader is continually reminded of the instability of Camilla's character. It is a technique aligned to the reformed-coquette aspects of the story. Mrs Tyrold, Edgar and even Dr Marchmont speak in unison and echo the narrator in agreeing that Camilla has an excellent character, but that her one fault, her tendency towards impulsiveness, ('whose impulses have no restraints: ...' I, 120) makes her particularly vulnerable to corrupting influences - typical examples may be found on (I, viii, 120 & III, xii, 485). The narrator's introductory delineation of Camilla's character told us of this 'reigning and radical defect' and, throughout the work, the narrator reiterates this point as she introduces us to scenes in which Camilla's character is shown to be vulnerable to the influence of others. The mentor characters, including Edgar, echoing the narrator, give frequent voice to the view that the world is a dangerous place for the 'developing' character. It is noticeable that Mr Tyrold and Dr Marchmont even use the same image of the 'guiding care of a mother's wing' in this context (III, viii, 375 & V, vi, 646).

It is worth considering in some detail the roles given to Edgar, Dr Marchmont and Mrs Arlbery, since it is their contribution to what is essentially a univocal work which, in my opinion, makes it

impossible to establish a convincing case that Camilla is a successful merging of traditional courtesy-book themes with a radical exploration of women in society.

Many twentieth-century critics have found Edgar an unsympathetic character. Yet the features which make Edgar 'unsympathetic' are those which make him an ideal husband (or mentor-lover within a reformed coquette narrative) for Camilla - his willingness to provide gentle didactic guidance, and his apprehension of the potential dangers inherent in characters and situations. Edgar is described in the following terms:

He was observant of the errors of others, and watched till he nearly eradicated his own. ... [But] he diffused ... such general amity and goodwill, that if the strictness of his character inspired general respect, its virtues could no less fail engaging the kinder mede [sic] of affection. (I, 1, 57)

The critics who read Camilla as a multivoiced, deliberately ambiguous, novel suggest that Burney's own view of Edgar accords with that of Mrs Arlbery, who stands in for the author herself' (Doody, p. 250). Similarly Julia Epstein says that 'the disquisitions of Mrs Albery [sic]' provide 'soapboxes for Burney's analysis of the predicaments her heroine faces' (pp. 143-44). (Epstein's use here of 'Burney' as opposed to her more general use of 'author/narrator' suggests that she attributes these views to the author herself). Doody finds evidence for this view in passages such as the following, which is taken to be a subtle rewording of the quotation above:

'Mandlebert is a creature whose whole composition is a pile of accumulated punctilios. He will spend his life in refining away his own happiness: but do not let him refine away yours.' (II, xii, 484)



'He is a watcher; and a watcher, restless and perturbed himself, infests all he pursues with uneasiness. He is without trust, and therefore without either courage or consistency.' (II, xii, 482)

Evidence from a letter written by Esther Burney to her sister, is cited to add weight to this assertion: 'Mrs Arlbery (whom we are all apt to call d'Arblay)'. Great weight is given to the 'relationship' between Edgar and Mrs Arlbery, particularly to Edgar's concern that Mrs Arlbery is not a suitable older friend for Camilla. In Doody's reading we are told that Edgar's 'ambitious prejudice against Mrs Arlbery' shows him 'repudiating' any 'acquaintance with Mme d'Arblay, turning against his own author' (ibid., p. 250).

This is a questionable interpretation. Edgar's reservations about Mrs Arlbery are entirely endorsed by the reformed-coquette aspects of the work which stresses the potential dangers of dubious companions for someone of Camilla's youth and disposition. The reasons given for Mrs Arlbery's dislike of Edgar have a far more morally flimsy foundation, however powerful their effect might be on the reader. We are told initially that 'Mandlebert' is 'her aversion' because he has 'just the air and reputation of faultlessness that gives me the spleen' (III, 367). We are later told that Mrs Arlbery 'internally resented the little desire [Edgar] had ever manifested for her acquaintance;...' (III, 481).

Such a reading has also to set aside the consistent and positive views articulated by other characters about Edgar and the frequency with which the narrator's and Edgar's opinions are shown to concur. Doody, for example, suggests that Edgar's motives in questioning the friendship between Mrs Arlbery and Camilla arise

merely from an 'arbitrary wish to show power over her' (p. 249). This is, in fact, Mrs Arlbery's view; she tells Camilla that her artlessness and innocence will work against her because Edgar will 'see by their means that you are undoubtedly at his command' (III, 455). Mrs Arlbery's opinions are, however, based on her particular experience of the world; all men are, in Mrs Arlbery's view, engaged in a battle with women for power. The same suggestion is made by Dr Marchmont about Camilla's influence over Edgar (V, 643): he like Mrs Arlbery is unable to see beyond his own prejudices. The care with which the narrative depicts Edgar's gratitude when Camilla does listen to him and the frequency with which his feelings are shown to be deeply involved, all suggest that this courtship is not for him a battle for dominance in the sense that Mrs Arlbery and Dr Marchmont take all courtships to be.

Doody who sees Camilla as taking what appear to be read as independent 'countermeasures' against her position 'under surveillance' (p. 230), pays little attention to those episodes in which Mrs Arlbery presents her advice to the heroine. Doody tells us only that these 'countermeasures' are 'so culturally conditioned as to be of poor service to her [Camilla]' (p. 230). We are told by the narrator when we first meet Mrs Arlbery that she is a character who 'loved coquetry' and this is fully borne out in volume three. Mrs Arlbery assumes the role of active adviser for only about thirty pages before her advice is seen to be totally wrong. The manner in which her scheme to win Edgar is presented leaves little room for ambiguity. (Any ambiguity which does arise about the status of Mrs Arlbery, occurs, one is tempted to suggest, because Burney wished to create an interestingly

'grey' character). Mrs Albery first broaches the subject of Edgar's relationship to Camilla in the third volume of the novel. Camilla is upset when she suggests that Edgar must see her affection for him and says that 'If such is [Mrs Arlbery's] opinion ... he shall see it no more!' Mrs Arlbery replies, 'Keep to that resolution, and you will behold him where he ought to be ... at your feet' (III, 455). The final phrase here is particularly telling and indicates Mrs Arlbery's view of men in general. Three pages later we hear Mrs Arlbery telling Sir Sedley: 'My resolution is fixt: either to see him at her feet, or drive him from her heart.' The critical comments made by Mrs Arlbery about Edgar cannot be taken at face value by a reader who is also taking account of all the other misconstructions and misjudgements which constitute the other major area of interest in the story and which mark its construction in the manner in which they impinge on the courtship of the central couple.

Unlike the reader, Mrs Arlbery does not see the actual emotions which tie Edgar to Camilla, nor does she see the other factors, such as the part played by Dr Marchmont, Lionel and Miss Margland in complicating the relationship and responses of Edgar and Camilla. Indeed, she, as much as Dr Marchmont, may be said to be a major feature of the part of the novel which is concerned to illustrate misconstructions and misjudgements.

Twenty pages later, Mrs Arlbery renews her advice to Camilla, who 'reluctantly receives her counsel' to gain Edgar through his jealousy of her attentions to Sir Sedley Clarendon. Camilla firmly rejects Mrs Arlbery's critical assessments of Edgar (just as the ending of the novel refutes the older woman's confident



judgement that Edgar will make Camilla wretched). Camilla reflects, 'even excellence such as his cannot, then, withstand prejudice' (III, 483). We are told too that 'Camilla dwelt on nothing [Mrs Arlbery] has uttered except the one dear and inviting project of proving disinterestedness to Edgar' (III, xii, 484). The narrator immediately comments on this project

From this time the whole of her [Camilla's] behaviour became coloured by this fascinating idea: and the scheme which, if presented to her under its real name of coquetry, she would have fled and condemned with antipathy ... (III, xii, 484)

The results of Mrs Arlbery's advice are also summarily dismissed by the narrator. We are given a short paragraph describing the more animated behaviour of Camilla towards Sir Sedley, and we are then told of Edgar's response.

All this, however, failed of its desired end, ... [B]ut never for one moment was any personal uneasiness excited by their mutually increasing intimacy ..... he took ... no interest ... beyond a vigilant concern for the manner in which it might operate on her disposition. Yet, however, he felt alarmed or offended, he never ceased to experience the fondest interest in her happiness. (III, xii, 485)

Edgar now echoes in reported speech the narrator's earlier views about the susceptibility of Camilla's character to potentially damaging influences, and this confirms his role as a choric voice supporting the coquette reformed story:

He knew that though her understanding was excellent, her temper was so inconsiderate, that she rarely consulted it: and that, though her mind was of the purest innocence, it was unguarded by caution, and unprotected by reflection. (III, xii, 485)

His contribution here may be in what Doody terms 'style indirect libre' (p. 257); but it is echoing, in almost identical language,

what the narrator has already told us and what she will repeat two pages later. This cannot therefore provide an example of what Doody means when she suggests that:

Camilla's characters take up room not only in dialogue but in passages without quotations [sic] marks, in indirect speech. And indirect speech is carried further into *style indirect libre*. Edgar's voice, in particular, is often ironically invited to take over the narrative job: 'Yet why had she so striven to deny all regard, all connection? what an unaccountable want of frankness! what a miserable dereliction of truth!' (III, 446). Critics too eager to see Edgar as Mentor have perhaps taken the *style indirect libre* passages unironically, as authorial reflection. (p. 257)

Doody's use of 'perhaps' here is appropriate, for while such a passage might give a sense of Edgar's character which indirect reported speech could not have captured, this is all that it does. In a narrative where the characters' continual misconstructions of one another's behaviour are so assiduously traced it would be unlikely that a reader would read this as 'authorial reflection'. The implicit suggestion that irony plays any part here is also questionable since there is no feeling of, or indeed opportunity for, a co-mingling of narrator and character comment in what the reader must take as Edgar's entirely predictable response. It is interesting to contrast this with a passage from Mansfield Park in which the 'kaleidoscopic ... shifts of perspective' between the characters' free indirect speech and narratorial commentary may lead an inattentive reader to mistake 'the subtle irony clinging to the free indirect speech statements for a rather crude narratorial irony.' (Roy Pascal, The Dual Voice, [op. cit. introduction above], pp. 56-57, citing the scene in which the Crawfords and Bertrams assess each other after their first

meeting. Mansfield Park, I, 47).

There may well be examples where, as Doody has discovered, Burney altered earlier drafts in order to include what was intended as 'character narrative', that is a contribution to the narrative by a character in free indirect discourse. But there seems little consistency in Burney's practice. We do not enter Edgar's (or any other character's) mind in the same way that we are invited to see through the eyes of Emma or Anne Elliot; nor, as with Fanny Price, are the character's expressed judgements about other protagonists shown by the events of the narrative to be sounder than some of those expressed by the narrator (see below pp. 240-41). The overall impact of Edgar's contributions is to echo the narrator's sentiments and tone. Edgar's reported thoughts are soon followed by Camilla's own wish that she had followed his advice.

What repentance ensued! what severity of regret! how did she canvass her conduct, how lament she had ever formed that fatal acquaintance with Mrs Arlbery, which he [Edgar] had so early opposed, and which seemed eternally destined to lead her into measures and conduct most foreign to his approbation!  
(III, xii, 489)

It is interesting that Camilla's emotion is conveyed in what could also be read as free indirect discourse, but the suggestion of Camilla's own words hardly affects the consistently univocal tone, since Camilla is agreeing with both Edgar and the narrator in words which, in another context, could well be those of the narrator, Edgar or her parents. This agreement is reinforced by the narrator's own comment which indeed suggests that Mrs Arlbery is not a suitable companion for Camilla. For it is suggested that



'If Edgar had seen her design, he had surely seen it with contempt' (III, 489).

A few pages later we are told that Mrs Arlbery is surprised by Edgar's failure to respond to her plan and that she assumes he is not interested in marrying Camilla. It is clear that Mrs Arlbery is not a reliable judge of Edgar's character. When, a little later, Mrs Arlbery again offers Camilla advice, the narrator is even more terse in its presentation. It is given in indirect rather than direct speech and once again Mrs Arlbery is reported as using the phrase 'at her feet' (III, 491). Shortly after this, the party at Tonbridge breaks up. Camilla returns to Cleves regretting the 'unjustifiable deviation from plainness of conduct' which Mrs Arlbery's advice has prompted. She finds as a result that Sir Sedley is seriously interested in her and this will lead, as the reader knows, to another set of complications which delay the union of Edgar and Camilla. When later in the story Camilla once more thinks of Mrs Arlbery's 'worldly' tactics, the narrator makes an even more explicit judgement:

... the worldly doctrine of Mrs Arlbery, had led Camilla, once more, into the semblance of a character, which, without thinking of, she was acting. Born simple and ingenuous, and bred to hold in horror every species of art, all idea of coquetry was foreign to her meaning, though an untoward contrariety of circumstances, playing upon feelings too potent for deliberations, had deluded her into conduct [as] mischievous in its effect ... [H]er every propensity was pure, and, when reflection came to her aid, her conduct was as exemplary as her wishes. But the ardour of her imagination, acted upon by every passing idea, shook Judgement from its yet unsteady seat, and left her at the mercy of wayward Sensibility. (IV, xi, 679-80)

The final advice which Mrs Arlbery gives to Camilla is that she marry Lord Valhurst to solve her financial problems. This

proposal would have appeared more morally dubious to a contemporary reader than anything the equally purblind Dr Marchmont suggests. It is however consistent with the view Mrs Arlbery has of men in general. The reader may be reminded of her similarly cold blooded and mercenary assessments of Edgar's suitability for Camilla: 'I hate him heartily; yet he rolls in wealth, and she has nothing ...' (III, ix, 460).

The lengthy relation of these episodes involving Mrs Albery serves two purposes. The first to indicate why the sort of readings suggested by Doody and Epstein are too selective; the second, to illustrate a feature typical of the whole novel: we are constantly moving between a reformed-coquette plot and another plot in which characters - however well intentioned they may be - are unable to free themselves from their own prejudices and, through their errors of judgement, generate a whole set of misconstructions which complicate the courtship of the central protagonists.

In the context of the reformed-coquette plot Edgar's concern about a developing friendship between Camilla and Mrs Arlbery cannot, as Doody suggests, be considered 'arbitrary'. Edgar's concern is shown by the development of this plot as anything but arbitrary; in the event it is wholly justified. He expresses the same kinds of doubt about Mrs Berlinton's influence over Camilla at the very time that his earlier fears about Mrs Arlbery are shown to be correct, that is, at the very time that Mrs Arlbery's scheme for Camilla turns out to be disastrous. The narrator confirms that there is no arbitrariness in Edgar's misgivings about the influence of either woman.

We are warned by the narrator that Camilla's attraction to Mrs Berlinton involves her imagination and not her judgement: 'Camilla was sensibly touched; and though strangely at a loss what to judge, felt her affections deeply interested' (III, 425). At the end of this chapter, the narrator restates the dangers. In the final volume of the work, Camilla is shown to become 'sensible to all the alarm with which Edgar had hitherto striven to impress her in vain'.

What is more, Edgar's thoughts about the susceptibility of Camilla's nature are phrased in language which echoes and reminds the reader that his concern is shared by Mrs Tyrold as well as the narrator. When Edgar learns 'with unaffected dismay' through Camilla about Mrs Berlinton's correspondence with Bellamy, he is unable to impress upon Camilla the gravity of such a situation. The narrator however takes up this point with a digression on Mrs Berlinton's upbringing in which the reader is warned about her lack of 'reproach' or 'scruples' in matters she considers romantic. The narrator's conclusion puts her firmly on the same side as Edgar:

With such a character, where virtue had so little guide even while innocence presided: where the person was so alluring, and the situation so open to temptation, Edgar saw with almost every species of concern the daily increasing friendship of Camilla. Yet while he feared for her firmness, he knew not how to blame her for her fondness; ... (III, xii, 488)

The reader is also asked to agree with Edgar's reflection that it is an unhappy 'chance' which brings about Camilla's friendships with Mrs Berlinton and Mrs Arlbery rather than with the more stable Lady Isabella Irby.



What also may be overlooked by readers who tend to view Edgar with suspicion are the numerous occasions in the novel when his loving feelings for Camilla are emphasised in spite of his disapproval of her conduct. At two points they prompt him to make decisions which are autonomous: he becomes engaged to Camilla in spite of Dr Marchmont's advice, and in spite of what his own observations appear to tell him about Camilla's behaviour in society. They become engaged (IV, v, 545) and re-engaged (IV, iii, 621). We are told in the latter incident that Edgar,

found himself quite unequal to enduring her [Camilla's] displeasure; his own, all his cautions, all Dr Marchmont's advice, were forgotten; and tenderly following her, ...

In the readings of Doody and Julia Epstein, Dr Marchmont, more even than Edgar, is seen to represent the forces of repression: a 'false archangel' (p. 246) who turns his tutee into a 'positive Cerberus' (p. 127). In giving much less weight to Camilla as a courtesy-novel, neither critic takes seriously enough Dr Marchmont's function as a choric voice commenting on events. Doody insists, that 'beneath the surface narrative', Dr Marchmont's portrayal is rather that of a subtly disguised 'Iago' playing to Edgar's 'Othello'. 'The constant ironic use throughout the novel of "prove" and "proof" and the delusions resulting from mad searches after shifting proofs can - and should - remind us of Othello'. Great weight is given to a performance of Othello which takes place in the text. It is claimed that:

The novelist could hardly give us a better clue to the novel as a whole. What the circulating reader would like to take as a 'staring Love Story' is a farcical, deeply absurd rendition of *Othello*, performed by bad actors - that is, by unheroic human beings acting in bad faith. ...

Echoes of the play are ironically transposed. [Thus Edgar says,] 'Jealousy is a passion for which my mind is not framed, and which I must not find a torment but an impossibility!' (II, 292). Edgar errs; jealousy is a passion which his mind adapts to very well indeed, although it is a learned emotion taught by Marchmont's, he becomes positively distrustful. Edgar grows to love self-torture; ... (M. A. Doody, p. 224)

But Doody's emphasis on Dr Marchmont's role as the principal creator of Edgar and Camilla's difficulties becomes less plausible if consideration is given to the other characters who function as marriage-delaying devices. Two of these, Lionel Tyrold and Miss Margland, who may much more convincingly be read as 'acting in bad faith' are already active in the narrative before Dr Marchmont begins to advise Edgar on marriage. Nor do the readings of Doody or Epstein give enough emphasis to Mrs Arlbery in her role as counsellor to Camilla. Dr Marchmont may be condemned as a misogynist but he is not, as Mrs Arlbery is, the advocate of 'immoral' measures.

It should also be noticed that when Dr Marchmont gives Edgar advice the narrator does not intervene with the same corrective moral commentary as is made on the advice given by Mrs Arlbery. Moreover, in his capacity as choric voice, Dr Marchmont frequently develops and reinforces views expressed by the narrator, and illustrated in the narrative. For most of the book, Dr Marchmont sums up the central ideas on character development which the whole narrative of Camilla has been illustrating. His description of the difficulties which face the developing character in a corrupt world echo those already expressed by Mrs Tyrold and the narrator. 'The character, at this period, is often so unstable, as to be completely new moulded by every new accident, or new associate'.

(IV, 594). About the careers of the foil characters he is correct. In words which again echo almost verbatim what the narrator has already told us about Lionel's character, we are given, later in the work, this apposite warning by Dr Marchmont:

'There is often, in early youth, a quickness of parts which raises expectations that are never realised. Their origin is but in animal spirits, which, instead of ripening into judgment and sense by added years, dwindle into nothingness, or harden into flippancy.' (IV, xii, 594)

His comments about the course of Camilla's career, as it is shown in the narrative, are often just. Where Dr Marchmont is egregiously wrong of course is in not predicting the happy ending for Camilla. But this fact may best be interpreted, not as evidence for a sub-text in which Dr Marchmont is a 'false archangel', but as evidence that Fanny Burney was not able to reconcile the desire to 'inculcate moral lessons' within a 'story all wove into one'; idea and art were not successfully integrated.

It has been strongly implied in this section that a multivoiced novel is more likely to achieve such integration. Certainly a novel which is purely, or mainly, a vehicle for didactic purposes is likely to be univocal - the dominant voice being that of the author/narrator. That this is true overall of Camilla can be shown not just in the passages cited above, where Edgar's reported thoughts echo those of the narrator, but significantly in a passage where, if anywhere, Burney could, if that had been her intention, have allowed her criticism of courtship rules to emerge. In the following extract the narrator reports Camilla as finding herself in an impossible situation.

What indeed could she say? he had made no declaration; she



could give, therefore, no direct repulse; and though, through her brother's cruel want of all consideration, she was so deeply in his debt, she durst no longer promise its discharge; for the strange departure of Edgar robbed her of all courage to make to him her meditated application.

Yet to leave Sir Sedley in this error was every way terrible. If, which still seemed very possible, from his manner and behaviour, he should check his partiality, and make the whole of what had passed end in mere public-place gallantry, she must always have the mortification to know he had considered her as ready to accept him: If, on the contrary, encouraging what he felt for her, from the belief she returned his best opinion, he should seriously demand her hand ... how could she justify the apparent attention she once paid him? and how assert, while so hopelessly his debtor, the independence to reject one who so many ways seemed to hold himself secure?  
(III, xvi, p. 516)

We can accept this as an example of free indirect discourse. The verb tenses and the personal pronouns of the direct questions are those of indirect speech; syntactically most of the passage follows the conventions of indirect speech as used in a narrator's report of what was going on; yet some of the vocabulary - 'her brother's cruel want of consideration', 'strange departure of Edgar', 'hopelessly his debtor', 'was every way terrible' - seems to reflect Camilla's state of mind rather than the emotional involvement of the narrator. In this sense the passage, and many like it, may be considered to have some flavour of the mimetic. Yet it is only a flavour. There are many examples in the novel of similar expressions of emotion which in context can only be considered part of the narrator's voice. For example:

That an uncle so dearly loved should believe she was forming an establishment which would afford him an asylum during his difficulties, now every prospect of that establishment was over, was so *heart-piercing* a circumstance, that to her father it seemed sufficient for the whole of what she endured.  
(my italics) (V, ix, 771-72)

The 'heart piercing' epithet cannot in this context be particularly Sir Hugh's or Camilla's or Mr Tyrold's; it can only belong to the narrator's idiolect.

There are many interesting examples in the novel of how a simple dichotomy between direct and indirect speech fails to cover the techniques by which Burney mingles various kinds of discourse with her narration. From the point of view of this thesis however, these many examples do not include any which set up an interesting tension between the narrator and the characters. There is little if any 'character narrative' and there are no examples that I can find of what might be called distinctive 'thought idiolects'.<sup>1</sup> We know by straight narration or from the context, not from the patterns of language, that a reported thought or opinion may be that of one of the characters, or of one of the characters echoing the views of the narrator. If characters with very distinctive idiolects, like Sir Hugh, Mr Dubster or Sir Sedley, 'took over' the narrator's job (as Doody claims unconvincingly that Edgar does on occasion) it might then have been possible to detect an ironical, or perhaps even subversive note. But when, by context alone, we recognise in a passage of narration that a certain expression of emotion or opinion could be an echo of one of the leading protagonists, we do not hear the note of a distinctive voice which we can set in any interesting way against the voice of the narrator, since the main characters and the narrator all sound alike. In the passage quoted above, for example, although we may

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1. See introduction above, pp. 7-8.

infer from the context that it is Camilla who finds the way Sir Sedley is left in 'errour' to be in 'every way terrible', we have no sense that her diagnosis of her situation is being ironically set against that of the narrator. We must read the narrator also as feeling that, since Sir Sedley, 'had made no declaration, she [Camilla] could give therefore no direct repulse'; and as agreeing that it is a matter of 'mortification' that Camilla should appear to have been ready to accept Sir Sedley on the basis of a passage of 'mere public-place gallantry'.

It is possible for a novelist to undermine or criticise courtship codes, or other 'accepted' forms of behaviour, through placing a narrator's voice and a protagonists's voice in ironic juxtaposition, but I can read no evidence of this technique of subversion or criticism in Camilla.

## 2. BELINDA - A POLEMICIST'S NOVEL?

Maria Edgeworth's Belinda (1801) is a clearer example than Camilla of an overt attempt to use a novel as a vehicle for developing contemporary and controversial issues. Both Camilla and Belinda look at the connection between upbringing and the problems of sensibility, but in the latter work the links are made more explicit and more thematically dominant.

A recent critic, Janet Egleson Dunleavy, has suggested that Belinda began a series of novels in which Edgeworth structured

her fiction in accordance with public taste and the



conventions of the novel of manners. Drawing on her skill as a teller of tales, she created cameo roles within predictable narratives enlivened by comic or dramatic ... episodes ... Central to each individual work was an idea, an abstraction that, although unrelated to the narrative imitations of life and art that were the vehicles of her fiction, was yet manifest through them.'

It cannot be denied that Edgeworth's 'cameo roles and comic and dramatic episodes' are extremely effective, but Dunleavy's implicit claim that no tensions exist between the 'idea' and the narrative in which it is being carried is more contentious. In this chapter I will suggest that in Belinda Edgeworth's central 'idea' - that reason is the natural and best support of virtuous conduct -, though as Dunleavy says, 'manifest through' the fiction, is not always happily carried by the narrative.

Judging from three of the major novels which span her writing career, Belinda 1801, Patronage 1814, and Helen 1834, some of Edgeworth's narrative difficulties arise because of her lack of faith in the naturalistic writing to which she was attracted. Here I refer in particular to her unwillingness to trust that the intelligent dialogue of her characters would be sufficient to convey her 'idea'; this lack of confidence led her to rely not only on frequent narrator interpolations to guide her readers but also on the kinds of narrative structure found in traditional exemplary fiction and described in chapter 1.

We know that Edgeworth, like Hannah More and Mary

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1. 'Maria Edgeworth and The Novel of Manners', Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners, eds. Barbara Brothers & Bege K. Bowers, (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1990), 45-65, p. 60.

Wollstonecraft, believed that sensibility was the foundation for the best qualities in the female character; and that for all three writers this could only be the case if sensibility was 'educated', that is controlled by reason. In Belinda, the sensibility is clearly shown in its negative, 'uneducated' manifestations; and this negativeness is thrown into relief by the character patterning which Edgeworth employs. For in this novel, as in many of her later ones, she presents her characters in clearly divided groups. Thus, the Percivals and Belinda are governed by reason, in contrast to Mr Vincent, Lady Delacour (for some of the novel) and Virginia. This pattern is further reinforced by the paralleling of the disastrous family life of the Delacours with the ideal family life of the Percivals.

Considerable attention is given in the narrative to the dire results of the education and upbringing of Mr Vincent and Virginia. The adult Mr Vincent believes that moral intuition alone is a reliable guide to good conduct, and that, 'the taste and feelings of individuals must be the arbiters of their happiness'.<sup>1</sup> His view of feminine perfection shows the same bias in favour of that pleasing passivity and heightened sensibility which were to be found in some courtesy books and in partial readings of Rousseau:

'... our Creole women are all softness, grace, delicacy - ... Their indolence is but a slight, and, in my judgement, an amiable defect; it keeps them out of mischief, and attaches

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1. Belinda, 2 vols. Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth, 18 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1833), XI and XII (containing I & II of Belinda), I, xvii, p. 212.

them to domestic life.' (I, xvii, 329)

These are precisely the views which educational writers, including Richard Lovell Edgeworth, sought to rebut. The sentimental ideas which contribute to many of Mr Vincent's 'estimable qualities' also ensure that his childhood habit of gambling remains unchecked. Finally it is this negative side of the sentimental coin which comes to dominate and destroy all his good qualities: 'thus social spirit, courage, generosity, all conspired to carry our man of feeling to the gaming-table. Once there, his ruin was inevitable' (II, xxviii, 276).

The hero Mr Hervey is also, in the earlier part of the novel, shown to be seduced by the ideas which were thought to be shared by Rousseau and other sentimental writers on the qualities which epitomise feminine perfection and which were given expression in contemporary courtesy books:

He was charmed with the picture of Sophia, when contrasted with the characters of the women of the world with whom he had been disgusted; and he formed the romantic project of educating a wife for himself. (II, xxvi, 182)

For this experiment it is necessary, Mr Hervey thinks, to find a young woman with

an understanding totally uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction; a heart wholly unpractised, yet full of sensibility, capable of all the enthusiasm of passion, the delicacy of sentiment, and the firmness of rational constancy. (II, xxvi, 182-83)

Like Mr Vincent, he wishes his future wife to combine great sensibility with perfect innocence, and to be full of grace, softness and delicacy. Mr Hervey however, comes to learn that



these virtues can exist in a society only when they have their foundation in reason as opposed to feeling. At the beginning of his experiment he appears to have found someone who fulfils his Rousseauesque requirements:

Her simplicity, sensibility, ... had pleased and touched him extremely. The idea of attaching a perfectly pure, disinterested, unpractised heart, was delightful to his imagination: the cultivation of her understanding, he thought, would be an easy and a pleasing task: all difficulties vanished before his sanguine hopes.

'Sensibility,' said he to himself, 'is the parent of great talents and great virtues; ...' (II, xxvi, 190)

His educational efforts are shown to be fallible when confronted with the problems of tutoring Virginia's 'exquisite sensibility'. Edgeworth's The Good French Governess 1801, offers an interesting contrast to Belinda; for in that work the governess, Madame de Rosier, also has to deal with a pupil who shows signs of possessing considerable sensibility.' But, unlike Mr Hervey and Mrs Ormond with Virginia, Madame de Rosier is successful in prescribing a curriculum for Matilda which accords with the advice offered on sensibility in Practical Education. Here, Madame de Rosier assesses her thirteen year old pupil:

The timid, anxious blush, which Mme de Rosier observed to vary in Matilda's countenance, when she spoke of those for whom she felt affection, convinced this lady that, if Matilda were no genius, it must have been the fault of her education. On sensibility, all that is called genius, perhaps, originally depends: those who are capable of feeling a strong degree of pain and pleasure may surely be excited to great and persevering exertion, by calling

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1. The Good French Governess, Maria Edgeworth's Tales and Novels, 18 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), II, pp. 95-96.

the proper motives into action.  
(pp. 95-96) (my italics)

Mr Hervey fails to give Virginia an education in which her sensibility develops on 'proper' lines; instead, its random and troublesome development leads him to the following reflection: in comparison with Belinda, Virginia appeared:

but an insipid, though innocent child: the one he found his equal, the other his inferior; ...his pupil, or his plaything. Belinda had cultivated taste, an active understanding, a knowledge of literature, the power and the habit of conducting herself; Virginia was ignorant and indolent, ... Mr Hervey had felt gratuitous confidence in Virginia's innocence; but on Belinda's prudence, which he had opportunities of seeing tried, he gradually learned to feel a different and a higher species of reliance, ...The virtues of Virginia sprang from sentiment; those of Belinda from reason. (II, xxvi, 207)

There is no encouragement through these examples to consider that 'on sensibility all that is called genius, perhaps originally depends'.

Similarly Lady Delacour's fashionable sensibility which claimed to be 'amiable weakness' but which was not connected with 'active virtue' (J. C. Dales, p. 368), is condemned in the novel:

'Sensibility!' exclaimed the indignant old lady, 'she has no sensibility, ... She who lives in a constant round of dissipation, who performs no one duty, who exists only for herself; how does she show sensibility?— Has she sensibility for her husband — for her daughter — for any one useful purpose on earth? — ...' (I, viii, 140)

For, like the educational polemicists of the 1790's, Edgeworth endorses the ideals of domestic life, to which this 'amiable sensibility' of Lady Delacour is a threat. While Lady Delacour does not, like Mr Vincent, claim that moral intuition is dependent

on sensibility, she is nevertheless ruled by ungovernable passions and for much of the narrative is shown to suffer because of this.

Lady Delacour's characterization in total may however be seen as an instance of art prevailing over idea. She is developed beyond her initial didactic position as a victim of an uncontrolled and misdirected sensibility. Guided by the heroine and Clarence Hervey who, unlike Mrs Margaret Delacour, believes she possesses 'sensibility' (I, viii, 140) and that this quality could be the basis for a happier domestic life, her presence becomes sufficiently strong to create a 'twin discourse' (Dunleavy, p. 56) alongside the story of Belinda's courtship. Indeed so strong is Lady Delacour's presence that it is she who is used to draw together, in the strange manner Edgeworth chose, the complex plot.

Yet the dominating presence of this character has repercussions on what is structured as a polemical narrative. For example, as a work written to criticise the excesses of romantic emotionalism found in sentimental novels, it recommends that young women adopt a prudent line in courtship. In this context Harriot Freke and Virginia are foils who illustrate, albeit in rather extreme forms, two very different positions on feminine sensibility.

The rational Percivals are predictably the main vehicles for recommending a prudential line in courtship and marriage. In a series of conversations which Lady Anne and her husband are shown to dominate intellectually, esteem emerges as a suitable basis for the choice of a marriage partner (II, xviii, 10-19), and what Mr Percival calls the 'unextinguishable nature of first flames' is dismissed as a 'pernicious doctrine' (II, xix, 31). Belinda's worries that the delicacy of her feelings for Mr Hervey ought to



prevent her from thinking about Mr Vincent as a potential suitor appear to have been allayed by the ideas of Mr Percival. For we learn that, 'after this conversation ... Mr Vincent perceived that he gained ground more rapidly in [Belinda's] favour; ... ' (II, xix, p. 33). We notice too that in setting out the 'correct' line on first loves and the parameters which should be allowed to female delicacy both Lady Anne and her husband are given lines which may be said to address the reader directly: Lady Anne, 'Happy those who can turn all the experience of others to their own advantage!' (II, xviii, p. 17), and Mr Percival: 'Happy they ... who can be convinced in half an hour! There are some people who cannot be convinced in a whole life, ...' (II, xix, p. 31). The reader is thus encouraged by the Percivals' position within the character patterning to expect that ideas which have led to their own domestic happiness will be endorsed by events in the narrative. Yet Lady Delacour directly opposes these particular views (II, xxiv, 150-54), and what is more, is shown by the unfolding of events to have judged Belinda's case more accurately than the Percivals.

A further result of allowing Lady Delacour to develop beyond the purely didactic role adumbrated by the character patterning is to highlight the deficiencies in the heroine's characterization. We contrast the believable manifestations of sensibility in Lady Delacour with the unconvincing nature of these in Belinda. We are told of the heroine's feelings and even of her sensibility by Lady Delacour as she orchestrates the closing scene of the novel:

'I do believe that the prudent Belinda is more capable of feeling real permanent passion than any of the dear sentimental

young ladies, whose motto is "All for love, or the world well lost". (II, xxxi, 337)

but the reader has little sense that this truly is the case.

Belinda might have been permitted to manifest a subtler and more fruitful kind of sensibility;<sup>1</sup> instead she is established as a character guided entirely by prudence. This quality she possesses in abundance from the outset of the novel, and it naturally aligns her with the character grouping of the rational Percivals. The plot of the novel also shows how strongly she is attracted to their well-regulated domestic life at Oakley Park. Belinda seems to be a work written in response to the fears of sensibility and the forces of anarchy articulated in the 1790's; it is a novel in which Edgeworth is determined to foreground and reward prudent behaviour and to imply that reason and prudence are more or less synonymous. Belinda cannot be shown to be susceptible to romantic emotions. The result is she is not a character who wins the reader's sympathy through shared emotional experience, or who engages the reader's interest in her emotional growth. Edgeworth herself indicates in a letter to Mrs Ruxton that she is not satisfied with her heroine, describing the 'cold tameness of that stick of stone Belinda'.<sup>2</sup>

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1. In her later novels Patronage (1814) and Helen (1834), Edgeworth shows, at least with subsidiary characters, a more positive picture of sensibility than she allowed in Belinda. In the former we can cite Mrs Hungerford II, xxxii, 290-91; and in Helen, Aunt Penant.

2. Letter to Mrs Ruxton, December 1809, The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth, ed. Augustus J. C. Hare, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1894), I, pp. 168-69.

The didactic writer Mary Brunton, through her use of a variant on the coquette-reformed plot, was able in her first novel, Self-Control, to suggest more convincingly that her heroine was moved by passion - though this is utterly condemned - as well as by the prudence of religious sentiment. By contrast, Belinda, from the outset of this novel, has an ability to assess situations accurately before allowing her feelings to influence her:

'O Lady Delacour, why, why will you try your power over me in this manner? ... You know that I ought not to be persuaded to do what I am conscious is wrong. But a few days ago you told me yourself that Mr Hervey is - is not a marrying man; and a woman of your penetration must see that - that ... I am not a match for Mr Hervey - ... I was not educated by my Aunt Stanhope -... ' (I, vi, 111)

Belinda's scrupulous observation of courtship rules and the emphasis given to prudence as the only virtue manifesting rational behaviour contrasts with the ambivalent attitude to this virtue found in both Sir Charles Grandison and Jane Austen's novels. It is, for example, the outlandish and easily dismissed Harriot Freke who articulates the feminist case on courtship behaviour in this novel. There is never any doubt that Belinda will keep her feelings for the hero well governed until she is certain of his intentions. 'Proud of having discerned his merit', Belinda permits herself for a 'moment' to feel 'unreproved pleasure in his company' (I, 159). While Lady Delacour is ill, Belinda finds it particularly difficult to satisfy herself in her conduct towards Mr Hervey. He clearly wishes to be considered more than a common acquaintance but Belinda is aware of the danger of 'admitting him to the familiarity of friendship'. In this instance, Belinda is shown assessing her changing situation with regard to Mr Hervey:



she was sometimes inclined to believe that he was trifling with her, merely for the glory of a conquest over her heart; at other times she suspected him of deeper designs upon her, ... but upon the whole she was disposed to believe that he was entangled by some former attachment from which he could not extricate himself with honour; and upon this supposition [which is the correct one] she thought him worthy of her esteem, and of her pity. (I, xi, 198)

At a later point in the story, when it seems that Mr Hervey will not be able to make his feelings for her known, Belinda has, we are told, through 'strength of mind, and timely exertion, prevented her prepossession [for Mr Hervey] from growing into a passion that might have made her miserable' (II, xix, 29).

In contrast to most novels of this period which deal with courtship situations, Belinda has reined in her feelings off stage, - out of view of the reader. In this, she is unlike almost any other heroine in this genre; even the timid Fanny Price is convincingly shown to be emotionally susceptible to Henry Crawford. The tensions between duty and inclination which receive such extensive treatment in the novels of Burney are no longer an issue in Belinda. Nor, as often happens in other novels, is the narrator of Belinda tempted ironically to counter-point her heroine's certainties about her courtship situation with developments of the plot. Irony of this type, which Jan Fergus has called 'linear irony', is often found in Austen's treatment of her heroines and can be seen in earlier works such as Burney's Cecilia. In that novel, for example, the heroine Cecilia's early

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1. 'The action [is organised] to undercut the characters' and the readers' expectations', Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel, (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), pp. 66 & 8.

certainties about the outcome of her relationship with Mortimer Delville, and the favourable part his mother will play in this, turn out to be fallacious.

Belinda's characterization creates other tensions within the narrative. For example, the opening of the work suggests that it will be in the tradition of stories in which an inexperienced heroine enters society and is led by her experiences towards some kind of character development. Edgeworth appears in the opening chapter to be setting up a plot which will realise these expectations. We are told that Belinda's 'character ... had yet to be developed by circumstances' (I, 1), and that she had 'generally acted as a puppet in the hands of others ... her mind not yet having been roused to much reflection' (I, 2). However, unlike other ingénue heroines, such as Burney's Evelina or Austen's Catherine Morland, it soon becomes clear that Belinda's role as an exemplar of prudent conduct will not allow her to be presented as a character who is perceived to change. In the interests of satirising sentimental attitudes, Edgeworth chooses a narrative strategy in which her heroine acts with uniform prudence from the outset to the close of the story. In her role as a static exemplar of prudence, Belinda ascends quickly to an unassailable position. A comment made by the narrator in chapter eleven of the first volume is interesting in this context: (Belinda's) prudence 'increased with the necessity for its exertion' (I, 198). The term 'prudence' becomes something of a leit-motif for Belinda; she is seldom mentioned without some reference being made to this quality. We know therefore, for example, that Lady Delacour's suspicions concerning Belinda's

ambition to marry her husband will not lead to any direful results. For, as Clarence Hervey says when he warns Belinda - gratuitously - of the various rumours:

'Now that you are upon your guard, your own prudence will defend you sufficiently. I never saw any of your sex who appeared to me to have so much prudence, and so little art; ...' (I, xiv, 271)

In similar vein Dr X says:

'... my dear Miss Portman, you will put a stop to a number of charming stories by this prudence of yours - ...' (I, x, 183)

Yet in Belinda, the narrator continues unconvincingly to suggest that Belinda is an ingénue who is engaged in learning from experience. If we accept Marilyn Butler's assertion that Edgeworth's 'liberalism' can be seen primarily in her belief that, 'the personal process of learning to reason [was] an end in itself'; and that this was a view which Edgeworth would have wished to illustrate in her novels, then we might ask why she does not do so successfully in Belinda. There are plenty of features of the work which suggest that Marilyn Butler is right in her assertion. In Burney's Camilla we see an impulsive heroine who learns to submit her judgement to the superior authority of her parents and future husband; Belinda, by contrast, shows a heroine who 'learns to escape [from such authority] and to rely on her own judgement' (The War of Ideas, p. 141). Belinda is certainly unusual in her low key casting-off of mentor figures. For example on receipt of an angry letter from her Aunt Stanhope we are told that Belinda feels 'regret ... at having grievously offended her aunt [but] was somewhat alleviated by the reflection that she had



acted with integrity and prudence' (I, xvi, 303).

We notice too that in contrast to the ideal of the traditional courtesy-book heroine, Belinda is not timid: she shows 'civil courage', as Lady Delacour remarks when the heroine decides against marrying Mr Vincent. (Civil courage in Edgeworth's novels appears to be that quality which allows characters to make their own decisions without being unduly swayed by conventional mores. In Patronage, for example, Rosamund Percy believes she has not sufficient 'civil courage' to marry into the merchant class). Nevertheless, in developing her central contrast between a rationally governed, happy domestic life and an unhappy dissipated life of fashion, Edgeworth does illustrate and endorse some traditional conduct-book orthodoxies. Lady Delacour's relation of her courtship years and marriage to Lord Delacour early in the narrative introduces many of these. For example her history hammers home the need for young women to choose suitable female friends; an issue which is returned to many times in the work.

During the Percival's outing to the rocking stones Belinda, for instance, observing the influence Harriot Freke has over Miss Moreton, says, 'What a lesson to young ladies in the choice of female friends!' (II, xix, 26). The lesson is also hammered home when the reformed Lady Delacour warns Helena to choose her female friends with care; had Lady Delacour herself done so, she believes she would 'have been an ornament to [her] sex - a Lady Anne Percival' (II, xxi, 93). In Belinda, as in conduct-book literature, the choice of reliable female friends is essential to the maintenance of a good reputation. The connection is made explicit by Mr Percival when, in endorsing Belinda's exclamation

about Harriot Freke's influence, he speaks of 'female outlaws ... who [having] lowered themselves in the public opinion cannot rest without attempting to bring others to their own level' (II, xix, 28). It seems that even Mrs Freke knows the value of reputation: 'tis better for a lady to lose her leg than her reputation - ...' (II, xxii, 112).

As Marilyn Butler argues, Edgeworth has created a heroine who is seen to engage in intelligent conversations and to be capable of making judgements, but she does not, as Jane Austen does, consistently employ the narrative techniques which reveal the internal workings of a character's mind. There is consequently a failure to show effectively a learning process: we are not involved in the internal struggles by which Belinda learns to reason. In fact, we are not involved, through free indirect discourse or any other discursive techniques, in the internal workings and thoughts of any of the main characters. Lacking these techniques, the novel lacks the depiction of characters who have psychological depth. And it is Marilyn Butler who, in a slightly different context, gives an idea of why this may be: 'For Maria Edgeworth, there can be no ... distinction between exterior speech and interior. There is rationality and irrationality; the mind ... is potentially the source of truth' (p. 264).

Edgeworth herself suggests implicitly that the plausibility of her heroine lies outside the usual claims of the genre. Belinda's plausibility is to be based on the work's parodic function: we are not invited to accept her as a developed character in her own right but rather to accept that her rational responses make her plausible in comparison with those of the sentimental heroines she

parodies. Many instances can be cited in which the narrator stands outside the boundaries of her fictional world in order to tell the reader that her text provides a more accurate reflection of real life than is to be found in novels influenced by sentimental ideas. For example, Lady Delacour prefaces the narrative of her life story with the following:

'My dear, you will be woefully disappointed if in my story you expect any thing like a novel, ... I can tell you that nothing is more unlike a novel than real life. Of all lives, mine has been the least romantic.'  
(I, iii, 43-44)

Similarly, when Dr X counsels Belinda over the apparent mysteries of Lady Delacour's boudoir, the same boundaries are spoken of:

'-a romance called the Mysterious Boudoir, of nine volumes at least, might be written on this subject, if you would only condescend to act like almost all other heroines, that is to say, without common sense'. (I, x, 183)

It is an issue returned to later when Mr Percival discourses on the shortcomings of the virtue delicacy:

'The struggles between duty and passion may be the charm of romance, but must be the misery of real life. ... The woman who marries one man, and loves another ... may be an interesting heroine; - but would any man of sense or feeling choose to be troubled with such a wife? - .....  
No; there are ingenuous minds which will never be enslaved by fashion or interest, though they may be exposed to be deceived by romance or by the *delicacy* of their own imagination.' (II, xix, 31)

Yet even this attempt to place Belinda in the context of 'real life' as opposed to the world of sentimental fiction is undermined: first, by the narrative contrivances which establish a spurious neatness of plot - an interconnectedness between the



characters which defies belief - and second, by the equally implausible contrivances which are used to bring the novel to a 'satisfactory' conclusion. Edgeworth's disclaimer that this is not a novel, with her metafictional satirising of her own plot manipulations, cannot prevent the reader from feeling that an appropriate ending has been achieved only by shattering the sense of reality which has been constantly claimed over the previous three volumes. It is worth explaining the effect of these contrivances by noting here briefly that Jane Austen did not permit the inclusion of such improbable or sensational elements in her narratives. Austen takes the genre more seriously in that she is more painstaking in ordering the events of her plots. In her novels minute attention is given to the creation of a consistent time span. As David Lodge has pointed out:

If there is a retrospective account of some event antecedent to the main action, or a delayed explanation of some event in the main action, either it is incorporated into the time span of the main action in the form of a letter (eg. Darcy's letter to Elizabeth explaining his involvement with Wickham; ...) or in dialogue (eg. Willoughby's apologetic confession to Elinor; ...), or it is briefly summarised in a non-scenic way by the authorial narrator (eg. the account of Anne Elliot's former relationship with Wentworth ...). In other words, there is a minimal disturbance of chronological order in Jane Austen's novels... We don't encounter in them the effect of flashback, in which the temporal progress of the main action is suspended and for a while effaced by the scenic presentation of an earlier event.  
(After Bakhtin, p. 124)

By contrast in Belinda, and in the later Helen, lengthy interpolations are inserted which suspend the straightforward unfolding of events. Moreover, these interpolations deal with considerable lengths of time which are antecedent, and not always directly pertinent, to the main narrative. The main action is, in

Lodge's terms, often 'effaced' by the scenic presentation of these narratives.

Returning to the quotation from Janet Egleson Dunleavy with which this chapter opened, we find that she suggests that the kind of interpretation, like mine, which sees in Belinda an unresolved clash between narrative imitations of life and the propagation of ideas is missing the point about Maria Edgeworth's intentions:

Central to each individual work was an idea, an abstraction that, *although unrelated to the narrative imitations of life and art* that were the vehicles of her fiction, was yet manifest through them. (p. 60) (my italics)

I can understand that it may be tempting to say that one finds the ideas being illustrated more important than the exemplification or development of a fictional genre. For example, one might consider Mary Brunton's development of her theology as more important than her development of compelling dialogues. But the novel of manners is a sufficiently powerful vehicle for ideas for it not to be as disposable as this kind of critical approach implies. Maria Edgeworth's retreat into the metafictional is not a satisfactory rounding off of the 'bitonality' which allowed us to contrast the stories of Belinda and Lady Delacour throughout the text. It is a way out - the only way out - of the impasse which the novelist's conflicting aims have brought about.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**CONFLICTS BETWEEN ART AND  
IDEA IN THE QUESTION  
OF UPBRINGING.**



I know not whether it was owing to the carelessness of nurses, or the depravity of waiting-maids, or whether, 'to say all, Nature herself wrought in me so; but, from the earliest period of my recollection, I furnished an instance at least, if not proof, of the corruption of human kind; being proud, petulant, and rebellious. Some will probably think the growth of such propensities no more unaccountable than that of briars and thorns; being prepared, from their own experience and observation, to expect that both should spring without any particular culture. But whoever is dissatisfied with this compendious deduction, may trace my faults to certain accidents in my early education.'

Mary Brunton's introduction and quasi-theoretical grounding of her exemplary novel Discipline, encapsulates the commonsense view of upbringing and character. She implies that it is impossible to ascertain how much in a character is due to genetic inheritance and how much to environment: she glances at the possibility ('an instance ... if not a proof') that original sin is sufficient explanation of all faults; she uses the question-begging word 'propensities', in the same way that her fellow authors and polemicists used words like 'temper' and 'disposition'; but in the end she implies that the only practical, commonsensical alternative to unprovable 'compendious deductions' is to focus on 'early education' as the most potent causal factor. It is significant also that she is concerned to explain faults rather than virtues. The commonsense approach, as illustrated by Mary Brunton, eschews any further philosophical delving and thus avoids such dangerous concepts as moral luck which raise doubts about the

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1. Discipline, (prefixed by) A Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Author, including extracts from her correspondence, (London, New Burlington Street: Richard Bentley, 1842), p. 65.

justification for allocating praise or blame for an individual's virtues or sins. Miss Percy suffers from 'certain accidents' in (her) early education; but such accidents are 'man-made'; they do not raise questions of grace given or refused by God or fate. The fact that Miss Percy's education was influenced by such accidents does not exonerate her: she is blameworthy and corrigible, and common sense would not undermine free will by questioning the blameworthiness or the corrigibility.

As far as a novelist keeps within commonsense bounds, few difficulties can arise: 'we know our will is free, and there's an end to it': a direct line can be traced from a character's faults to his deserts: the end of the story is inherent in its narration. This is the case with Discipline and, short of discovering a subverting 'sub-text', we can safely say that this was the author's intention. But Mary Brunton as a writer of exemplary fiction was not very concerned with criticism that her stories (or, presumably, her characters and dialogues) were 'improbable'.<sup>2</sup> If a novelist has ambitions to be more probable - to emulate the psychological realism of Samuel Richardson for example - there will be a temptation to stray beyond the safe bounds of 'common sense' and to become involved in deeper complexities of motivation, of blameworthiness and of corrigibility. A novelist may also take greater risks than Mary Brunton does, by trying to

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1. James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, rev. & enlg. & ed. L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), II, p. 82.

2. See below Chapter 4, p. 144.

be more specific and schematic in 'accounting' for characters. We may offer Jane Austen as an example of the first type of risk-taker, and Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth as examples of the second.

As will be shown in chapters 4 and 5, Austen raises, though less tendentiously, similar issues to those of Burney and Edgeworth and to some extent, therefore, faces similar conflicts between art and idea. In essence these are to do with reconciling the strength of the author's moral convictions with the need to involve lifelike characters, or characters who appear to have lives of their own, in convincingly developed plots.

In this chapter and in chapter 5, what is said by each of these novelists about the upbringing of their central protagonists will be explored. Reconciling what is said about education with the requirements of a narrative provides an even greater challenge for these authors than the incorporation of views on first loves, sensibility and acceptable behaviour during courtship. All three novelists accept unquestioningly the generally held opinion that early environment is of great importance in shaping the adult character. In the context of Mansfield Park, many critics suggest that Austen intends to show that environment is the main determining factor in character formation. Yet, as Marilyn Butler says,

The theme that character is formed decisively in early childhood is a difficult one for a novelist to handle. The implication is that adult characters have little or no capacity to learn from experience; their natures were already determined, well before the action of the novel begins. (Maria Edgeworth A Literary Biography, p. 333)



Here Marilyn Butler is speaking specifically about Maria Edgeworth, whose polemical interest in environmental determinism was clearer than that of Burney or Austen. The following chapter will explore how far these novelists manage to deal with the conflicts which arise between an emphasis on the importance of early education and the need to show that their adult characters are potentially corrigible, or in some interesting ways moved by free will. They will also explore how far these novelists increase their difficulties when, either for narrative reasons (Jane Austen), or for polemical thematic reasons (Burney and Edgeworth) they move out of the commonsense bounds exemplified by the quotation from Brunton's Discipline above p. 130.

#### 1. NATURE VERSUS NURTURE IN CAMILLA

Burney was pleased by the view of a contemporary reader that Camilla was 'intended as a system of education' (Hemlow, 'Fanny Burney and The Courtesy Books', p. 758); and it is clear that Burney was interested in showing the effects of a variety of differing educational systems. Here, attention will be confined to Burney's sustained attempt to convey through her narrative a coherent and consistent statement about the influence of nature and nurture upon her characters.

From the outset, the narrator attempts to examine the formation of Camilla's character in a schematic fashion. An initial distinction is drawn between the results of the education provided

for her by her parents and the dispositional flaws which she shares with her brother Lionel. The first seventeen years of Camilla's life are considered to be a period of character formation; what follows, the main concern of the narrative, is the process of character development and character 'fixing'. Camilla has, we are told, 'a character that called for more attention to its development than to its formation; ...' (I, i, 51). Nurture or parental guidance has, by the age of seventeen, left Camilla with a 'sedulously cultivated understanding' and 'principles modelled by the pure and practical tenets of her exemplary parents' (I, i, 52). Nurture has however, made little impact on 'her reigning and radical defect, an imagination that submitted to no control' (I, iv, 84). The narrator and other characters frequently refer to this defect in terms which suggest that it is either genetic in origin or so deep-seated as to be a constant danger to her other 'propensities'.

... her every propensity was pure, and, when reflection came to her aid, her conduct was as exemplary as her wishes. But the ardour of her imagination, acted upon by every passing idea, shook her Judgement from its yet unsteady seat, and left her at the mercy of wayward Sensibility - that delicate but irregular power, ...  
(IV, xi, 679-80)

In the first two volumes of the work, Mrs Tyrold is more concerned than her husband about how Camilla's character will develop. When the Tyrold parents discuss Edgar Mandlebert's apparent decision not to marry Camilla, Mrs Tyrold betrays her concern that character formation, for which she and her husband (with some interference from Mr Tyrold's brother, Sir Hugh) have been responsible, may not necessarily lead on to satisfactory

character development: for that must be the result of social influences. Thus while her husband regrets the loss of Edgar's income, Mrs Tyrold laments the loss of his guiding care which could prevent the worst effects of her daughter's 'reigning defect'.

Throughout the novel the comments of Edgar and Dr Marchmont as well as the running commentary of the narrator all assume that characters are 'developed' in society; they all express the same fears about Camilla's failure during the period of character formation to control her imagination. (Katharine Rogers suggests that 'imagination' and 'sensibility' are used synonymously in Burney's novels).<sup>1</sup> It is this defect which causes her to become so readily and dangerously involved with people like Mrs Arlbery and Mrs Berlinton. The narrator endorses the fears already voiced by Edgar over these friendships, when she states that Camilla's attraction to Mrs Berlinton involves her imagination and not her judgement: 'Camilla was sensibly touched; and though strangely at a loss what to judge, felt her affections deeply interested' (III, v, 425). At the end of this chapter, the narrator restates the dangers,

Neither the thoughtlessness of the disposition, nor the gaiety of the imagination of Camilla, could disguise from her understanding the glaring eccentricity of this conduct and character: *but she saw them with more of interest than blame*; the various attractions with which they were mixed, blending in *her opinion*

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1. 'The term 'imagination' in Burney's novels does not refer to the creative faculty, but seems to be equivalent to 'sensibility' Frances Burney The World of Female Difficulties, p. 113.



something between pity and admiration, more captivating, though more dangerous, to the fond fancy of youth, than the most solid respect, and the best founded esteem.  
(III, v, 426-27) (my italics)

In chapter three it was noted that Dr Marchmont, in his role as commentator on events, sums up the central ideas on character development which the narrative of Camilla has been illustrating. His description of the difficulties which face the developing character in a dangerous and corrupt world are the same as those already set out by Mrs Tyrold and the narrator.

'The character, at this period, is often so unstable, as to be completely new moulded by every new accident, every new associate.' (IV, xii, 594)

In his first interview with Edgar, he acknowledges that Edgar has been well placed to find out about Camilla's character; he nevertheless suggests that 'happiness' (married happiness) is related to the (more mysterious) qualities of disposition. In the event Dr Marchmont is shown to be correct about the course of Camilla's character development. For example, in volume four he re-introduces fears expressed earlier by Mrs Tyrold concerning the consequences which may arise if Camilla is allowed a free rein in social situations which will excite her imagination:

'You must not imagine that I mean a censure upon the excellent Mr Tyrold, when I say she is left too much to herself: the purity of his principles, and the virtue of his character, must exempt him from blame; but his life has been both too private and too tranquil, to be aware of the dangers run by Female Youth, when straying from the mother's careful wing. All that belongs to religion, and principle, he feels, and he has taught; but the impediments they have to encounter in a commerce with mankind, he could not point out, for he does not know. Yet there is nothing more certain, than that seventeen weeks is not less able to go alone in a nursery than seventeen years in the world.' (IV, vi, 645-46)

Near the end of the novel Camilla implicitly agrees with what Dr Marchmont has said: 'O my dearest mother! How have I missed your guiding care' (V, 896).

However, the exigencies of narrative construction give rise to thematic inconsistencies. For example, during his final interview with Edgar, Dr Marchmont's generalisations about character development clash both with how we expect the story to end and with how it does end. The interview opens with Edgar's decision to leave the country, since Camilla has apparently proved too unstable for private domestic life. Dr Marchmont replies:

'Alas! Mr Tyrold has himself erred, in committing, at so early a period, her conduct into her own reins. ...  
*What instance more than this now before us  
can shew the futility of education, and the precariousness  
of innate worth, when the contaminating world is allowed to  
seize its inexperienced prey, before the character is fixed  
as well as formed?*' (V, iii, 726) (my italics)

This can be read as a logical culmination of the views on the formation and development of character introduced by the narrator and commented on by Dr Marchmont throughout the narrative. The problem is that, in spite of the privileged knowledge given the reader about how central characters are misinterpreting one another, we cannot disagree with the Doctor's gloomy sentiments here. The general 'truth' of Dr Marchmont's opinion makes more impact on the reader than the specific story of Edgar and Camilla with its happy ending. For what he says here merely summarises what the narrative has been illustrating for the last four volumes. The only safe member of Camilla's family - who have all been brought up on the 'adamantine pillars of religion and virtue', - is Lavinia who, significantly, is the only child not to

have left Etherington.

The problem results then, firstly, from the generic pressure to resolve the story satisfactorily for all the 'deserving' characters; and, secondly, from Burney's concepts of character formation, character development and character 'fixing' which, rather than being left in the manageable realm of unreflecting received wisdom or common sense, are elevated to the level of a consistent explanation of character - an explanation which is sustained by the continual endorsement of numerous characters acting as a choric voice.

The reiterated message is that character formation (upbringing) cannot guarantee virtue: the development and 'fixing' of a character can be the result only of experience of the world. Thus Camilla's 'impetuous disposition' lacked that 'Foresight, the offspring of Judgement, or the disciple of Experience' (II, vi, 216). Yet the narrative demonstrates repeatedly that for characters like Lionel and Camilla - lacking 'foresight and judgement' this 'experience' will be dearly bought. Read in this way, the text supports Dr Marchmont's view that neither early education nor innate worth can be of any value if the character is exposed to the world before it is fixed. Character formation has, it seems, little bearing on stable character development which must be left to luck, with the odds stacked heavily against a successful outcome. (In a different context, Katharine Rogers notices another interesting contradiction which arises in the narrative. Sir Hugh's apparently meaningless comment about not finding 'much difference between ... good and the bad people' (V, 774) is in fact, 'proved true by the events of the plot, where



'good' people contribute no more, perhaps less, to others' happiness than 'bad' ones do. In a book that constantly preaches the importance of obeying the law, it is an astonishingly subversive statement; for it brings into question the whole rationale for repressive morality based on innate sinfulness.'). (Female Difficulties, p. 110).

The pressures to provide a happy ending for the main characters cause the focus to move arbitrarily from Camilla's vulnerability to the contaminating influences of the world ( which she shares with all young people prematurely exposed to these influences, and for which no early educational preparation is likely to suffice) to her dispositional flaw, which had also been untouched by early upbringing. Mrs Tyrold on finding her daughter close to death, says: 'It is time to conquer this impetuous sensibility which already in its effects, has nearly broken all our hearts' (V, xi, 882). Is 'disposition' now something different from the character which is 'formed', 'developed' and 'fixed'? Is it a way of describing traits which can and should be overcome by will? In the realm of common sense there is no difficulty in squaring this circle, but Burney's readers have been forced out of that realm into one where they seem to be encouraged to seek explanations.

The inconsistencies would have been lessened if Dr Marchmont had been made a more plausible character; if he had been less of a mouthpiece for expressing theoretical truths, and more the product of an unhappy life. But, in spite of our being told about his failed marriages, we are not able to read his comments on Camilla's education as just the embittered utterances of a man who feels ill-used. Dr Marchmont's judgements have been consistently

confirmed by the narrative; he has been presented as a serious commentator on upbringing and character development.

In the treatment given to the character development of both Lionel Tyrold and Mrs Berlinton the inconsistencies become more glaring. Burney, in keeping with exemplary fiction, deems it necessary to have Mrs Berlinton as a foil to Camilla, that is, as a character who is intended to act as a warning of what could happen to the main protagonist. But in book six, considerable detail is given about Mrs Berlinton's own upbringing. The conditions under which her character formation took place have clearly been less auspicious than the principled religious education provided for the Tyrold children. Moreover, the 'progress of dissipation' which Mrs Berlinton's career illustrates - her inability to cope with the demands of an adult social role - is related by the narrator to nurtural influences and not to a dispositional flaw. The reader may therefore infer that Mrs Berlinton could, under a more favourable early childhood regime, have been taught to curb her tendencies towards imaginative and sentimental excess. This is a reversal of the pattern illustrated by Camilla's story. As a result, Mrs Berlinton's career contradicts what most of the narrative illustrates - that the course of character development cannot be ensured, or even much assisted by the process of character formation. Mrs Berlinton has from an early age been:

left, ... to the care of a fanatical maiden aunt, who had taught her nothing but her faith and her prayers, without one single lesson on good works, or the smallest instruction upon the practical use of her theoretical piety ...

(This 'instruction' has been supplemented by The Works of the Poets and some 'ill selected novels and romances'.) The narrator continues:

whatever was most noble or tender in romance, she felt promptly in her heart, and conceived to be general; and whatever was enthusiastic in theology, formed the whole of her idea and her belief with respect to religion. Brought up thus, to think all things the most unusual and extraordinary, were merely common and of course; she was romantic without consciousness, and excentric without intention. Nothing steady or rational had been instilled into her mind by others; and she was too young, and too fanciful to have formed her own principles with any depth of reflection, or study of propriety. (III, xii, 487-88)

In this instance the narrator seems to be in agreement with the writers of conduct books and educational treatises about the need and efficacy of instilling good regular habits at an early stage, for in a later comment on Mrs Berlinton she says, 'The feelings are so often the mere concomitants of habits' (IV, ix, 662). The emphasis given to the fanatical nature of Mrs Berlinton's early religious instruction invites a contrast with the 'adamantine pillars of religion and conscience' which have informed the Tyrold children's education. Such a contrast is however undermined by the relative failure of this better upbringing to affect the course of Camilla's and Lionel's subsequent careers.

Thus in Mrs Berlinton's case, and in the case of another subsidiary character, Alphonso Bellamy, it is implied that early nurtural influences will determine later character development. This is explicitly denied in the cases of Camilla and her brother Lionel, so that a great deal of weight is then thrown on the concept of 'disposition' - in the form of 'dispositional flaws - which defy nurtural influences including attempts to



establish 'good regular habits'. But Burney causes further confusion between what are to be read as dispositional flaws and what as culpable failures to respond to the influences of education. She is driven into these confusions through the narrative requirement to assess corrigibility and allot blame. Lionel attempts to explain his inability to follow his father's virtuous example in terms of a dispositional bias. For example, on discovering that Lionel has been defrauding his uncle, Mr Revil, Lavinia asks why her brother cannot now try to model himself on their father. Lionel replies:

'... nature, nature, ... is in the way. I was born a bit of a buck. I have no natural taste for study, ... I am a light airy spark, ... My father is firm as a rock ... but this firmness ... he has kept all to himself; not a whit of it do I inherit; every wind that blows, veers me about and makes me look some new way'. (II, x, 241)

At times it seems that the narrator agrees with Lionel's diagnosis:

The zealot for every species of sport, the candidate for every order of whim, was the light-hearted mirthful Lionel. A stranger to reflection, and incapable of care, laughter seemed not merely the bent of his humour, but the necessity of his existence: ... (I, iii, 79)

Yet, Camilla is permitted to be 'all spirit', while Lionel's more 'violent spirits' (II, 245) are condemned. A little later the narrator speaks of Lionel in terms that will be picked up and used by Dr Marchmont in depicting the course of a character's development:

... his defects, though not originally of the heart, were of a species that soon tend to harden it ...  
.....

Yet, when mischief or misfortune ensued from his wanton faults, he was far more sorry than he thought it manly to own; but as his actions were without judgement, his repentance was without principle. (II, x, 239)

Here the narrator allows that Lionel's faults are very like Camilla's, and, like hers, have not been amended by early upbringing. But in Camilla's narrative her faulty judgements are again and again explained and to some extent excused by her 'radical and reigning defect' of disposition; Lionel's attempts to explain his own faults in terms of similar dispositional flaws are dismissed. Mrs Tyrold can only say that Lionel's failures are due to the neglect of his studies: 'this neglect [has been] the cause of all his errors' (II, 242). Dr Marchmont concludes that education and innate worth are valueless in the context of character development - a view endorsed by the narrative for four volumes; while Mrs Tyrold seems in Lionel's case, early in the work, and in Camilla's case in the final volume, to see education as a cure even for dispositional flaws.

In the case of two minor characters, Hugh Westwyn and Clermont Lynmere, Burney provides an explicit example of the overpowering influences of nature rather than nurture in the formation of character. Since neither of these characters plays an indispensable role in the plot, and since Burney chooses to give the reader information about their identical educations - laying the foundations for her final comment - rather than to develop them as complex characters, we may assume that their primary purpose in Camilla is didactic. During the final chapter of the novel, we find Lavinia Tyrold married to Harry Westwyn. She finds the contrast between her husband and his contemporary Clermont

Lynmere so striking as 'to annul all Hypothesis of Education, ...'

(The narrator continues):

...Brought up under the same tutor, the same masters, and at the same university, with equal care, equal expence, equal opportunities of every kind, Clermont turned out conceited, voluptuous, and shallow; Henry, modest full of feeling, and stored with intelligence. (V, xiv, 909)

The problem, as has been said, lies in attempting to be schematic and theoretically sound about this and other difficult subjects in a text which also attempts to tell a story. And not a story comprising a loosely connected series of incidents and escapades, as in a picaresque novel, or a set of cautionary tales, but one which depends on the interactions of developing characters: a story which depends on psychological realism. The generic pressures to tell such a story can be shown to create confusion in Burney's development of Lionel's character, as much as it does in Camilla's.

It can be argued that it is Lionel's subsidiary role in the plot (in which his main function is to help create an intolerable situation for the two central characters), rather than anything we need accept about the development of his character, which ensures that he becomes a victim of the moral consequentialism required by this type of story telling. However, even this interpretation is not consistent with the text. At the close of the book, we are told that, 'time and adversity' do somehow 'form ... a new character for Lionel' (V, xiv, 909). It seems that a belated attempt to make the reader accept the continuing existence and development of her characters (as if she really were, despite her disclaimers, primarily concerned with writing a novel) has



subverted Fanny Burney's earnest attempts to make a coherent statement about character formation and character development.

## 2. NATURE VERSUS NURTURE IN BELINDA

In her Advertisement to Belinda, Edgeworth claims that her work is an attack on contemporary sentimental novels rather than itself a novel:

The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale the author not wishing to acknowledge a novel ... so much folly, error and vice are disseminated in books classed under this denomination, that it is hoped the wish to assume another title will be attributed to feelings that are laudable and fastidious.

Yet a summary of the plot indicates that Belinda was in fact intended to be read as a novel. The claim in chapter 2 was that Belinda suffered from the contradictory pulls of, on the one hand a drive towards a naturalistic presentation of character and events, and on the other, a drive or obligation to exemplify a moral. 'Maria ... found it by no means easy to reconcile her liking for the natural with her belief in the exemplary' (Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth A Literary Biography, p. 315). Maria Edgeworth had a particular interest in education and sought to demonstrate a linkage, amounting almost to educational determinism, between errors in upbringing and subsequent failure of adults to govern their feelings by the use of reason and understanding. In Belinda the characters of Virginia and Mr

Vincent in particular illustrate this concern: they bring into sharp focus the tensions between a potentially naturalistic novel, and a novel in which an educational moral is exemplified.

Like Burney, Edgeworth is writing a novel of manners which is subject to the same generic pressures to resolve the plot satisfactorily for her heroine. Edgeworth chooses to marry Belinda to her first love Mr Hervey. This marriage creates difficulties since it can take place only if two other characters, Mr Vincent and Virginia, are removed, and for this to happen they have to be read as both blameworthy and incorrigible. Virginia is left unchanged, incorrigibly governed by feelings, though by means of an excessively over-contrived ending she is permitted to meet, and presumably marry, literally the first man she has ever seen. In this satire on first loves, Virginia remains a vehicle for illustrating the absurdities of sentimental excess. Once the way is clear for the union of Mr Hervey and Belinda, neither author nor reader can be said to care much about Virginia's future lot.

In the case of Mr Vincent, Edgeworth contrives his necessary incorrigibility by attempting an educational determinist explanation of his vice, gambling. Yet the generic need to remove this character, and the polemical drive to explain his fault in terms of his early environment do not sit together easily in the narrative. There is a strong suggestion that Mr Vincent's belief in a moral instinct, as well as his gambling, is the result of his upbringing:

... his feelings were always more powerful than his reason  
(II, 270)

Unfortunately he disdained prudence, as the factitious virtue of inferior minds: he thought that the *feelings* of a man of honour were to be his guide in the first and last appeal; ... he proudly professed to trust to the sublime instinct of a good heart. (II, xxviii, 271)

Under a more auspicious early regime, such as Mr Percival might have offered had he come to England as a young child, he would, it is implied, have been taught to curb his feelings by use of his reason and understanding. Instead, during his time in the West Indies, his 'habits and character were in a great measure formed' (II, 270).

It is clear that Edgeworth, in talking of a character being 'formed', is not referring to innate qualities as genetic inheritance, but to early upbringing. She makes it quite clear a few years after the publication of Belinda, that she did not want to involve herself in the debate on genetic endowments - Madame de Fleury 1809 - (see chapter 5, p. 247, below). In Practical Education written at the time Belinda was written, the following is stated:

*We have, without entering into the speculative questions concerning the original differences of temper and genius, offered such observations as we thought might be useful in the education of the attention of vivacious, and indolent children; whether their idleness or indolence proceed from nature, or from mistaken modes of instruction, we have been anxious to point out means of curing their defects. (Practical Education, p. 715)*  
(my italics)

Nevertheless, even without introducing the difficult question of how far characters are determined by the luck involved in genetic endowments, an emphasis on the importance of early childhood experiences can become sufficiently deterministic to cause a



novelist problems. In Belinda we confront two problems: first whether Mr Percival is a convincing mentor figure; second, whether Mr Vincent was so incorrigible as to be ruled out of question as a 'sensible' choice of husband for Belinda.

The Percivals seem to represent, like Belinda but in a more articulate form, an ideal of rationality. But some doubt is thrown on this reading by the development of the plot. For Mr Percival's measures on discovering his ward's vice cannot be read as worthy of an intelligent character. We are told that, while Mr Percival had not immediately discovered this 'foible in his ward' (II, 271), he was nevertheless aware that Mr Vincent was given to the 'presumptuous belief in his special good fortune which naturally leads to a love of gambling' (II, xxviii, 270). When the habit of gambling is first discovered in the eighteen year old Mr Vincent, his guardian makes an appeal to his understanding and shows him examples of the 'ruinous effects of high play in real life' (II, 270). Since the reader has already been told of Mr Vincent's present deficiency in reasoning powers, Mr Percival's appeal may well be seen as inadequate.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that we are to read Mr Percival's failure with his eighteen-year old ward as lending support to the powerful and irrevocable effect on Mr Vincent of his early upbringing. Such a view is supported, for example, by Mr Hervey's amazement that a pupil of Mr Percival's could become a gamester. We are told that Mr Hervey had forgotten, 'that Mr Vincent had not been educated by his guardian' (II, 270). The implication is that had Mr Vincent's earliest education been governed by Mr Percival, he would have been taught successfully to

curb his feelings by the use of his reason and understanding, so that gambling would never have become a problem. But nothing Mr Percival could later do (even if he were a more convincing mentor) could, we are to understand, reverse an irreversible process. It is this determinist view of early upbringing which thwarts our judgements about a character's corrigibility: if childhood influences are all-important, then moral exertion, blameworthy or praiseworthy behaviour in adults, are all the results of contingency and the reader's natural drive to allot praise and blame is balked. Common sense resists such a view (even Maria Edgeworth could not have held in practice such an unmitigatedly deterministic view); but in this case, our suspicion that after all Mr Vincent may have been corrigible makes it seem an arbitrary piece of plot manipulation that he should be removed from the range of Belinda's choice.

A further problem arises because the educational determinism which is used to explain the character of Mr Vincent cannot be applied to the heroine. It is noticeable that in the opening chapter we are given only a small amount of information about Belinda's early upbringing: she had been brought up in the country, had seen, while very young some examples of domestic felicity, (I, xi, 190) and was: 'early ... inspired with a taste for domestic pleasures; she was fond of reading, and disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity' (I, 1). We can appreciate the difficulties Edgeworth has created for herself here. If she were to remain consistent in her educational determinism, any detailed information about Belinda's upbringing would undercut the already weak claim that she is a heroine whose

character will be developed by experience. As an instrument for conveying the central theme, Belinda has to display exemplary prudence, yet at the same time Edgeworth's educational convictions make it necessary that this prudence should be seen to be the result of an understanding 'excited to reason' by experience. This is the point which Mr Hervey recognises when he contrasts Belinda with his own educational failure, Virginia. Belinda has the 'power and habit of conducting herself', while in the case of Virginia he learns,

it was absolutely impossible she could conduct herself with that discretion, which must be the combined result of reasoning and experience. (II, xxvi, 207)

A host of further questions arise from the educational determinist explanation of Mr Vincent's character. Why is Lady Delacour allowed to be corrigible? Most of the episodes in the novel involving Lady Delacour show a character, who, while intelligent and perceptive, is nevertheless misguided precisely because like Mr Vincent, she is not governed by her understanding and reason. The episode in which she returns to the methodism instilled into her during childhood raises this awkward question since here the similarities between her and Mr Vincent are so striking: both show characters in whom the failures of early upbringing come to light in adult life.

the early impressions that had been made on her mind in her childhood, by a methodistical mother, recurred. Her understanding, weakened *perhaps by disease, and never accustomed to reason*, was incapable of distinguishing between truth and error; and *her temper, naturally enthusiastic*, hurried her from one extreme to the other - ... (II, 52-53) (my italics)



Lady Delacour was governed by pride, by sentiment, by whim, by enthusiasm, by passion - by anything but reason. (II, xx, 53)

Belinda has, we are told, sometimes seen Lady Delacour in 'starts of passion that seemed to border on insanity' (I, 287). It is worth noting that Mr Vincent is described in similar terms at the gambling table:

he played on, ... with all the impetuosity of his natural temper; his judgement forsook him; he scarcely knew what he said or did; and, in the course of a few hours, he was worked up to such a pitch of insanity, that in one desperate moment he betted nearly all that he was worth in the world - and lost! (II, xxviii, 279)

Yet the educational determinism which holds for Mr Vincent apparently does not apply to Lady Delacour. G. J. Barker-Benfield suggests that it is Lady Delacour's saving sensibility which permits her late reform.<sup>1</sup> And we know that Maria Edgeworth believed that 'on sensibility, all that is called genius originally depends'. (The Good French Governess written to accompany Practical Education (see above p. 88). However this does not answer the question why Mr Vincent's sensibility, which we are told is strong, and which, since his arrival in England, has been supervised by the rational Mr Percival, is not similarly the basis on which a late reform could be built.

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1. The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in the 18th Century, (Chicago, London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), 'The task Belinda and her ally, the sensitive Hervey, set themselves is to make Lady Delacour "as happy in domestic life as she appeared to be in public". It is not too late because, unlike Harriot Freke, she does not lack "sensibility"' p. 392.

These problems become more apparent in those novels written when Edgeworth was most influenced by her father's determinist views in Professional Education.

Almost all the characters in Mme de Fleury, Vivian, and Patronage are divided into sheep and goats, ... determined long ago by their parents' notions about education. Ennui, Mme de Fleury, Vivian, The Absentee, and Patronage resemble one another structurally, ... The plots differ from the reasonably continuous stories Maria Edgeworth had devised for The Modern Griselda and Manoeuvring. ... In every episode the hero fails to meet the challenge he is faced with because of a weakness of character brought about by defects in his education. Naturally a story constructed with this aim in mind is repetitive and discontinuous. (Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth A Literary Biography, p. 333)

These problems affect more than just the narrative structure of the story. In The Absentee, Grace Nugent is, for much of the novel, depicted as a character who, unlike Lady Clonbrony, is fully aware of what is implied in the behaviour of those characters with whom she interacts. Lord Colambre, the hero, is also depicted as a perceptive character - a pragmatist with common sense. This reading of each is however undermined by the emphasis Edgeworth gives to the irrevocable effects of upbringing and early education. When Lord Colambre discovers that Grace is illegitimate, he decides he cannot marry her. This decision is made not because her father is unknown, but because she has been brought up as a small child by an immoral mother. As Marilyn Butler points out, (ibid., p. 332) this subplot will remain incomprehensible unless it is understood in the context of Professional Education. And it seems that critics, like Walter Allen, who did not make this connection, tend to see Lord Colambre's objections to Grace's illegitimacy in terms of the

likelihood of her having 'inherited (genetically) her mother's frailty'. That it should be possible and understandable to make a reading which is totally the opposite of what Edgeworth must have intended, points to a clumsiness in the handling of the educational theme. While Allen may have missed the point Edgeworth intended to make about upbringing here, he goes on to raise a very reasonable objection to this episode in terms of the credible characterisation of both protagonists:

Colambre is a very passable attempt at a hero, ... That he gets by is shown by our horror at his behaviour towards Grace Nugent, whom he loves, his renunciation of her when he believes he has discovered that she is illegitimate and therefore, as he theorizes, that she must have *inherited her mother's frailty*. We are even more horror-struck, since she is such a vivid characterization, when Grace herself admits the justice of his behaviour. For Grace is a woman of high pride, vigorous common sense, and downright flashing wit, who is not at all taken in by the fashionable world. Yet, when Miss Edgeworth requires it, she is made to behave entirely out of character.' (my italics)

A further corollary arises from Edgeworth's later stance as an educational determinist, though it does not feature in Belinda. In 'The Novel as Domestic Conduct Book: Richardson to Austen', Dales proposes that Edgeworth, in line with Hannah More and Mary Brunton (Emmeline 1816, ), believed that 'women of tarnished reputation must be shunned' (p. 375). Writing before the publication of Marilyn Butler's Jane Austen and The War of Ideas, Dales, on this issue and others, such as the uncompromising

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1. James Newcomer, Maria Edgeworth the Novelist: a Bicentenary Study, (Texas: Fort Worth, 1976), p. 74, (quoting Walter Allen The English Novel, p. 122).



adherence to sense, puts Edgeworth in a more conservative camp than does Butler. Dales sees Edgeworth as offering a secular version of the evangelical position on correct conduct.

[For Maria Edgeworth], the apostle of sense, virtue walked in a straight path according to rules which might be learned from conduct books, and those who did not follow them had only themselves to blame if society rejected them. . . . This attitude can be found in her novels. (Dales, p. 375).

Dales points out that in Patronage 1814, Edgeworth

demanded that reprobation [here aimed at Miss Hauton who was brought up by a divorced mother] should extend even to the daughters (and grand daughters?) of such sinners. (p. 375)

Mr Percy, the voice of prudence and reason in the novel takes a firm line in arguing with his son, Godfrey, about the merits of Miss Hauton:

'I would rather a son of mine were to marry a well-conducted farmer's daughter of *honest parentage*, than the daughter of an ill-conducted lady of rank or fashion. The farmer's daughter might be trained into a gentlewoman, and might make my son at least a faithful wife, which is more than he could expect, . . . from the young lady, who had early seen the example of what was bad, . . .'  
(Patronage, I, iv, 75)

Mr Percy counters Godfrey's charge of injustice to the individual by suggesting, in line with the tenets of Professional Education, that in all cases, 'children suffer discredit more or less for the faults of their parents of whatever kind'. Moreover Mr Percy feels that it is 'highly advantageous, that *character*, in general, should descend to posterity as well as riches or honours, . . .'  
(I, iv, 76-77). Mrs Percy is allowed to mitigate the harshness of her husband's argument by suggesting that the education received

by Miss Hauton be the basis on which 'a prudent man [should] form his opinion, [rather than the] mere accident of birth' (I, 78). However, it is significant that Mr Percy proves to be right about Miss Hauton. Godfrey, whom education has made prudent, comes to agree with his father, when during his first, post-ball meeting with Miss Hauton he learns that she sings songs,

which although sanctioned by fashion, were not such as a young lady of taste would prefer, or such as a man of delicacy would like to hear from his sister or his wife.  
(I, v, 84)

His doubts about the suitability of Miss Hauton as a wife are confirmed when he learns that she has waltzed regularly with Captain Bellamy, a man of libertine character (ibid., p. 91). As with Grace Nugent in The Absentee, and Mr Vincent in Belinda, what is at issue here, as Dales admits, is not the passing on of irredeemable genetic defects but the effects of an unsatisfactory upbringing, in this case the one Miss Hauton is bound to have had considering her background. Nevertheless Miss Hauton is still uncharitably to be consigned to a deserved rejection because she was the offspring of sinners.

It is however the narrative distortions which Virginia's presence creates in Belinda which are most questionable. The author has already been reckless in her use of arbitrary elements to remove Mr Vincent from the scene. In the case of Virginia, the author is driven to a wildly improbable series of circumstances which she incorporates into her expressed parodic intentions. Just as Belinda is to be accepted because she is less unconvincing than the heroines from whom she differs so markedly in her

attitude to sensibility, so the wildly improbable is to be read as a metafictional judgement on the kind of novel which Edgeworth is willing to use as a vehicle for ideas but not willing to take seriously.

The narrative reins are handed over to Lady Delacour who gives the following list of those contingent elements necessary for the timely appearance of Captain Sunderland:

'My inquiries after him [Captain Sunderland] were indefatigable, but for some time unsuccessful: and so they might have continued, ... if it had not been for Mr Vincent's great dog Juba - miss Annabella Luttridge's billet-doux - sir Philip Baddely's insolence - my lord Delacour's belief in a quack balsam - and captain Sunderland's humanity'. (II, xxxi, 339-40)

This final breakdown into total parody is unlike the other parodic elements in Belinda, for here, the author has no choice but to end the novel in this manner. Since the generic moral consequentialism which demands a happy resolution has not been abandoned, Edgeworth has to draw together a series of incongruous narrative strands. The reader is aware that the resolution here could not have been achieved by other means; such an ending throws doubts on the claim made throughout the work that it is closer to life than those sentimental novels it parodies. It is this confusion of intentions which no doubt prompted Richard Whately to write:

Miss Edgeworth, indeed, draws characters and details conversations, such as they occur in real life, with a spirit and fidelity not to be surpassed; but her stories are most romantically improbable, ... almost all the important events of them being brought about by most providential coincidences; and this, as we have already remarked, is not merely faulty, inasmuch as it evinces a want of skill in the writer, and gives an air of clumsiness to the fiction, but it is a very considerable



drawback on its practical utility: the personages either of fiction or history being then only profitable examples, when their good or ill conduct meets its appropriate reward, not from a sort of independent machinery of accidents, but as a necessary or probable result, according to the ordinary course of affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Jane Austen is generally more persuasive in dealing with the corrigibility of her characters (see chapter 6 below); yet even she at times provokes the same type of speculation on the arbitrariness of deeming some characters corrigible and some not; this too is sometimes the result of allowing it to be understood that early childhood environment has been entirely responsible for how a character has come to be as he or she is.

#### UPBRINGING IN HELEN: THE EXEMPLARY NOVEL VERSUS THE NATURALISTIC

In her later novel, Helen, Edgeworth is able to link character and upbringing in a more subtle way than in Belinda or Patronage: Lady Davenant and Cecilia for example, carry the educational polemic more interestingly than do Mr Percival and Mr Vincent. In Helen, upbringing as a theme is not so obviously and awkwardly subservient to the interests of the plot.

The effect is different, not merely because there is less

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1. 'Jane Austen', Quarterly Review, XXIV, (January 1821), 352-76, rpt. in Jane Austen The Critical Heritage, ed. B. C. Southam, (London, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 87-105, p. 93.

emphasis on the idea that the adult personality is set firm in childhood, but also that the main moral lessons are shown to be double-edged. Mr Vincent in Belinda illustrates an assumed given fact about how childhood habits endure into adult life, and there is little or no attempt to develop his character beyond this. In Helen, by contrast, the effects of upbringing on Cecilia are shown to be contradictory and complex. Although she is a morally ambiguous character, she is nevertheless allowed, in her interactions with the other protagonists, to highlight the weaknesses of their more dogmatic, but ultimately, in terms of the novel's value-scheme, more correct positions. The reader may echo the heroine's reflections near the end of the novel:

Characters which she thought she perfectly understood, had each appeared, in these new circumstances, different from what she had expected. From Cecilia she had scarcely hoped, even at the last moment, for such perfect truth in her confession. From Lady Davenant not so much indulgence, not all that tenderness for her daughter. From the General, less violence of expression, more feeling for Cecilia; ...<sup>1</sup>

Some of the subtler influences of upbringing are treated obliquely in the novel: there is little or no attempt, either by the narrator or by a mentor-character, to explain and elucidate the implications of events. This obliqueness can be seen in the narrative decision to have Cecilia fall in love with and marry General Clarendon. The reader comes to realise gradually that Cecilia has in effect 'married' her mother: that is, a character to whom she dare not reveal the 'truth'. Alongside this

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1. Helen, (London, New Burlington Street: Richard Bentley, 1850), III, xiv, 438

revelation the reader may also infer the motives - more readily made perhaps by the twentieth century reader who will have an apprehension, however slight, of psychoanalytic thought - which have caused Cecilia to make such a marriage. In neither case are overt authorial interpolations deemed necessary. The marriage encourages the reader to connect the past with the present and allows an objective insight into Cecilia's earlier relationship with her mother - insights which for most of the novel Lady Davenant herself is unable to make. It is by deploying techniques like this that Edgeworth gives dynamism and depth to her treatment of the potentially static theme of upbringing. The ambiguities thrown up by the mother-daughter relationship are echoed elsewhere in the narrative and take on deeper significance by being linked in this way to other themes.

Both Helen and Cecilia are told by Lady Davenant that their main problems stem from an inordinate desire to be liked; in Cecilia's case she uses the more denigrating terms, 'desire of pleasing ... [the] ruling passion ... of a little mind ...' (I, iii, 20). The fundamental difference between the two, and the virtue which saves Helen in Lady Davenant's opinion, is that Helen, unlike her own daughter, has the 'strength of mind' to tell the truth. We learn that Helen has been Lady Davenant's favourite since she and Cecilia were children. Lady Davenant believes truth, in the sense of telling the truth, to be the foundation of all that is good and virtuous, and, in her role as prophetic spokeswoman on the fate of her dishonest daughter, regularly warns Helen (and the reader), in passages like the following of the need for truth:

'truth I believe to be the only real lasting foundation



for friendship: in all but truth there is a principle of decay and dissolution' (I, v, 32).

However, alongside these unsubtle injunctions which punctuate the conversations between Helen and Lady Davenant, the reader gradually learns what led in the first place to Cecilia's 'early childhood ... habit of inaccuracy'. This interesting psychological insight into the mother-daughter relationship leads to a subtler treatment of the problems of upbringing than seems likely at the outset of the novel when the theme is introduced through the critical comments of the Collingwoods. Their comments warn the reader that upbringing will be a central theme in the novel, and their judgement - that Lady Davenant's constant absences during Cecilia's upbringing are the main cause of any subsequent problems - appears to adumbrate the way this theme will be explored. Lady Davenant is, they assert, culpable for pursuing her political ambitions - a questionable occupation for an English woman - instead of addressing herself to her daughter's education.

For much of the novel, Lady Davenant herself appears to recognise her own failure as a mother only in the same terms, or she slides away from the question altogether: 'all our former misunderstandings arose on Cecilia's part from cowardice of character: on mine from - no matter what - no matter which of us was most wrong' (I, 111, 21). At times Lady Davenant denies that any blame can be apportioned, saying instead, that she and Cecilia could never get to know each other since persons with 'intrinsic differences of character ... can never understand one another beyond a certain point' (I, x, 82).

It is Lady Davenant's zeal for the truth as an abstract

imperative that has blinded her to her daughter's real character and to her own part in deforming it. We learn that when Cecilia had grown-up she and Lady Davenant appeared to forge a new and better relationship. This new understanding does not however remove the major emotional block between the two. And during the narration of this happier time in Florence the reader becomes more aware of just how severely Cecilia had been judged as a child by her mother. The language used by Lady Davenant in her 'confession' to Helen will later be seen to be ironically self-belying.

*'I really never did know Cecilia till I saw her heartily in love: I had imagined her incapable of real love; I thought the desire of pleasing universally had been her ruling passion - the ruling passion of a little mind and a cold heart: but I did her wrong.'* (I, 111, 20)

Cecilia's present fear of her mother, combined with what we now come to know about the severity of Lady Davenant's tone when she spoke to Cecilia as a child, is in itself enough to call into question the rigorous postures of Lady Davenant, the General and his sister. Cecilia also appears as a more sympathetic character than her 'truth-telling' relatives on those occasions when her less rigorous attitude to truth permits her to show more socially generous and civilized manners. Her desire to see relationships around her running smoothly contrasts favourably with the booming utterances of Lady Davenant, the severity of the General and barbarous behaviour of his sister. Our ambivalent attitude to those truth-tellers continues beyond the first volume, even after Cecilia's behaviour becomes more obviously culpable.

Although for most of the book Lady Davenant seems to recognise

that Cecilia's failure is in part owing to her own neglect, she does not until the end make the all important connection between this failure and her own domineering personality. A situation is therefore created in which the reader may have a more privileged insight into the relationship than the apparently 'omniscient' Lady Davenant. Maria Edgeworth herself confirms the validity of this reading in a letter to her sister Lucy:

I must tell you that she [Mrs Moore] discovered a moral in Helen which I certainly wished to impress but which few people except herself & my ... family have ever noticed. Most people ... tell me that the moral of Helen is that wish to abide by truth - Very well - But we all knew that before - That's too common a moral- But the moral I draw from Helen is from that fine Lady Davenant's character that mothers talented mothers should take care not to make their children afraid of them so as to prevent them from telling the truth & trusting them with their faults & secrets at the time when youth most wants another's counsel & assistance. <sup>1</sup>

As Edgeworth recognises here, many people did not notice this subtler moral area. And it is certainly true that this moral insight is often obscured by the heavy-handed and more insistent didactic tone in which the more obvious moral is presented. For example, there is the constant use of Lady Davenant as a prophetic mouthpiece - an unnecessary piece of didacticism - which serves no purpose since the more banal moral does not need to be emphasised. Subtler judgements are further damaged by having Cecilia's career follow in every detail Lady Davenant's utterances. The overripe language used by virtually all the characters in praise of 'truth' not only provides unnecessary and potentially limiting sign-posts

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1. Maria Edgeworth to Lucy Edgeworth, 6th January, 1836, cited in Marilyn Butler's Literary Biography, pp. 475-76.



for the reader, but seems particularly out of place in a novel which in other respects provides a subtle study of human interrelationships. On 'truth', Esther, the General and Lady Davenant speak with a single undifferentiated voice and lose any semblance of being convincing individual characters.

The generally laudatory tone with which Lady Davenant, in spite of her failings, is treated throughout the narrative, her role as a prophetic voice, the respect she is said to inspire in all, taken in combination with the 'heroic' death-bed scene, all contribute to a sense that the author has not fully worked out her own attitude to this character; it suggests that Edgeworth was still not willing to stray too far from the narrative techniques of exemplary fiction. It appears from the letter cited above that many readers were unaware of this intended critical view of Lady Davenant and consequently took the moral of the book to be a simple injunction to tell the truth.

Yet, the worst excesses of her heavy-handed didacticism are mitigated by Edgeworth's more subtle handling of the theme of upbringing. For example, the unmistakably critical questioning of Cecilia's early education serves to raise interesting questions about the apparently traditional courtesy-book dichotomy set up by the two opposing character groupings in the novel: on the one hand Lady Davenant, the General and his sister, who value truth above all things; on the other, characters like Horace Churchill and Cecilia, who use their communication skills to charm their potential critics and to avoid confronting 'truth'. At one point in the novel we are told that Esther cannot understand Cecilia who is motivated by such a mixture of feelings. She,

... could not comprehend the possibility of such contradiction in any character: she could not imagine the existence of such variable, transitory feelings - she could not believe any human being capable of sacrificing her friend to save herself, while she still so loved her victim, could still feel such generous sympathy for her. (III, viii, 389)

This failure to understand a complex personality suggests an underlying and subtler dichotomy in the novel between those characters who belong to a two-dimensional moral world of right and wrong behaviour and those, like Cecilia, who even while erring, can still raise searching questions about others who presume to judge her. Because of the treatment given to upbringing, Cecilia remains more than an articulate villain - a self-seeking character perverting her linguistic fluency to achieve selfish aims. At this late stage in her career, Edgeworth has moved some way into the world of complex character interaction found in both Richardson and Jane Austen: a world in which exemplary conduct-book rules are seen to be questionable guides to human conduct. The rigid and inflexible attitudes to truth of both the General and his sister, Esther are found wanting.

With Esther in particular we have at first been allowed to see and judge her behaviour through what other characters say about her and the manner in which they react to her. For example, during Esther Clarendon's visit to Clarendon Park, Helen feels compelled to say, 'whoever makes truth disagreeable commits high treason against virtue' (I, vi, 49). Yet, as the novel proceeds, the narrator seems to be anxious to ensure that the reader is placing this character 'correctly'.

It fell to the lot of this gentle-hearted lady [Esther] to

communicate to Helen the dreadful intelligence' (III, x, 401).

Similarly

Many a truth would have come mended from Miss Clarendon's tongue, if it had been uttered in a softer tone, and if she had paid a little more attention to times and seasons: but she held it the sacred duty of sincerity to tell a friend her faults as soon as seen, and without circumlocution. (III, xii, 419)

Helen is allowed for a second time (see above) to make the 'right' judgement about the relative merits of Esther and Lady Cecilia:

Helen sighed, but though she might feel the want of the charm of Lady Cecilia's suavity of manner, of her agreeable, and her agreeing temper, yet she felt the safe solidity of principle in her present friend, and admired, esteemed, and loved, without fear of change, her unblenching truth. (III, xii, 422)

The need to have a story 'all wove into one' leads to other weaknesses in the novel which are reminiscent of Belinda. The unrealistic use of chance to link Beauclerc - quite purposelessly from the point of view of the novel - to both Lady Davenant and to General Clarendon's family smacks of an adherence to older techniques. The ending too reads like an attempt to retract some of the understated but unmistakable criticisms which have been made about the truth-telling characters. Finally Cecilia has to adhere to the moral expectations of her mother and the other 'truth-tellers'. There is, in view of such a closure, something dishonest about the passage in which the narrator dwells on the arbitrariness of Fortune (however quickly she resolves this into a conservative conclusion)

That Fortune is not nice in her morality, that she frequently favours those who do not adhere to the truth more than those who do, we have early had occasion to observe. (III, 350)



But this is not the world of Vilette: Edgeworth's ending, unlike Charlotte Bronte's, points a particularly trite moral announced in the sentence which follows the one just quoted:

But whether Fortune may not be in this, as in all the rest, treacherous and capricious; whether she may not by her first smiles and favours lure her victims on to their cost, to their utter undoing at last, remains to be seen. (III, v, 350)

While successful in resolving the plot according to generic expectations, this suggestion that 'Fortune' after all supports morality detracts from the subtlety with which the implications of upbringing have been dealt with for much of the narrative.

The theme of the final four chapters of this thesis is that Jane Austen was more successful in evoking moral complexities, mainly because her novels are more effectively multivoiced than those of either Burney or Edgeworth. The voice of the narrator interacts with the distinctive voices of the characters in a way that does not hinder their self-revelations as moral agents in recognizably complex human situations. At the same time, however ironical the narrator's voice and however ironically that voice is set against other distinctive voices, the total effect of each novel is to endorse certain moral themes more strongly than they could be endorsed by a didactic narrator whose voice is not counterpointed by other voices, but echoed or endorsed by characters speaking in a choric mode.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ART  
AND IDEA: JANE AUSTEN AND  
THE ADVICE BOOK TRADITION

There are occasions in Jane Austen's major novels when the author appears to be deriding advice-book maxims. For example, she suggests that the ludicrous ideas of what constitutes gentility and right thinking articulated by Mrs Elton, and the 'threadbare morality' of Mary Bennet are drawn from these sources. The association of John Fordyce's works with Mr Collins has the same effect. We may also read Mr Collins's letter advising Mr Bennet on the correct means of chastising Lydia as a parody of the letter-writing mentors of the courtesy novel. This same mocking attitude can be seen in Northanger Abbey when Austen pursues to a logical reductio ad absurdum the code of delicacy by which female and male behaviour should be governed during courtship. Here the narrator suggests that, 'if feelings of love should not even be felt, let alone admitted, before there is certainty of reciprocation, then it must be still more indelicate for a lady to dream of a man before he has dreamed of her' (p. 29).

Nevertheless, Austen also depicts without irony characters who, in some of their roles, adopt the diction and tone of the advice book. It is also clear that Jane Austen was influenced, either directly or through the novels of her contemporaries and predecessors, by the themes dealt with in advice-book literature. For example, the areas chosen for examination in chapters two and three - appropriate behaviour during courtship and the status of first love - are both potential areas of conflict in her novels.

Although in the context of all her work Jane Austen can be judged to have had strong opinions about some general moral issues - for example, the need to be just and open in dealing with one's equals, generous and charitable with those less fortunate than



oneself - it is not always possible to infer from her narratives what particular opinions she held about the issues which exercised the writers of exemplary fiction and guides to conduct. For example, at the close of Northanger Abbey the narrator refuses to be drawn into giving a definitive statement on the question of filial obligation.

In Pride and Prejudice Charlotte Lucas provides an interesting variation on the well-worn theme of the prudential marriage. It is easy to see that Elizabeth's prejudices about such marriages are being corrected towards a greater sense of awareness and greater charity. But the issue is not discussed in general terms; it is almost entirely set in the context of the marriages of sharply realised characters - Charlotte Lucas and Mr Wickham. In the same novel, Jane Bennet, who has many of the qualities of the courtesy-book heroine, is given a secondary role, and illustrates the author's ambiguous attitude towards 'pictures of perfection'; while Jane's behaviour during courtship accords with the passivity recommended by courtesy book propriety, in this novel it works against rather than for her.

Some of the techniques associated with exemplary fiction are significantly absent in Jane Austen's novels. For example, she does not use character commentators or choric voices: if Sir Thomas, during the final chapter of Mansfield Park, uses the diction of the courtesy books, we as readers can place what he says in the context of a character whom we have grown to understand: we do not expect or find him to be a mouthpiece for received opinions. The effect of Sir Thomas's sad musings on the past is very different from that given by the commentaries of

Fanny Burney's Mr Tyrold, Dr Marchmont or Rev. Villers.

Austen differs also from Maria Edgeworth in that she does not tie her characters so clearly and irrevocably to theme: there are no Mr Vincents or Mr Percivals in her novels. While some of her characters, as in courtesy-novels, may function as foils, - for example, Mr Bennet may act partly as a warning of what Elizabeth's wit could become; Mrs Elton as a parody of Emma's vanity - their impact as credible characters is always greater than their impact as foils. We know that Mrs Berlinton's or Mr Vincent's central flaws exist principally as a means of illustrating the author's particular views; in Austen's novels psychological causality is all-important: art is not sacrificed to idea.

As in courtesy novels, Austen develops symmetrical and parallel patterns of narrative and characterisation - in Pride and Prejudice this symmetry is particularly marked -; yet this technique does not lead to comparable lifeless and sterile effects, as Mary Lascelles and the later critic Jan Fergus have pointed out.

It is possible to isolate some of the narrative elements which help to create what one recent critic has called the 'unprecedented realism' which distinguishes Austen's fiction so clearly from that of her contemporaries. Austen clearly avoids the use of wholly improbable elements in her narratives. We can judge from her own mature work, from her juvenilia and her letters that Austen did not admire the improbable plots and adventures which many of her contemporary novelists used to enliven their moral tales. Of Mary Brunton's Self-Control, Austen commented:

an excellently-meant, elegantly-written work, without

anything of nature or probability in it. I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River is not the most natural, possible, everyday thing she ever does.'

Unlike, Jane Austen, Mary Brunton wished above all to write exemplary fiction and her reply to charges of improbability here and in her other novels was that these were trivial criticisms which did not affect the 'lessons' of the novel: 'were ... small censures pointed at the lessons which the tales were intended to convey, ...'<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, not only did she consider this kind of criticism irrelevant to her purposes, she did not accept the justice of this particular instance: 'The American expedition, ... the best written part of this book, is ... more conspicuously a patch than any thing else which it contains. Though I do not see the outrageous improbability with which it has been charged, ...')<sup>3</sup>

Maria Edgeworth appears, like Jane Austen, to have been driven towards a naturalistic presentation of story, yet her novels rarely achieve a sense of probability and real life comparable with Austen's. For example, in Belinda we find a masque in which disguises are used and comic dramatic scenes such as the duel between Mrs Luttridge and Lady Delacour. We find also that the central protagonists are linked to one another by improbable

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1. Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others, collected & ed. R. W. Chapman, 2nd edn, (New York, London, Toronto: OUP, 1952), p. 344, (11th Oct. 1813).

2. Discipline, introd. Fay Weldon, (London, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986 [for the Pandora Press]), p. viii.

3. 'Letter to Miss Joanna Baillie', April 19th, 1811, quoted in the 1842 edn, of Discipline (see above, p. 103).



events in the past.

A different aspect of Austen's pursuit of the probable may be seen in her treatment of the travails of her central protagonists. Struggles between personal inclination and perceived duty are not permitted to render her narratives over-dramatic, as for example is the case in Burney's Cecilia. In this novel the exemplary tranquillity and contentment ('rational contentment') which her heroine attains when she sacrifices personal inclination to duty has to be arbitrarily shattered in order to drive the plot. As Jan Fergus has noted, Burney is:

forced into the ridiculous position of continually asserting ['the true power of virtue'] ... in spite of all untoward circumstances, and then contriving circumstances yet more untoward to shatter her [Cecilia's] resolutions and contentment, and move the plot.  
(Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel, p. 72).

In Austen's novels the same conflicts between personal inclination and the ties of duty certainly exist for heroines like Fanny Price, Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot, but they are set in less stagily dramatic or untoward contexts. A remark given to Elinor Dashwood indicates that Austen was aware of the sort of overwrought drama she wished in her own novels to avoid. Elinor, supposing that Edward Ferrars' odd and inconsistent behaviour to herself is the result of his mother's influence, makes the following wry reflection:

The shortness of his visit, the steadiness of his purpose in leaving them, originated in the same fettered inclination, the same inevitable necessity of temporising with his mother. *The old, well-established grievance of duty against will, parent against child, was the cause of all. She would have been glad to know when these difficulties were to cease, this opposition was to yield, - when Mrs Ferrars*

*would be reformed, and her son be at liberty to be happy.*  
(S&S, p. 102) (my italics)

Even the chastened Emma Woodhouse, has not been 'reformed' in order to make heroic and incredible sacrifices:

for as to any of that heroism of sentiment which might have prompted her to entreat him [Mr Knightley] to transfer his affection from herself to Harriet, as infinitely the most worthy of the two - or even the more simple sublimity of resolving to refuse him at once and for ever, without vouchsafing any motive, because he could not marry them both, Emma had it not. She felt for Harriet, with pain and with contrition; but no flight of generosity run mad, opposing all that could be probable or reasonable, entered her brain. She had led her friend astray, and it would be a reproach to her for ever; but her judgment was as strong as her feelings, and as strong as it had ever been before, in reprobating any such alliance for him, as most unequal and degrading. (p. 431)

The expression of Emma's thoughts mingle seamlessly with the narrator's comments giving an impression of the narrator-author's endorsement of Emma's judgement on this occasion.

In the rest of this chapter inferrable influences from conduct-book sources will be traced, particularly in Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park and Persuasion: how, for example, the characters in these novels respond to the conduct-book tradition with regard to rules governing courtship behaviour and to the importance allowed to feelings for a first love.

### 1. Courtship Behaviour in Sense and Sensibility

Both Marianne and Elinor form 'unrequited attachments' which run parallel through much of the narrative, inviting the reader to compare the methods employed by each to deal with the situation.<sup>1</sup> Elinor, in traditional courtesy-book style, attempts to conceal and overcome her love. In this, and in her attempts to find consolation, she resembles earlier exemplary heroines such as Cecilia Beverly (Cecilia), Harriet Byron (Sir Charles Grandison) and Laura Montreville (Self-Control). On discovering Lucy is engaged to Edward, Elinor is better able to bear her disappointments, since she knows that no offence against courtship codes on her part has contributed: 'I am not conscious of having provoked the disappointment through any imprudence of my own ...' (p. 263).

When Marianne suggests that Elinor was never deeply attached to Edward: Elinor replies:

'the composure of mind with which I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the consolation that I have been willing to admit, have been the effect of constant and painful exertion: - they did not spring up of themselves'.  
(p. 264)

Marianne believes that her own sensibilities provide a more infallible and reasonable guide to conduct than do the traditionally accepted guidelines. She,

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1. Jane Nardin, Those Elegant Decorums: The Concepts of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1973), p. 27.



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

It is significant that in Northanger Abbey Catherine Morland disobeys the rules of conduct out of ignorance; Marianne Dashwood knows the rules but decides, through the strength of her feelings, that she will not abide by them.

In Sense and Sensibility, the characters of Marianne and Elinor seem to show that the qualities expected of an exemplary character in the advice-book tradition, above all prudence, cannot be reconciled with spontaneous displays of feeling. It may be that Austen was influenced by the climate of anti-sentimental opinion in the 1790's during which this novel was started. We can certainly contrast Marianne and Elinor with Fanny Price: the heroine of the later novel manifests aspects of sensibility, including occasional outbursts of spontaneous feeling, which overcome her normal timidity, yet these are shown to be part of, indeed the basis for, her qualities as an exemplary character. In Sense and Sensibility the division between those who follow the path of sensibility and those who observe the demands of decorum is more pronounced. Marianne, for example, places too great an importance on 'the delicacies of a strong sensibility', and Elinor has, in the interests of observing the demands of delicacy and decorum, moved too far away from candour and spontaneity.

Overall, Elinor's system of conduct is found to be more acceptable than that pursued by Marianne. It is in the end Marianne for whom change is deemed necessary, and whether or not

the reader believes she will prove corrigible in the long term, she does, after her illness, endorse the traditional values to which her sister has been adhering: '

'I considered the past; I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudences towards myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave.' .....  
Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing indulged'. (pp. 345-46)

Austen, in line with many of her contemporaries, shows Marianne's prejudice in favour of first love to be fallacious: for Marianne, we are told, eventually marries her second suitor on the basis of esteem and friendship. Nevertheless, Jane Austen is not a polemicist and the reader is not left unquestioningly with such a neat resolution. Marianne's sensibilities have now been channelled in a more worthy direction, but Marianne is still Marianne: it is therefore unlikely that she could settle for mere 'esteem and friendship': we are told that she, 'would never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby' (p. 379).

Implicit in this novel is a suggestion that the guidance offered by the conventional wisdom of conduct books over matters like

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1. John F. Burrows in Computation into Criticism however makes the point, in the light of statistical research into the idiolects of Jane Austen's characters, that in Marianne Dashwood we have a character who is less 'fixed', less consistently recognisable through repeated linguistic patterns, than other heroines: he suggests plausibly that a lack of critical consensus about her character is due to the fact that we can linguistically identify five Mariannes. (p. 147)

courtship is necessary because personal judgements are so often fallible.' Yet, Elinor is not so infallible a representative of the virtues of prudence as Belinda; she, like Marianne, though not as seriously, is shown to be capable of misjudgements in this area. For example, she is wrong in assuming that all that was 'astonishing' in Edward's behaviour' (p. 101) towards herself is solely the result of the intractable demands of his mother. Austen also shows Elinor to be in her own way as culpable in her dismissal of fiction as a force in life, as Marianne is guilty of embracing such an idea. And while, on discovering that Edward is bound to someone else, Elinor considers with justice that he has failed to observe the rules of courtship behaviour, she has nevertheless been shown to be wrong in her assessment of the mother's role: 'He had been blameable, highly blameable, in remaining at Norland after he first felt her influence over him to be more than it ought to be' (p. 140). It is however important to recognise that Elinor works within a system which makes no claims to be infallible:

'I have frequently detected myself in ... mistakes ... in a total misapprehension of character in some point or other: fancying people so much more gay and grave, or ingenious or stupid than they really are, and I can hardly tell why, or in what the deception originated'. (p. 93)

Overall, like her predecessor Richardson, Austen does not seem to find these codes satisfactory for all times and situations.

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1. Jane Nardin suggests that errors of judgement will 'inevitably' be made and not just by the Mariannes of this world. (Those Elegant Decorums, p. 132)



Yet within the format of a novel which is attacking the cult of sensibility her potential for making any sustained criticism of the restraining rules is restricted. As Jane Nardin puts it:

The code of propriety which Sense and Sensibility as a whole suggests is morally valid is a rule oriented code, a code which places conventional ideas concerning duty to society and to self before the dictates of personal judgment and desire. Perhaps in a novel that is attacking the cult of sensibility, though not sensibility itself, this must be so, just as such a novel must, by its nature, emphasize the destructive powers of feeling above the constructive ones. (p. 45)

The possibility that the conventional rules of propriety may repress good and constructive feelings is only very briefly considered in the novel. (ibid., p. 43)

In other novels Jane Austen is able to imagine a world in which feeling and duty to self and society generally coincide, but in Sense and Sensibility they typically oppose each other. (ibid., p. 44)

But even within this restrictive framework Austen still points, usually by implication, to some of the shortcomings in Elinor's mode of conduct.

In Sense and Sensibility the avoidance of a straight-forward dialectical opposition between the two sisters allows for the development of more complex characters. Austen waits till the final pages to introduce the technique of overt paralleling of character and situation when she compares the marriages and family life of Elinor and Marianne with those of Edward Ferrars, Lucy Steele and John Dashwoods's family. This general avoidance of character-patterning may be seen as a part of Austen's tendency to have character-driven narratives: narratives in which the development of characters is given priority over characters as carriers of theme. At times, for instance, Elinor's elevation of

proprieties above all other considerations is shown to be excessive, displaying an almost Kantian severity, and causing her to distort reality almost as much as her sister does. This can be seen in the interpretation which Elinor insists on putting on Edward Ferrar's behaviour when he decides, in spite of his mother's opposition, to continue his engagement to Lucy Steele. Edward's decision is founded on his belief that Lucy is a 'well disposed, good hearted girl, thoroughly attached to himself', and it is, at least in part, this consideration for her feelings which determines his honourable action. At the end of the novel, this is restated more emphatically when Edward says, nothing but this 'persuasion' of Lucy's partiality 'could have prevented his putting an end to [the] engagement' (p. 367). Elinor, on the other hand has long been aware of Lucy's true character and knows she will make a very unsuitable wife, but she discounts these considerations in order to glory in the 'integrity' shown by Edward in abiding by an abstract rule of honour (p. 270). In this overriding concern for obedience to the rules of courtship, even at the expense of filial obedience, Elinor Dashwood shows herself to be less thoughtful than Eleanor and Henry Tilney in Northanger Abbey, who are more willing to recognise and face up to the necessary moral conflicts when two sets of rules clash.

Elinor claims that Marianne expects 'from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own' (p. 202). Yet Elinor too displays at times a failure to comprehend the motivation of those who do not operate within the limits of her own rationally orientated intelligence. Colonel Brandon, who shows every sign of being a rational character, is nevertheless still able to

empathise with a very differently motivated character like Marianne.

Elinor's imaginative failure culminates in her inability to believe Marianne can be seriously ill: self-induced sickness of this sort being categorised by the elder sister as belonging to romantic fiction rather than real life. At the level of day-to-day social interactions, Marianne is occasionally shown to be more correct in her assessments than her sister. Every meeting between the Middletons, Mrs Jennings and the Dashwoods, supports Marianne's assertion that Elinor is wrong to believe that the exercise of discretion will stop characters like Mrs Jennings from making 'impertinent remarks' (p. 68). Even the respectable Colonel Brandon is subject to her egregious curiosity. (In the long term however it has to be acknowledged that Elinor proves to have been more just in suspending judgement about Mrs Jennings than Marianne who condemns this character so readily).

The most compelling evidence of ambivalence in Austen's attitude to the differing systems of conduct pursued by Elinor and Marianne may however be seen in the most unusual and untraditional license given Marianne to transgress the rules of courtship behaviour. Marianne provides the one instance in Austen's works where refractoriness in this context is not to be read as 'a priori evidence' (Nardin, p. 89) of a wider moral character flaw. This, even more than the implied criticism of Elinor's lack of flexibility and sensitivity in her adherence to traditional rules of conduct, indicates that Jane Austen was not concerned to illustrate the conduct-book tradition; even though that tradition



influences and explains much of the behaviour of the characters in Sense and Sensibility.

#### ii. Pride and Prejudice

In Pride and Prejudice, advice-book concerns with the basis on which a marriage choice should be made are developed, not just through the main story involving Elizabeth and Darcy, but, in a manner more sophisticated and problematic than in any of Burney or Edgeworth's novels, through the stories of Charlotte Lucas and Jane Bennet.

Elizabeth's initial opinion, expressed to her sister Jane, of Charlotte's marriage to Mr Collins, 'You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness' (pp. 135-36), is the type of judgement we might have expected to hear, and find exemplified, in the works of Burney or Edgeworth. Charlotte's cold-blooded, pragmatic attitude to the institution of marriage would have led to some kind of disaster which would confirm the condemnation of the narrator and the choric voices. In Pride and Prejudice however, it becomes clear that, not only is Elizabeth's view of the matter not an endorsement of a previously expressed view of the narrator, it is a view which she herself is forced to re-evaluate in the course of the narrative.

There is very little use of narrator interpolation to guide the reader's opinion on this matter even when, by the juxtaposition of the actions of Charlotte with those of Wickham, Elizabeth's views

are shown to be inconsistent. At the outset of what becomes an inter-character discourse, in which Mrs Gardiner also plays a part, the narrator merely says that Elizabeth is being 'less clear-sighted perhaps in this case [Wickham's 'wish for independence'] than in Charlotte's, ...' (pp. 149-50).

While the narrative certainly does not condone the attitudes of either Wickham or Charlotte, more attention is given to the latter's actual fate as the wife of Mr Collins than to her 'improper' views about the feelings which should attend a marriage. Whatever Charlotte may have said about happiness in marriage being a matter of chance, it is clear that once established at Hunsford she leaves very little to chance. It seems indeed, from our own and Elizabeth's first view of Hunsford, that, while Charlotte may not actually feel gratitude or esteem for Mr Collins, she behaves in all essentials as if she did: the life she establishes fulfils all the required obligations of a wife. In this sense Charlotte uses her intelligence constructively and in a manner which is not condemned by the narrative.

Just after Elizabeth's arrival, we begin to see some of the strategies employed by Charlotte to deal with her husband: 'when Mr Collins said anything of which she might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, ... in general Charlotte wisely did not hear'. The narrator, like the reader, confronted with these realities appears unable to reach any conclusions. There is no attempt to mitigate the awfulness of the choice: Mr Collins does not alter and Lady Catherine de Bourgh remains an unspeakable patroness. On the other hand, neither was there any attempt to

mitigate the dismal prospect for Charlotte of becoming an ageing spinster, or to sentimentalize her character. At the end of Elizabeth's visit the narrator is equally inconclusive about Charlotte's fate, as can be seen in this extract where the narrator's voice takes over from Elizabeth's parting thoughts:

Poor Charlotte! - it was melancholy to leave her to such society! - But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns *had not yet lost their charms.*  
(my italics) (p. 216)

Pride and Prejudice is unlike its literary predecessors in allowing this degree of uncertainty to exist: Charlotte is not simply a foil to those characters, like Elizabeth and Jane, who marry for the 'right reasons'; nor is she a vehicle for illustrating conduct-book certainties about the basis on which young women ought to consent to marry. Instead we are presented, through a fairly neutral narrative voice, with a psychologically consistent character study - a study which prompts us to ponder individual motives operating in a particular set of circumstances.

Charlotte convinces because the author has, despite the fact that this is a relatively minor character, taken pains to ensure a level of psychological continuity. Her selfish prudence is established before Mr Collins comes to Meryton, and can be seen to exist after her marriage has taken place: indeed, it is presented as a fundamental part of Charlotte's make-up, rather than as a one-off strategy for gaining a husband. Elizabeth notices that,

Very few days passed in which Mr Collins did not walk to



Rosings, and not many in which his wife did not think it necessary to go likewise; and till Elizabeth recollected that there might be other family livings to be disposed of, she could not understand the sacrifice of so many hours' (pp. 168-69).

This consistent pragmatism is picked up more tellingly by the narrator when we are told of Charlotte's 'schemes' for Elizabeth once she recognises that her friend is admired by both Fitzwilliam and Darcy:

In her kind schemes for Elizabeth, she sometimes planned her marrying Colonel Fitzwilliam. He was beyond comparison the pleasantest man; ... but, to counter-balance these advantages, Mr Darcy had considerable patronage in the church, and his cousin could have none at all. (p. 181)

We learn too that Charlotte is not able to believe that Elizabeth's dislike for Darcy would not vanish once she realised she had influence over him. Charlotte is shown to be wrong about her friend; the heroine in the event proves herself to be just sufficiently disinterested.

Clearly Charlotte's cold-blooded views on marriage are implicitly criticised by the ideal marriages of the more morally worthy Jane and Elizabeth. Yet, while Charlotte's fate can hardly be presented to the reader as ideal, she is nowhere overtly condemned for her decision to marry without esteem or gratitude. We are shown that the prescriptions of the courtesy book are simply not relevant to characters in Charlotte's situation. There is no attempt to mitigate the harshness of Charlotte's pre-marital situation, as becomes clear from the narrator's introductory remarks and from the description of the relief which all the members of the Lucas family greet the news of her engagement. Nor

are we allowed to forget the pressures in which Charlotte's situation place her. For example, when Lady Catherine interrogates Elizabeth about her own and her sisters' education, the reader is invited to speculate on the sibling resentment which would be likely to occur in a family in which the younger daughters were not allowed 'out' before their eldest sister has married. The reader may recall that this was the case in the Lucas household. The narrative leaves us to guess what a character with Charlotte's intelligent awareness - she is the friend of Elizabeth and has been seen to be highly observant of what is happening around her - would think of this situation. Further elements in the narrative make it difficult to pass facile judgement on Charlotte. As the visit to Hunsford and our introduction to the domestic life of Lady Catherine reminds us, there is not one family in this novel in which some of the characters are not embarrassingly vulgar. In such a world, Charlotte's choice of an egregious fool as a husband becomes less noteworthy. The more sustained glimpse we have of Sir William during his stay at Hunsford suggests he would have provided an appropriate training for the future bride of Mr Collins.

Although in the main plot Jane Austen allows us a glimpse of the perils of a contingent world by suggesting that Elizabeth might well not have married Darcy, the reader is still aware that in the world of domestic comedy an author is under pressure to ensure a happy resolution for her heroine. Charlotte perhaps permits the reader a more sombre and prosaic view of a reality in which fates will not be altered by the intervention of benign contingent factors.

The treatment given to Charlotte is only one aspect of this novel to show an interesting relationship to the prescriptions of the courtesy book. For example, the effect of Mary Bennet's and Mr Collins's moral pronouncements also suggest strongly that the rules of the conduct books are inadequate as guides in a less than perfect world. The most telling example of the inappropriateness of Mary's 'threadbare morality' occurs when Elizabeth returns to Longbourn after hearing of Lydia's elopement:

'This is a most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must *pour into the wounded bosoms of each other the balm of sisterly consolation*' ... 'Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable - that one false step involves her in endless ruin - that her *reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful* - and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex.' (my italics) (p. 289)

Elizabeth is understandably 'amazed' by these irrelevant and banal observations uttered in the very type of language used by Gregory, Fordyce and others. They are moreover a series of observations which bear little resemblance to the events in this novel. The dialogue established between Pride and Prejudice and the conduct-book tradition is however more complex than this character satire suggests. Jane Bennet as much as Charlotte Lucas can be seen as a comment on this tradition: in her case also, what happens does not accord with the traditional dictates of the conduct book.

Jane's behaviour during courtship is the reverse of Charlotte's, yet for much of the novel her conduct-book reserve works against her. Jane behaves as a courtesy-book heroine should in not allowing her feelings for Bingley to show until he has made his



intentions clear to her. Unfortunately Jane has also we learn, 'a constant complacency in her air and manner not often united with great sensibility' (p. 208). Elizabeth, who wonders herself whether Bingley had simply not been aware of Jane's liking for him, cannot deny the justice of Darcy's assumption that Jane showed no symptoms 'of peculiar regard' for Bingley (p. 197). It is the cynical Charlotte Lucas who proves to have been the first to draw Elizabeth's and the reader's attention to the possible negative repercussions which Jane's impassivity may cause. In this Jane Bennet shows a marked similarity to Edgeworth's Caroline Percy, 'it might seem to a common observer as if she was, and ever would be a stranger to the passion [love]' (p. 294), but in this, Caroline Percy's case, the author has no doubts about the status of her exemplary heroine.

Not only is Jane for all her virtue not the heroine of this novel, we find that in contrast to, say Burney, the machinations which keep the lovers apart are dealt with tersely and even ironically; as indeed are all those episodes in which Jane's situation echoes those of the courtesy novel. Jane's preferring to see Bingley's apparent rejection as the consequence of her own mistaken judgement rather than accepting Elizabeth's explanation - which 'makes everybody acting unnaturally and wrong' - certainly reads on one level like an ironic comment on the courtesy-book heroine.

The mental discomfort suffered by Jane during this period of uncertainty and loss of hope is not anatomised in detail by Austen as it had been by Burney in the case of Cecilia: feelings are dealt with succinctly though with some sympathy:

Jane was not happy. She still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Having never even fancied herself in love before, her regard had all the warmth of first attachments, and from her age and disposition, greater steadiness than first attachments often boast; and so fervently did she value the remembrance ... that all her good sense, and all her attention to the feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets which must have been injurious to her own health and tranquillity. (p. 227)

Even this tepid defence of the power of first loves is unusual in Austen's work, and the opposite position is found in an equally unusual context in this novel - in Elizabeth's changed feelings for Darcy:

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in her defence, except that she had given some trial to the latter method in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill success might perhaps authorize her to seek a less interesting mode of attachment.  
(p. 279)

Jane is shown to be governed by all the mores which should guide the literary heroine of the courtesy novel. Elizabeth, like her sister, is in many essentials also shown to be virtuous. Both sisters have a strong sense of duty to their family; though in Jane's case this reaches a hardly credible level of christian forbearance and charity. Each proves, compared with Charlotte Lucas, to be reasonably disinterested in their marriage choices. However, judged by the more trivial tests to which courtesy-book heroines were often put, Jane succeeds where her sister fails. For example, Jane will not probe or try to find out the secret which Lydia begins by mistake to relate to her sisters; by

contrast Elizabeth writes immediately to her aunt Gardiner to find out the truth. Perhaps Jane Austen is deliberately echoing an episode in Sir Charles Grandison in which secrecy of this type is seen as sacrosanct.'

It would be a mistake to see Jane's presence in the novel merely as a satiric nod in the direction of the courtesy-book tradition and all those didactic novels in which we encounter a perfect heroine on the first page. An examination of Jane's responses to the various events which occur in the novel show her to be 'right' more often than her sister. We notice too that while Elizabeth laughs at the 'universal good will' (p. 135) of her sister, it is nevertheless part of her education to learn the value of Jane's 'liberal minded' candour.

On hearing Elizabeth's account of Darcy's behaviour to Wickham as narrated by the latter, Jane's essential response is shown by the events of the novel to be more correct than her sister's:

'They have both ... been deceived. ... It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side'. . . . .

'Laugh as much as you chuse, but you will not laugh me out of my opinion. My dearest Lizzy, do but consider what a disgraceful light it places Mr Darcy, to be treating his father's favourite in such a manner, - ... Can his most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? ...' (p. 85)

Jane appears to have 'won' this argument when Elizabeth falls back on the weak and obviously fallible position that there is 'truth'

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1. For example see Sir Charles Grandison, III, 3-4 in which Charlotte Grandison tries to persuade Harriet Byron to look at a letter from her brother to Dr Bartlett. Also in Persuasion, Anne and Mrs Smith look at Mr Elliot's letter. p. 204.



in Mr Wickham's 'looks' (p. 86).

The line taken by Jane when Charlotte marries is again more constructive than that taken by Elizabeth:

'You do not make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper. Consider Mr Collins's respectability, and Charlotte's prudent, steady character. Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for everybody's sake, that she may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin.' (p. 135)

At the same time, Jane warns Elizabeth not to cultivate a cynical attitude to her fellow men which will ruin her happiness: the same advice is shortly after given by Mrs Gardiner. Jane's 'universal good will' (p. 135) may perhaps be a strategy for avoiding these cynical feelings. And we are reminded, when Elizabeth realises that her own feelings for Miss King are the same as those expressed by her sister Lydia, of the dangers of not cultivating a benevolent habit of mind. In fact Elizabeth's recent thoughts about Miss de Bourgh also remind the reader of her younger sister's assessment of Miss King. In this novel part of Elizabeth's education lies in learning to put an even higher value on Jane's generosity of sentiment. Thus she reflects on reading Darcy's letter, 'How despicably have I acted! ... I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust' (p. 208).

By dealing in a conduct-book theme - the basis on which a marriage choice should be made - but transcending the simplistic arguments and illustrated lessons which often accompanied such themes, Jane Austen reveals her own ideas without resorting to

overt didacticism. In her world-picture candour and magnanimity are virtues in the light of which the prescribed behaviour of the advice books is seen to be insubstantial.

### iii. Mansfield Park

No attempt has been made prior to this paper ... to see Mansfield Park in the context of courtesy book literature as a whole ... with its bald didacticism and sober tone, Mansfield Park has always been the ugly duckling of the Austen canon ... By examining it in its own historical context, and particularly in the context of the courtesy books and novels of the day, we can reach a new understanding of Mansfield Park and answer some of the problems it poses for the modern reader. ('The Courtesy-Book Heroine of Mansfield Park', p. 32).

Marian E. Fowler's thesis centres on Jane Austen's presentation of Fanny Price who, she says, is not 'merely a courtesy book girl according to eighteenth century prescriptions, but ... also exemplifies the evangelical concepts current at the time of her creation' (p. 33). To support the second half of this claim Fowler quotes extensively from the evangelical writers Hannah More and Thomas Gisborne and draws some general conclusions. For example, she sees Austen's contrast of the morally sound but unaccomplished heroine with the morally precarious but accomplished Julia and Maria Bertram as a reflection of the educational ideas of both More and Gisborne. The evangelicals emphasize the need for moral education and imply that this need is not met by a mere training in accomplishments. Fowler believes that Fanny's 'modesty', 'delicacy', 'reticence' and eschewing of any pretensions to be witty match this central prescription.

These points are valid as far as they go. However, the debate

on education and feminine virtue in the late eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth century, as we have seen in chapter one, involved areas of agreement between a broad range of political and religious thinkers. It is notable that Ruth Bernard Yeazall, can plausibly suggest that on the question of what constituted 'genuine female modesty' Mansfield Park has more affinities with Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication than with the traditional courtesy books or writings of the evangelicals.'

Fowler justly quotes both Gisborne and More decrying the evils of amateur acting; the former suggests for example that the 'unrestrained familiarity' it allows for the sexes to mix will 'destroy female diffidence' (p. 41). What is not said is that in 1814, both Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth published novels in which the central protagonists either refuse or show reluctance to take part in private theatrical performances. Since neither Burney nor Edgeworth is considered to be significantly influenced by evangelical thought, we may assume that a critical view of amateur dramatics was by this date not confined to evangelical thinkers.

Dales believes that Mansfield Park shows, as do the last three novels, a 'stiffening of posture' on the part of Austen. (The Conduct Book from Richardson to Austen p. 390). It is claimed that in this novel she takes the same attitude to vice as her contemporary Mary Brunton. Dales bases her view to a great extent

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1. Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel, pp. 155-164.



on the treatment given to the fallen Maria Bertram, which she contrasts with the much laxer punishment meted out to Lydia Bennet. In the earlier novel, Mr Bennet is persuaded to allow Lydia to re-enter his house and it is only the ludicrous and inconsistent Mr Collins who appears to believe that Lydia, as an incarnation of original sin, should not be shown mercy. But in Mansfield Park the removal of Maria's contaminating influence is not merely a nice reversal of the opening pages of the novel, in which Sir Thomas made it clear that should Fanny Price have a bad disposition she should not be allowed to live at Mansfield Park, it shows, Dales considers, Austen's new conservatism on sin and penitence:

As a daughter - he [Sir Thomas] hoped a penitent one - she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every encouragement to do right, which their relative situations admitted; but farther than *that*, he would not go. Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, be affording his sanction to vice, or in seeking to lessen its disgrace, be anywise accessory to introducing such misery in another man's family, as he had known himself.  
(MP, p. 465: Dales, p. 90)

While this certainly suggests that a ruined character is indeed incorrigible (particularly one who, unlike Lydia Bennet, is unable to repair her folly by marriage), and while it implies that Maria must now look towards her eternal salvation, this statement has none of the stridency or dogmatic certainty of Hannah More, Mary Brunton, or indeed Maria Edgeworth. It has much more to do with the chastising of Sir Thomas than the endorsement of religious doctrines or social codes. What is more, it must be read against the narrator's subsequent challenging comment about Sir Thomas's

measures in the light of contemporary attitudes to men and women. In considering Henry Crawford, the narrator makes the following comment:

That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, ... (p. 468)

Contrast these views on the sin of adultery with the following extract from Mary Brunton's Discipline, which is typical in its concern with eternal rather than temporal consequences for sinners:

If kindness cannot touch, nor exhortation move, nor warning alarm, nor chastisement reclaim, what other means can be employed with a mortal being: What remains but the fearful sentence, 'He is joined to his idols; let him alone.' Oh, Ellen, my blood freezes at the thought that such a sentence may ever go forth against you. Rouse you, dear child ..., - rouse you from your ill-boding security. Tremble, lest you already approach that state where mercy itself assumes the form of punishment.' (Discipline, pp. 187-88)

The rest of Brunton's novel is tied firmly to the illustration of this theological theme - that mercy itself may assume the form of punishment. This is a far cry from 'let other pens dwell on guilt and misery'.

It is worth noting here that among the many critics who have looked for the influence of evangelical thought in Mansfield Park - for example, that there is a strong flavour of the ideas found in works like Hannah More's Strictures - there is no agreement in the conclusions. As David Monaghan points out:

In recent years, Avron Fleishman, Robert Colby, Marian Fowler,

Marilyn Butler, Peter Garside and Elizabeth McDonald have subjected the hypothesis [that Mansfield Park shows the influence of Evangelical thought] to thorough analysis, but [they] have not been able to reach a consensus opinion.'

We might consider Marian Fowler's more general claim that Fanny Price is a courtesy-book heroine 'par excellence' with her contention that this contributes greatly to the 'bald didacticism' she finds in Mansfield Park. At first sight, Fowler's assertion may seem reasonable. Fanny does exhibit the typical virtues of the courtesy-book heroine and these excellences are recognised by Henry Crawford, Sir Thomas Bertram and Edmund Bertram. The latter two may for much of the novel be read as more morally developed than the majority of the protagonists so that their judgements may therefore carry some weight with the reader. Both hold similar views on what constitutes good female conduct - views which appear to draw on the conduct book tradition. Here for instance, Sir Thomas censures the behaviour of many young women, seeing the:

'... wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, ... [as] offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence.' (p. 318).

Edmund has similarly condemned modern female behaviour earlier in the novel when he replied to Mary Crawford's questions about Fanny's being 'out'. Neither character knows the full reasons for Fanny's refusal to consider Henry Crawford's offer of marriage, so that each comes to regard her initial response to a potential

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1. 'Mansfield Park and Evangelicalism: A Reassessment', NCE, 215-230, (216).



suitors as laudably modest and retiring. For example, Sir Thomas says,

'I know he [Henry Crawford] spoke to you yesterday, and (as far as I understand), received as much encouragement to proceed as a well-judging young woman could permit herself to give. I was very much pleased with what I collected to have been your behaviour on the occasion; it shewed a discretion highly to be commended.' (p. 315)

Edmund, who like his father, wants this marriage to take place, also sees merit in Fanny's continued reticence:

'So far your conduct has been faultless, and they were quite mistaken who wished you to do otherwise. But the matter does not end here. ... *You have proved yourself upright and disinterested*, prove yourself grateful and tender hearted; and then you will be the perfect model of a woman, which I have always believed you born for.' (p. 347) (my italics)

While the heroine's responses here may be seen as a realisation of the traditional codes governing courtship behaviour, the reader, knowing the part played by Fanny's attachment to Edmund in her continued refusal, will find it an inadequate explanation of her behaviour that she was following courtesy-book rules. One might however detect the influence of courtship codes in Fanny's refusal to marry a reformed rake and in her determination to conceal her unrequited love from Edmund: 'Her secret was still her own; and while that was the case, she thought she could resign herself to almost every thing' (p. 365). Fanny's priorities here would no doubt have pleased Sir Walter Scott, who found Harriet Byron's failure to keep her love for Sir Charles Grandison secret unacceptable in a heroine (see above, p. 41). We also learn later in the novel that, had Edmund married Mary Crawford, Fanny's

conscience would, very correctly, have been called into play in subduing her passion for Edmund.

While Fanny's presentation may endorse some aspects of the traditional courtesy-book heroine, the prescriptions laid down for the ideal female are not affirmed in the narrative. For example, the narrator does not simply approve the heroine's 'timidity' and 'physical delicacy' as good in themselves. An ambivalent attitude is apparent when Fanny is compared with her less timid brother and sister. William Price can cope better during his reunion with Fanny after seven years apart: not only is he 'much less incumbered by the refinement of self-distrust' but his 'stronger spirits and bolder temper' make it as 'natural for him to express his love as to feel it' (p. 234). The view that Fanny's physical delicacy and timidity may be regarded as a constitutional misfortune rather than indicative of deeper moral qualities is expressed again when Susan Price comes to settle at Mansfield Park: for her 'more fearless disposition and happier nerves made every thing easy there' (p. 472): and the narrative illustrates many times that Fanny's lot is made more difficult because of her enduring timid fear of Sir Thomas.

It is clearly not physical delicacy or timidity which the narrator is approving when she praises Fanny as 'truly feminine' (p. 169). Indeed this quality, like Fanny's 'natural delicacy', is closely aligned to Fanny's capacity to feel. The delicacy of her responses to others is often highlighted and originates in her capacity to sympathise with their feelings. In Sense and Sensibility by contrast, Elinor's sensibility was not foregrounded. It may be that by the time the later novel was

begun the alarms of the 1790's about the dangers of over-emphasising sensibility had diminished so that, unlike Elinor Dashwood and indeed her sister, Fanny Price's highly developed sensibility and unsophisticated candour are allowed to be entirely compatible with a capacity to exercise good judgement and understanding. Indeed the kind of behaviour which has led some critics to see her as an excessively correct courtesy-book heroine can be more justly attributed to this positive kind of sensibility. Fanny's delicate feelings for others always prevents her being as selfish as most of the other characters are at various points in the novel. She is seen pitying and helping Mr Rushworth to learn his 'two and forty speeches'; she sympathises with the slighted Julia. Her behaviour towards her indifferent parents is similarly marked: 'Delicacy to her parents made her careful not to betray such a preference of her uncle's house ...' (pp. 431 & 369). Her main concern in disobeying Sir Thomas by refusing to consider Henry Crawford as a suitor is that she will appear ungrateful. Neither here nor in her assessment of her parents at Portsmouth is she merely following some abstract notion of filial duty: she feels the need to behave both compassionately and justly.

For those characters who come to a real knowledge of Fanny, it is her acute feelings that make her interesting and sympathetic. For example, Edmund finds the ten year old Fanny 'an interesting object' because he is convinced of her 'having an affectionate heart... and [he perceive[s]] her ... great sensibility of her situation' (pp. 16-17). Henry Crawford later finds that Fanny, 'interested him more than he had foreseen': 'He...was no longer in



doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling. It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite ... her young, unsophisticated mind!' (pp. 235-36).

Fanny is in no danger of becoming a mere embodiment of a literary convention: while the narrator endorses her positive sensibility, her more gauche manifestations of this quality are mocked. The most notable examples of ironical comment occur when Fanny eulogises the night sky; when she describes the beauties of the shrubbery to the indifferent Mary Crawford (p. 209); and during her 'heavenly flight of mind' occasioned by Edmund's gift of a gold chain (p. 262). Although these episodes have a place in illustrating the young Fanny's isolation, nevertheless, even in this context, the narrator is unable to resist a satirical glance at what are in danger of being overblown forms of sensibility.

It seems that only by strained comparisons, and only subject to a great many important provisos and exceptions, can we align Mansfield Park with either courtesy novels, the courtesy-book tradition, or with contemporary evangelical polemics. It is more fruitful to consider how Jane Austen uses the concepts behind these polemics for her own artistic purposes. So that, for example, Fanny Price's timidity, reticence, habits of ready submission, physical delicacy become essential for developing her role as, first, a relatively static focal point around which others play out their moral dramas - notably at Sotherton and during the theatrical episode - and, later, as a more active exponent of moral sensitivity, as in her assessment of Mary Crawford. There are differing critical views about how successful Jane Austen was in developing this role for Fanny Price, but the

terms in which these views are expressed confirm that we are concerned with a novel which is more usefully seen not as a vehicle for ideas<sup>1</sup>, but as an embodiment of a pattern of life - an exploration of moral sensitivity.

#### iv. Persuasion

In Persuasion the question of what exactly Jane Austen felt about issues raised in advice books and courtesy novels becomes even more difficult to pin down than in the other novels. As the critic Mary Poovey has noted, in Persuasion, 'the centralising narrative authority taken for granted in earlier novels has almost completely disappeared ...' (p. 224). Citing Norman Page,<sup>2</sup> she indicates how the narrative techniques developed by Austen have allowed her to achieve this: '[Persuasion employs a] style in which narrative, comment, dialogue (presented in various ways) and interior monologue very frequently and unobtrusively merge into one another'. This section will concentrate on Austen's treatment of the significance of first loves; for that is a 'courtesy-novel' issue which becomes in this work particularly problematic, the more so if it is considered alongside an exploration of filial obligation manifest in the relationship between Anne and Lady Russell.

Advice-book themes can readily be discerned in this novel; Anne

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1. For example, see Marilyn Butler, The War of Ideas, pp. 246-49.
  2. The Language of Jane Austen, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 49, in The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, p. 224.

Elliot for example resembles in some ways the traditional courtesy-book heroine. Yet, the resemblance of Persuasion to exemplary fiction does not provide firm ground for understanding the novel. For example, Anne's ability to make more accurate judgements of character than Lady Russell highlights only the most obvious anomaly in the mentor or surrogate parent relationship, and causes us to question the utility of rules governing filial obedience in this 'exceptional case' (Nardin, p. 129). We have to consider also the contradictory and complex views which Anne holds when she reflects on her past, particularly when we consider the contingencies necessary for the happy resolution - the probability that it could have been otherwise - the advice given by Lady Russell (which conformed to conduct-book rules on unreliable courtships) being 'good or bad only as the event decides'.

It is easier to assess Wentworth's character in terms of a failure to be governed consistently by the rules of courtship behaviour than it is to relate Anne's responses, or the consequences of her responses, to either these demands or the rules governing filial obligation. Wentworth seriously misjudges the situation in allowing himself such license with the Miss Musgroves. From one who out of anger at the past has decided that life should be governed by firm and immutable resolutions this latitude is particularly dangerous. From Anne's perspective, during the first section of the novel, his ill-judged behaviour and the equally, though predictable, rash behaviour of the Musgrove family puts at risk both his honour and their happiness. As far as Anne 'dares' judge from memory and experience, Captain Wentworth was not in love with either of the (Miss Musgroves).



They were more in love with him, this she qualifies to 'a little fever of admiration' but reflects that, 'it might, probably must, end in love with some'. Charles Hayter seemed aware of being slighted, and yet Henrietta had sometimes the air of being divided between them.

Anne longed for the power of representing to them all what they were about, and of pointing out some of the evils they were exposing themselves to. She did not attribute guile to any. It was the highest satisfaction to her, to believe Captain Wentworth not in the least aware of the pain he was occasioning. There was ... no pitiful triumph in his manner. He had, probably never heard, and never thought of any claims of Charles Hayter. He was only wrong in accepting the attentions - (for accepting must be the word) of two young women at once. (p. 82)

... she deemed it of more consequence that he should know his own mind, early enough not to endanger the happiness of either sister, or impeaching his own honour, ... Either of them [the Miss Musgroves] would, in all probability, make him an affectionate, good-humoured wife. (p. 77)

The matter is soon settled when Louisa is judged by Wentworth to have the more resolute character of the two sisters, and Henrietta is once more reconciled to Charles Hayter (pp. 89-90). Anne's previous sources of anxiety are now allayed. However the lack of thought which Anne had noticed leads to a potentially disastrous marriage; for, according to the laws of honour by which Wentworth certainly feels himself bound, his intimacy with Louisa marks him out as hers if she wishes. Only through a series of improbable chances is he extricated from this situation. Mrs Croft, we are told, has noticed that Wentworth's courtship of Louisa has gone on for a suspiciously long time, which suggests, in a character of renowned decisiveness, that even before the events at Lyme Regis Wentworth is not, in this instance, certain of his own mind. Like

the characters in Sense and Sensibility, Wentworth, given the errors into which his own anger might lead him, should have bound himself firmly by the major codes governing courtship. As he reflects, and only by outstanding chance is he in a position to do so at the close of the novel, his 'preceding attempts to attach himself to Louisa' were the attempts of 'angry pride'. He finds, to his horror that he 'was considered ... an attached man: neither Harville nor his wife entertained a doubt of our mutual attachment' (p. 243). He continues,

'I was hers [Louisa's] in honour if she wished it. I had been unguarded. I had not thought seriously on this subject before. I had not considered that my excessive intimacy must have its danger of ill consequence in many ways; and that I had no right to be trying whether I could attach myself to either of the girls, at the risk of raising even an unpleasant report, were there no other ill effects. I had been grossly wrong, and must abide the consequences.' (p. 243)

Admiral Croft had also considered Wentworth an engaged man, and like his wife is aware of the length of time the engagement has continued. On meeting Anne in Bath, he says of Louisa and Frederick, 'we all thought [she] ... was to marry Frederick. He was courting her week after week' (p. 171). As Jane Nardin puts it:

In Sense and Sensibility an important part of Jane Austen's attack on the cult of sensibility rests upon her argument that individuals need the rules of propriety as protection against the worst social consequences of their inevitable errors in judgment. (Nardin, p. 132)

Of Anne however she suggests:

Only in Persuasion does Austen give open consideration to ... the possibility that the fallible individual may sometimes be wiser than the major laws of decorum. (ibid., p. 132)

Jane Nardin's quoted view could be reformulated in terms of Anne's being presented as better able to judge than her mentor, Lady Russell, and therefore as not to be tied by rules of filial obedience. Nardin's assertion that this is peculiar to Persuasion does not take sufficient account of the fact that Fanny Price is also seen to be a better judge of right conduct than her guardian Sir Thomas Bertram. But in Mansfield Park the judgement being asked of Fanny by the reader is less difficult and ambiguous than is the case here.

Anne's behaviour and character are recognised by Lady Russell, Mr Elliot and finally by Captain Wentworth as showing exemplary excellence; to all intents and purposes she is depicted as being an exemplary courtesy-book heroine. Mr Elliot 'thinks her the most extraordinary young woman; in her temper, manners, mind, a model of female excellence' (p. 159). Wentworth too comments on the 'excellence' of her mind with 'which Louisa's could so ill bear comparison' (p. 243). Anne is shown to be compassionate, restrained, obedient, has elegant manners, and her important decisions are invariably motivated by considerations of duty. In the tradition of the courtesy-book heroine she submits, despite the personal cost, 'Anne had never submitted more reluctantly to the jealous and ill-judging claims of Mary; but so it must be' (p. 115). During a concert in Bath, Anne, comparing herself with Miss Larolles, hopes that Wentworth will sit in the empty seat next to her. Mr Elliot, on the pretext of her helping him to understand the Italian songs occupies the place. 'Anne could not refuse; but never had she sacrificed to politeness with a more suffering spirit' (p. 190). Anne who would prefer to stay in Uppercross



rather than go to Bath, nevertheless considers that to go with the others 'would be most right, and most wise, and, therefore, must involve least suffering' (p. 33).

Anne also shows loyalty to her father who she must know is by any standards an unworthy human being. For example, during her stay in Bath, she has made an engagement to see Mrs Smith, an old school friend. Sir Walter makes some slighting comments about her choice of visiting the 'nobody' Mrs Smith rather than going to Lady Dalrymple. Mrs Clay, who had been present while all this passed, now thought it advisable to leave the room, and 'Anne could have said much and did long to say a little, in defence of her friend's not very dissimilar claims to theirs, but her sense of personal respect to her father prevented her' (p. 158).

Another aspect of Anne's behaviour which also aligns her with courtesy-book heroines such as Harriet Byron is her unwillingness to use her wit and intelligence to retaliate. Her sense of what is due to her father is again made clear by her reaction when Mrs Smith reads Mr Elliot's letter:

Such a letter could not be read without putting Anne in a glow; and Mrs Smith, observing the high colour in her face, said, 'The language, I know, is highly disrespectful.' ... Anne could not immediately get over the shock and mortification of finding such words applied to her father. She was obliged to recollect that her seeing the letter was a violation of the laws of honour, ...  
(p. 204)

Her father plays a smaller role than Lady Russell in the breaking of her initial attachment to Captain Wentworth. Over this major decision Anne is willing to oppose, albeit passively, for he does not give an outright negative to Wentworth's proposal,

the values her father endorses: 'Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill-will, ...' (p. 27).

The two imperatives which appear to have governed Anne's decision to give Wentworth up are those of duty and the 'advice' given by Lady Russell in her role as a loving surrogate mother. The two factors are invoked throughout the course of the novel. Lady Russell thinks it a very unfortunate alliance and believes 'It must not be, if by any fair interference of friendship, any representations from one who had almost a mother's love, and mother's rights, it would be prevented' (p. 27). At the close of the novel, Anne tells Wentworth that it was her duty to 'submit' to Lady Russell who was 'in the place of a parent' (p. 246). But it is not just duty to filial obligations Anne felt in giving up her suitor; she was persuaded that she was obeying the dictates of duty for the sake of Wentworth himself:

But it was not a merely selfish caution, under which she acted, ... Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up. - The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for *his* advantage, was her chief consolation, ... (pp. 27-28)

And again Anne says of the past, 'When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; ...' (p. 244). At times the narrative seems to see Lady Russell's actions as justifiable, suggesting that it was her duty to advise Anne to make this decision. For example, both Anne and Wentworth overhear the discussion which takes place between Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft on the evils of extended and uncertain engagements and each registers its applicability to their own past

situation. While we may not be swayed by the opinions of Mrs Musgrove, we are likely to give more credence to those of the admirable Mrs Croft. Not only is she a naval character, she is also one who is shown to be more perceptive about human relationships than her benign husband the Admiral. The narrator has also ensured, in the course of this discussion between the two women, that the reader understands that Mrs Croft is 'attending with great good humour to all Mrs Musgrove is saying', and that when she is able to make contributions they are 'very sensible' (p. 230). The discussion, which like so many in this novel seems at first to be working against Anne, suddenly turns when Mrs Musgrove observes that,

'... there is nothing I so abominate for young people as a long engagement!'

'Yes, Dear ma'am', said Mrs Croft, 'or an uncertain engagement; an engagement which may be long. To begin without knowing that at such a time there will be the means of marrying, I hold to be very unsafe and unwise, and what, I think, all parents should prevent as far as they can.'  
(p. 231)

The influence Lady Russell has over Anne even eight years later should not be underestimated, highlighting as it does Anne's sense of filial loyalty. Many incidents in the novel attest to this. Speaking of Lyme Regis Anne finds she cannot utter Wentworth's name - which neither woman has referred to since the engagement was broken off - and 'look straight into Lady Russell's eye' until she adopts the expedient of saying she believed him probably attached to Louisa Musgrove (p. 124). Anne is faced with a similar dilemma when she is obliged to tell Lady Russell that Louisa Musgrove was to marry Captain Wentworth: 'It cost her



something to encounter Lady Russell's surprise' (p. 178). This acts as a preface to an episode the following morning during which the reader feels Anne's agitation as she persuades herself that Lady Russell must notice Wentworth as he walks along Pulteney-street (pp. 178-79). However, when Anne feels duty to be on her side, she is able to brave even Lady Russell's disapproval. When both her mentor and Elizabeth 'overlook' Wentworth at a concert we are told that Anne's 'nerves' are 'strengthened' and she now feels that she 'owed him attention' (p. 180). Anne is now prepared 'whatever she might feel on Lady Russell's account, [not] to shrink from conversation with Captain Wentworth, if he gave her the opportunity' (p. 180).

Anne's loyalty to Lady Russell does her credit; the question of whether Lady Russell deserves such loyalty is more difficult for the reader. We have already noted aspects of the narrative which appear to endorse Lady Russell's 'persuasion', yet there is equal, possibly greater, evidence to suggest that such advice was wrong, and particularly wrong coming from one who is not as naturally perceptive as Anne herself. It is the narrator who raises some of these doubts. For example we are told that Anne at 'seven and twenty thought very differently from what she had been made to feel at nineteen' (p. 29). As has been stated, we are told on two occasions that Anne is more perceptive in her judgements than her mentor; a point which is confirmed by their differing opinions of Mr Elliot. Although Anne had doubts about Mr Elliot's past and his lack of spontaneity even before her decisive talk with Mrs Smith, she notes that she might have been yet again 'persuaded' by Lady Russell into a disastrous marriage (p. 160). Lady Russell,

whose influence over Anne, as suggested above, remains strong, would presumably in this instance have claimed she was following her duty in offering this advice. It is a subject which is spoken of once more - and the number of times it is alluded to suggests that the author wants the reader to think about the possible ramifications - by Wentworth at the close of the novel when he confesses to his fear that Lady Russell would have persuaded Anne to marry Mr Elliot. Anne replies with the incautious certainty of hindsight - which may leave some readers with a slight sense of dissatisfaction - :

'You should have distinguished, ... You should not have suspected me now; the case so different, ... If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here. In marrying a man indifferent to me, all risk would have been incurred, and all duty violated.' (p. 244)

The issue of Anne's superior judgement is raised in an earlier part of this same conversation with Wentworth, when she suggests that although she was correct in submitting to Lady Russell's advice, the advice itself was wrong:

'Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. ... I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice.'  
(p. 246).

We do not hear in this the certainties of courtesy-book novels or advice manuals. Lady Russell has, in light of the events eight years later, to admit that she had been wrong, but this is the knowledge of hindsight. There is an alternative scenario too, which chance and situation have worked against, as the narrator

points out early in the novel - that Anne could have found, and been happy with, someone else.

v. First Loves and Marriage

In the novels of Austen which touch upon this theme the narrator invariably takes a disparaging view of the supposed power and enduring nature of first loves. In Sense and Sensibility, Marianne's prejudice in favour of marriage to a first love is seen as a risible manifestation of the cult of sensibility:

Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another! - (p. 378)

In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Bennet is allowed to feel a more serious first love for Bingley, though it is presented as an exception to the norm which exists by virtue of Jane's age and serious disposition. In Persuasion, this theme creates some difficulties because the narrator's opinion on first loves diverges from, and is never reconciled with, that of her central protagonist.

At first sight the story of Anne and Captain Wentworth does seem to exemplify the power of first love to prevail in the end, against the odds. But throughout Persuasion the narrator maintains the sceptical attitude shown in her earlier works. Near the beginning of this novel the narrator comments on the ill luck Anne had experienced in not finding someone to replace Captain



Wentworth:

No second attachment, the only thoroughly natural, happy, and sufficient cure, at [Anne's] time of life, had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste, *in the small limits of the society around them.* (p. 28) (my italics)

Later, Anne musing on her 'eternal constancy' to Wentworth provides a rare instance of the narrator treating her central protagonist with some irony. The narrator maintains her original scepticism about constancy and first loves and uses the undermining, 'she believed' to throw doubt on the validity of Anne's conclusions.

How she might have felt, had there been no Captain Wentworth in the case, was not worth enquiry; for there was a Captain Wentworth: and be the conclusion of the present suspense good or bad, her affection would be his for ever. Their union, *she believed*, could not divide her more from other men, than their final separation. Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camden-place to Westgate-buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way. (p. 192)

When Anne, during her time in Bath, becomes involved in a conversation with Captain Harville, the debate about constancy is given a more general footing. Anne claims that women are more constant than men in their first attachments by virtue of 'their nature', and, because their lack of alternative occupations provides them with no other distractions for their thoughts and energies. The contributions of both participants is marked here by non-sequiturs which are in Anne's case surprising, but, given that it is a highly charged emotional scene, appropriate. Harville is equally staunch in his claim for the greater constancy

of men, and the question is put to one side as irresolvable in this context.

We might be tempted to support Anne's view here, because it chimes with something said earlier by the narrator about Anne's particular situation. On page 29, the narrator makes the same point - though it is given in an argument which does not favour the idea that first loves are enduring - about the lack of career opportunities leaving women more the victims of their feelings than men. Yet neither the views of Anne nor those of the narrator can account for either Benwick's 'inconstancy', or, more important, for Wentworth's constancy. It seems that Wentworth's active career has not helped him to overcome his first love; nor does his attempt to form a second attachment to Louisa Musgrove provide a cure. The conversation between Harville and Anne is drawn to a close when Anne says, 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone' (p. 235). We may recall that in Mansfield Park, when Fanny Price doubts that Mary Crawford will prove corrigible even should she marry Edmund, the narrator contradicts her by making a similar generalised statement to the effect that such a pessimistic view runs counter to the nature of most women. Here however the statement is made by Anne and it puts her even more radically at odds with the views of the narrator on the question of constancy and first love.

It is interesting that a recent Dostoyevskyan critic, John Jones, detects what he calls a 'slippage principle' in Dostoyevsky's The Possessed. By this he means that the

reliability of the narrator is undermined:

It is not easy to say what the narrating 'I' is doing. ... Again and again he seems to be in and yet dubiously of the party. In fact the chronicle succeeds in having its cake and eating it, all the way back to the stir caused by Nicholas Stavrogin's arrival in 'our town', when it is recorded that ... 'he seemed to know a lot' - 'But of course it didn't take much knowledge to astonish us.' Isolated that looks like straightforward double focus: the first person narrator inside the chronicle box, unaware of his provincial limitations; and Dostoyevsky outside it. One's overall sense of The Possessed absolutely refuses to confirm any such duality, and one can pay the novel no simpler or fuller tribute than by saying so.'

Far from seeing the 'slippage principle' as a fault, Jones notes that where we might expect it to 'enervate ... in truth [it] exhilarates' (ibid., p. 276).

Clearly Jane Austen is not, as Dostoyevsky was, trying to depict the vertiginous instability of contemporary society through a matching indeterminacy of style and construction of her novels. Nevertheless, the clash of opinions between the narrator and the heroines in Persuasion and in Mansfield Park has the effect of setting a context in which the reader knows that neither the narrator nor the characters are to be read as mouthpieces for the author, or as endorsements of a code of behaviour as inflexible as that conveyed in conduct books. The world of Jane Austen has a place for doubt, uncertainty and contingency. This is partly what I mean by the psychological realism of her novels.

If the world of Jane Austen has a place for doubt, uncertainty and contingency, it is very puzzling that a contemporary critic

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1. Dostoyevsky, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 276.



should try to exemplify what she may justifiably consider to be the tyranny of the male critical dominance of English literature, by asserting that Mary Brunton's exemplary fiction deserves to be ranked, as novel writing, alongside Jane Austen's work: that Discipline, for example, is comparable, as a novel, with Emma and that only the purblindness of a male critical establishment and 'social conditioning' could have failed to notice this.

#### vi. Emma and Exemplary Fiction

Dale Spender, the author of Mothers of the Novel: One Hundred Good Women Writers before Jane Austen admires Mary Brunton's writing as 'close to Jane Austen's in time, style and achievement'; she expresses her surprise that the writing 'should have moved so far from view, and left Jane Austen to stand alone'. She is convinced, 'that there are no limits to which the tradition makers will go to present a literary heritage which is predominantly male'. She ranks Mary Brunton's Discipline alongside Austen's Emma.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time Dale Spender admits to finding Brunton's, 'use of overt christian dogma as an explanation of moral development ... a real problem': she was however able to read and enjoy the novels by avoiding the 'pious prose' and skipping those pages on which the 'doctrinaire pronouncements' occurred. It is difficult for me to understand how this was done, since Brunton's novels are

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1. Mothers of the Novel, One Hundred Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen, (London, New York: Pandora Press, 1986), pp. 335-36.

driven by her 'christian dogma' and by her 'doctrinaire pronouncements', as Jane Austen's are driven by her characterization. Indeed Brunton attacks her contemporary novelists on precisely these grounds, 'the few moral lessons which our English fictions profess to teach are of the humblest class. Even Miss Edgeworth's genius has stooped to inculcate mere worldly wisdom'.<sup>1</sup> In her 1814 Preface to Discipline she continues the same theme:

A picture of human life, then, which excludes this great agent, ['the progress of religious principle'] is like a system of anatomy in which the heart is forgotten. The inferior parts may be described with a truth which is acknowledged by every observer; with a skill which delights while it instructs; but the description, however accurate is incomplete. It cannot convey a full idea of man as he appears in a country where Christianity is known. (p. 60)

The novels of Mary Brunton's are close in time to Jane Austen's but not in style and not in achievement. The pairing which Dale Spender makes of Emma and Discipline can be used to illustrate more, and more important, divergences than similarities.

In Discipline Brunton uses a first person narrator viewing her past from the point of view of a reformed character. This allows for the whole story - every stage of the heroine Ellen's development, - to be seen from the perspective of Brunton's strongly held version of christian doctrine. The opening pages make it clear that the author believed that 'moral development' can only be explained in overtly christian terms: there is no

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1. Letter to her Brother, October 27th 1815, Extracts from Brunton's correspondence, p. 65, (op. cit., p. 103, above).

other moral development which counts for her. She, like Hannah More, is interested in education (upbringing) only in so far as it fits the soul for eternity. The very different narrative technique used by Jane Austen, whereby, as Wayne Booth has pointed out, the reader travels with Emma during her trials and during the process of her growing self-awareness, has quite different, and much greater advantages - advantages which Brunton regarded as irrelevant (see above, p. 144).<sup>1</sup> At the very least Jane Austen's method avoids the gross improbability of the heroine's remembering verbatim detailed conversations from the past. Much more positively it encourages the reader into extensions of human sympathy and awareness which Brunton might well regard as too wordly and inimical to her particular conditions for saving the immortal soul. For it is clear from Discipline that we are not meant to understand vanity, as we come to understand Emma's; we are to recognise and shun it:

Let not the forgiving smile which belongs to the innocent weakness of nature be lavished on a vice which leads to such cold, such heartless selfishness. Let it rather be remembered that avarice, oppression, cruelty, all the iron vices which harden the heart of man, are not more rigidly selfish, more wantonly regardless of another's feelings, than unrestrained, *active vanity*. (p. 193)

In Discipline a black and white contrast, almost allegorical in its formal patterning, is made between the good or repentant and the impious unsaved, particularly in the scenes of dissipation in London to which Ellen's sin of pride drives her. The presentation

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1. The Rhetoric of Fiction, 2nd edn. (The Univ. of Chicago, 1961, 1983), p. 245.



of good and bad is necessarily tendentious, and the trivial empty London life is depicted as being unworthy of serious attention - as being, in the prophetic words of the 'saintly' Miss Mortimer:

'[a place] where nothing good or holy must tread; and if you [to Ellen] follow her [Lady St Edmund] to the tempter's own ground, you must bid farewell to better spirits. The wise and virtuous will one by one forsake you, until you have no guide but such as lead to evil, and no companions but such as take advantage of your errors, or share in your ruin'. (pp. 143-44)

It is irrelevant to Brunton's purposes that we should hear the denizens of this London life as credible human beings. The most powerful representative, Lady St Edmund, is said to be witty, fluent and, in Ellen's lapsed state, irresistible. But we never hear her, as we hear Mary Crawford in Mansfield Park or Frank Churchill in Emma (or Mrs Arlbery in Camilla and Lady Delacour in Belinda).

As far as it is possible in a novel based on the well-worn theme of the reformed coquette, Brunton manages to keep secular love in the background in Discipline. The goal which Ellen has to achieve, that for which she surmounts her trials and proves her worth, is not primarily marriage: Ellen has to prove she is a 'tried and true' christian, one who has struggled to overcome pride her 'ruling passion', (p. 210) not merely in order that her mentor lover, Maitland, will find her acceptable, but so that her 'besetting sin' does not colour 'the face of eternity' (p. 381). The reader is assured on numerous occasions that while the heroine comes to recognise the true christian merits of Maitland, she is not in love with him: (for example, Ellen says, 'Don't appeal to my knowledge, Juliet, for I never was attached and never shall

be.' p. 402, see also, pp. 332 and 434). Thus the similarity of Knightley to Maitland is superficial, in that it resides solely in their both being older and at first morally sounder than their eventual spouses. But with Emma there is no clash between genre and theme: we move with her to the gradual realisation that her image of herself as a lifelong, respectable and influential spinster is a wasteful denial of her true nature and of her capacity for love, in a wordly sense.

As Fanny Burney does in Cecilia, Brunton commits herself to a narrative which sees her heroine confronting and drawing lessons from 'untoward circumstances, and then facing circumstances yet more untoward'. Dale Spender sees merit in some of these untoward circumstances and praises the 'guts' which enabled Brunton, unlike Austen, to confront socially fearsome scenes such as Ellen's extreme poverty and her incarceration in a lunatic asylum. But Ellen's situation is exploited primarily for the exemplary purpose of testing her faith in providence. It is less an opportunity to expose, for example, the barbarous treatment of insanity than for Ellen to discover that she has not yet rooted out pride from her temper. Far more space is devoted to Ellen's pious meditations (they could hardly be skipped however selective the reader tries to be) than to Brunton's admittedly perceptive comments on sanity and madness. It seems excessive to call her insights 'Langian', (Spender, p. 336) but they are certainly in advance of many of her contemporaries in recognising that the line between sanity and insanity is unclear.

Yet these incidental excursions into social realism cannot do anything to make the narrative of Discipline more exciting or

gripping, even in the simple sense of 'what happened next?' Brunton is concerned above all, not merely to emphasise the overwhelming power of the 'mercy' of providence: 'that state where mercy itself assumes the form of punishment' (p. 113) but to gloss the theological concept of 'mercy' in a particular way. This 'mercy' is not in any sense a mitigation or lightening of the burden of misery for the sinner; it is 'mercy' which allows you to suffer as a result of the vices generated by original sin and thus to be able to eradicate the vices in this world as a preparation for salvation in the next. There is an unacknowledged egocentricity involved which precludes the kind of gradual awareness of her own selfishness which Emma painfully if less melodramatically achieves. Ellen makes it clear, about a third of the way into the novel, that the normal expectations of the genre - that simple repentance will suffice after a measure of suffering - will not meet her particular need to ensure salvation:

Little did I at that moment imagine, that I myself was destined to furnish proof, that the loss of all worldly comfort cannot of itself procure this solace; that the ruin of all our earthly prospects cannot of itself elevate the hope long used to grovel among earthly things. (p. 202)

And this is reinforced, a few pages later with, 'I have lived to be deserted by all mankind, - ...' (p. 220). Redemption is Brunton's subject: to show how Ellen comes to recognise the requirements for salvation takes precedence over the need to generate suspense (we know, because we are continually told, the sort of thing that is going to happen); surprise can be generated only by melodramatic details, such as the incarceration in a lunatic asylum. Ellen's quest for salvation also takes precedence



over the suffering of others. Emma is condemned for using other human beings, Harriet Smith and Miss Bates, as puppets in her own domestic theatre and we accompany her on the painful voyage of discovery which leads her to awareness of her fault. Ellen is allowed to contemplate, not only her own, but the suffering of others as justifiable in order that she can achieve her own salvation. She rejoices at rediscovering her earlier treacherous associate, Miss Arnold:

O Author of peace and pardon! enable me joyfully to toil,  
and to suffer for her, that I may at last trace, in this dark  
soul, a dawning of thine own brightness! (p. 411)

A little later she enunciates even more clearly her plans to  
'manipulate' Miss Arnold:

'If ever you see me fail in kindness, if ever I seem to  
prefer my own comfort or advantage to yours, then - then  
remind me that you once did me wrong, that you may rouse me  
by the strongest motives to love and benefit you, ...'  
(pp. 413-14)

These overtly religious messages are not incidental to the novel - they cannot be skipped without changing, and diminishing, the nature of Brunton's achievement. Brunton, in the context of her beliefs, cannot risk understatement or irony: Emma's potential for a good life, in human terms, is adumbrated by her relationship with her fussy, valitudinarian father; only minimal narrator comment is required; more would not be helpful. Ellen's crucial final testing by the peevishness of her sick school friend, Miss Arnold, is not realised as convincingly and could not demonstrate its significance without lengthy authorial comment. As Marilyn Butler said, Jane Austen 'naturalised a didactic tradition'; she

also places her novels firmly in the realm of humane values. Because of this, we recognise her world with a sharpness of vision which is not granted us in Brunton's novels. Thus the trivial affair of Frank Churchill's haircut reveals more of human vanity than do Ellen Percy's reminiscences of and religious commentary on her years of dissipation.

Through Austen's more subtle characterization and credible narrative methods we recognise the world in which we live - a world which may sometimes appear to be providentially ordered but which at other times is subject to random or inexplicable chance. Frank Churchill is a child of fortune, a lucky lad, despite his faults; there could be no place for his good luck in Brunton's rehearsals for eternity. In her providentially ordered world there is room for melodrama leading up to the final expected and heralded dénouement; there is no place for suspense, excitement or open-endedness. To say that Discipline is 'strikingly similar' (Spender, p. 335) to Emma is unjust to both writers.

I shared with Dale Spender a sense of déjà vu when I read Discipline, but that is because I had recently been reading Hannah More's Strictures. At times Discipline reads like a series of scenes illustrating Hannah More's religious polemic, particularly the elevation of vanity to the most serious category of vice:

Vanity ... is not confined in its operation to ...  
any single organ, but is diffused through the whole  
being, alive in every part, awakened and communicated  
by the slightest touch! ...

.....  
Vanity is not to be resisted like any other vice,  
which is sometimes busy, sometimes quiet; it is not  
to be attacked as a single fault, which is indulged  
in opposition to a single virtue; but it is uniformly  
to be controlled as an active, a restless,

a growing principle, at constant war with all the christian graces; ... (Strictures, p. 49) (my italics)

We do of course also associate Emma with this vice but Austen allows us to discover its importance; Brunton needs to be explicit in terms that echo Hannah More.

The term 'exemplary fiction' seems to imply that fiction is being used to illustrate, emphasise, bring home, but not to explore or elucidate, firmly held beliefs - beliefs such as the following:

A worldly temper, by which I mean a disposition to prefer worldly pleasures, worldly satisfactions, and worldly advantages, to the immortal interests of the soul; ... [it is] the living principle of evil. It is not so much an act, as a state of being; not so much an occasional complaint, as a tainted constitution of mind. ... infusing a kind of moral disability to whatever is intrinsically right. (Strictures, pp. 305-306)

No doubt Jane Austen and Mary Brunton would have come near one another in responding to Hannah More's belief - near, for example, in comparison with the probable response of their contemporary Lord Byron - but their methods of incorporating these sentiments in their fiction are far apart: Ellen Percy belongs to exemplary fiction; the Crawfords do not.



CHAPTER FIVE

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ART  
AND IDEA:  
JANE AUSTEN AND THE  
QUESTION OF UPBRINGING

## 1. JANE AUSTEN AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

Before taking up the question of upbringing in Jane Austen's narratives it is appropriate to consider briefly whether in this and other important matters to do with moral responsibility, she was, as is sometimes claimed, directly influenced by contemporary moral philosophers. There have been claims of varying strengths and plausibility that Jane Austen had read and been influenced by philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly Lord Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl, 1671 - 1713) and Bishop Butler (Joseph Butler, 1695 - 1752).

Gilbert Ryle, for example, does not try to prove from direct evidence that Jane Austen had read Shaftesbury; he is however convinced that she is a Shaftesburian from the evidence of her 'Aristotelianism'. She had 'sniffed some air with Aristotelian oxygen in it' and it was Shaftesbury who had 'opened the window' through which a few people in the eighteenth century had inhaled that air. Ryle proposes that in the eighteenth century moralists tended to belong to one of two camps: one, 'with conscious crudity', he calls the Calvinist, the other the Aristotelian camp. In the first, moral judgements are black or white - 'a man is an unhappy combination of white angelic part and a black satanic part' (p. 284) -; in the second, the Aristotelian, moral or ethical judgements take into account that people differ from one another in degree and not just in kind. By such a crude

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1. 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', rept. in The Oxford Review, No. 1, (Oxford: OUP, 1966), 276-91, p. 276.

distinction it is easy to put Jane Austen in the Aristotelian camp: it would be difficult not to include any novelist of repute. Even Oliver Goldsmith and Fanny Burney, who are labelled by Ryle as Calvinist because, 'their bad characters are pure stage villains' (p. 284), have written novels which are read with pleasure because many of their characters, like Jane Austen's are, 'alive all over, all through and all round, displaying admirably or amusingly or deplorably proportional mixtures of all the colours there are save pure white and pure black' (p. 285). Moreover, if one sets aside Ryle's proposition that Shaftesbury acted as a conduit for a kind of Aristotelian pluralism, if one looks more specifically at certain important aspects of Shaftesbury's own philosophy, it is difficult to see Jane Austen as a Shaftesburian.

The fact, noted by Ryle, that her ethical vocabulary is strongly laced with aesthetic terms - 'moral tastes', 'beauty of mind', 'the beauty of truth and sincerity', 'delicacy of principle' - may show that, somewhat like Shaftesbury, she believed that rightness of conduct was connected with rightness of context, but there are significant differences. For Shaftesbury the context is cosmic - universal concord and harmony; for Jane Austen it is more specifically the concord and harmony of the family.' Family estates such as Pemberley and Mansfield Park were potentially able to provide an ideal

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1. Alisdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, (London: Duckworth, 1981), claims that it is in Austen's 'uniting of Christian and Aristotelian themes in a determinate social context [the Homeric link in MacIntyre's thesis] that 'make her the last great effective imaginative voice of the tradition of thought about and practice of the virtues ... her heroines seek the good through seeking their own good in marriage' pp. 223-24.



standard of harmony. A reading of the novels of Richardson or Fanny Burney also shows that this use of an 'ethical vocabulary laced with aesthetic terms' was not unique to Jane Austen. While there is some evidence that Jane Austen sympathised with Shaftesbury's concept of 'a refined earthly fulfilment' as the basis for the reward of virtue, there is at least as much 'evidence' that, for her, the driving force of virtue was willed obedience to an externally imposed moral law. Certainly, there is little evidence in her novels of any support for a natural temper which is conveniently able to reconcile duty with pleasure or self interest. As for example she shows in her implied condemnation of John Dashwood:

'I felt it my duty to buy it. I could not have answered it to my conscience to let it fall into any other hands. A man must pay for his conveniences; and it has cost me a vast deal of money.' (S&S, p. 225)

The 'innate taste' and 'natural delicacy' of Susan and Fanny Price are instruments for making choices of conduct which may have to be painful. In all her novels, despite her use of aesthetic terms in describing virtue, there is an equal emphasis on virtue as duty, often painful duty. In this sense Jane Austen could as well be called a Kantian as a Shaftesburian. It is not known whether she had read Kant, but it is likely that she would have responded with one part of her nature to the severe, puritanical code which saw duty always and necessarily as 'painful duty'. For duty in this simplified version of Kant is unconditional, in the sense of not being provisional on some other good; it is essentially nothing to do with pleasure, happiness or any other object of desire. It is true that Fanny Price and Anne Elliot - whose respective senses of duty encompass an appreciation of

what is 'right' in an absolute sense - do eventually come to a deserved happiness, but throughout much of Mansfield Park and Persuasion they are seen to be influenced by this 'joyless creed' which expects no pleasant consequence of virtue and even suspects the desire for reward.

Every emendation of Anne's had been on the side of honesty against importance. She wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity. (P, p. 12)

It is borne in painfully upon both Anne Elliot and Fanny Price that this sense of duty or recitude is generated, as Kant affirms, only by 'direct apprehension of the moral law'. It cannot be the result of utilitarian calculation; otherwise it is indicative of the failure of a character to apprehend this 'principle of right'. For example, when Edmund Bertram tries to gain Fanny Price's approval for his participation in the private theatricals, his argument rests on just such utilitarian calculations. He challenges Fanny:

'Can you mention any other measure by which I have a chance of doing equal good?'

[Fanny replies]: 'No, I cannot think of any thing else.'

Unable however to gain Fanny's approbation, he continues:

'If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself - and yet-' (p. 155)

Two pages later, Tom and Maria Bertram are delighted by Edmund's decision:

... he was to act, and he was driven to it by the force of selfish inclinations only. Edmund had descended from the moral elevation which he had maintained before, ....

Fanny's own feelings corroborate this view:

Her heart and her judgement were equally against Edmund's decision; she could not acquit his unsteadiness, ...  
(pp. 158-159)

The reader is never able to infer with certainty whether this direct apprehension of the moral law can be developed or is in some sense innate. When we consider Sir Walter Elliot and Maria Bertram, to say nothing of the more ludicrous characters such as Mrs Norris or Mrs John Dashwood, we have to feel that this direct apprehension cannot be taught. Yet, even if a sense of duty which apprehends what is right is in some sense naturally given, it does not rule out the possibility that a lesser, not so infallible sense of duty can be learned. For Lydia Bennet's and Mary Crawford's lapses are said to be due to bad upbringing, while Kitty Bennet, who is not claimed to have Susan Price's 'innate taste', is considered corrigible if put in the right environment.

We might speculate, however, whether Kitty would learn only outward forms of decorum and become like Julia Bertram:

The politeness which she had been brought up to practise as a duty, made it impossible for her to escape; while the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it. (p. 91)

It is possible to detect a certain Shaftesburian flavour about this since it matches Shaftesbury's comparison of virtue and vice':

And since every vicious Action must in proportion, more or

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1. Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. J. M. Robertson, I, Treatise iv, 336, (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964), (my italics).



less, help towards this Mischief [misery] and Self Ill; it must follow *That every vicious action must be self injurious and ill.*

But Shaftesbury goes on to expound a kind of proto-utilitarianism which was opposed by Bishop Butler (see below) and, as we have seen, was unacceptable to Fanny Price and, we may infer, Jane Austen.

On the other side; the Happiness and original Good of VIRTUE has been prov'd from the Contrary Effect of other Affections, such as are according to Nature, and the Oeconomy of the Species or Kind. We have *cast up* all those Particulars, from whence (as by way of Addition and Subtraction) the main Sum or general Account of Happiness, is either augmented or diminish'd. And if there be no Article exceptionable in this scheme of *Moral Arithmetick*, the subject treated may be said to have an evidence as great as that which is found in Numbers, or Mathematicks.  
(ibid. p. 336) (my italics)

From such a wordly calculus of happiness as great a self-righteous certainty and complacency can develop in the natural philosopher as was notoriously found in the puritans against whose abuses of severity Shaftesbury was reacting. If Jane Austen read anything directly bearing on criticism or support of Shaftesbury's views it was likely to have been the anti-utilitarian writings of Bishop Butler and, more certainly, the satirical passage in Johnson's Rasselas which dismisses the 'natural [Shaftesburian] philosopher' in these terms: 'When he had spoken, he looked around him with a placid air and enjoyed the consciousness of his own beneficence.'

'You must decide for yourself,' said Elizabeth;  
'and if, upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery

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1. The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1988), p. 56.

of disobliging his two sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife, I advise you by all means to refuse him.' (P&P, p. 119)

Jane Bennet's apparently impenetrable good will, her unreflecting benevolence, could be read as a satire on Shaftesburian good feeling and moral arithmetic.

Bishop Butler's sermons and his second Dissertation: Of the Nature of Virtue were likely to have been in Jane Austen's father's library. If this is so, and if she had read these works, she would certainly have met a view of virtue opposed to Shaftesbury's 'noble enthusiasm' regulated by 'moral arithmetic'. For Butler,

Acting, conduct, behaviour, abstracted from all regard to what is, in fact and event, the consequences of it, is itself the natural object of moral discernment; ...'

He insists, that man has a natural, speculative capacity for distinguishing some actions to be good and some as evil in themselves: 'we naturally and unavoidably approve some actions, [as] ... virtuous; and disapprove others, as vicious...' (Dissertation ii, 312)<sup>2</sup>.

It may be acknowledged that neither Jane Austen nor Joseph Butler, would have been opposed to some important aspects of Shaftesbury's morality - those aspects which arose from the

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1. The Works of Joseph Butler, preface & account, Samuel Halifax, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1849), I, Dissertation ii, 314.

2. In William Bage's novel Hermsprong the hero's father brings his son up to believe in man's natural capacity to distinguish between good and bad actions. Hermsprong, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1985), p. 233.

belief that morality would be strengthened by being linked with a doctrine of refined earthly fulfilment and by being grounded upon man's natural sociability. Jane Austen would have agreed also that moral character entails, not just a rational or cognitive element, but also an affective element (an 'affection' in Shaftesbury's terms) to stimulate action and direct one towards the good. Both Lady Bertram and Mr Bennet fail in their respective duties by lacking the appropriate 'affection'. But while she would have agreed with Shaftesbury that virtue must be active and, in that sense, must be valued in terms of its beneficial effects, she must have agreed more strongly with Butler that, 'benevolence and want of it, singly considered, are in no sort the whole of virtue and vice' (ibid, p. 319).

In the dispute between Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram as to whether he should participate in the theatricals, the unworldly Fanny perceived, through intuition and reflection, what was wrong with the project. No considerations of her own comfort and well-being, benevolence towards the others' enthusiasms or even, as put forward by Edmund, moral damage limitation, could sway her from her sense of what was right. Even more dramatically she stands firm against the powerful pulls of good-will, gratitude, social harmony, and sheer avoidance of misery, in resisting Sir Thomas Bertram's attempts to persuade her to accept Henry Crawford as a suitor.

The same reliance on 'intuitional - reflective' rather than 'utilitarian - reflective' judgements is manifested in the heroine of the earlier novel, Northanger Abbey. Catherine Morland knows little of the ways of the world; she is in Bath to learn.



Consequently her good natured perceptions could not be supported by a Shaftesburian 'moral arithmetic', which would require much more knowledge of other people and their needs than she could muster. Yet her powerful sense of what is right and wrong derived from her upbringing - which we can reasonably infer comprised more than the feeble accomplishments satirised in the first pages of the novel - impels her to resist the Thorpes' blandishments and to court embarrassment and possible humiliation by running to the Tilneys' lodgings to explain and apologise for her failure to keep her earlier appointment with Eleanor Tilney.

Philip Drew, in delineating Jane Austen's concern 'for the basis of moral judgements', cites a more controversial episode, one which illustrates how little Jane Austen accepted a hedonistic calculus as the foundation of morality. In Persuasion, Anne Elliot justifies her past decision to break with Wentworth despite the years of misery that decision has caused them both:

'I have been thinking over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature',

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1. 'Jane Austen and Bishop Butler', NCE, 35, (September 1980), 127-49.

nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion.' (P, p. 246)

This episode exemplifies the difficulty of applying philosophical models - 'pure' Kantianism or 'pure' utilitarianism - to actual human situations as portrayed in novels. If the term 'justification' is to be used, about a character's actions or motives, (as it must be in Persuasion, or any other non-trivial novel) then some sort of balance will have to be struck, some sort of calculus will be applied. But the 'pure' Kantian needs no 'justification'; his natural 'apperception of the right' is all that is required; justification will inevitably involve those external criteria which render actions heteronomous rather than autonomous. On the other hand, while the calculus which Anne Elliot applies cannot in any normal sense be termed 'hedonistic', the 'pure' utilitarian might have to say (and in the process will undermine his philosophy as a practical proposition) that all such calculations must be hedonistic, even if they involve measuring one pain against another. Anne Elliot is looking back; she is reflecting upon the past, as human beings must; in doing so, she sets the known and predictable miseries which her actions brought about against a different, hypothetical set of miseries which failing in her duty would have brought about. She decides that the latter set would have been worse, in that they would have left her without even the satisfaction of having been true to her principles. This is not a stance which appeals directly to many twentieth-century readers, mostly because it is not for them an efficient hedonistic calculus: it fails to give due weighting to

the pleasures of union with a beloved which tip the scales in other novels and in many real-life decisions. In any case, it seems to be an unhelpful complication to read Anne's retrospective balancing of duty and miseries as an example of a Shaftesburian hedonistic calculus. In fact it may seem more plausible to read Jane Austen's use in such a context of the language of measurement and comparison as a veiled attack on the utilitarian approach.

Drew suggests further that Jane Austen always repudiates, either obliquely or directly, those who judge actions solely by standards of utility. Mr Elliot's later heartless conduct is adumbrated by his dismissal of Anne's scruples about her family's behaviour:

'My dear cousin, ... you have a better right to be fastidious than almost any other woman I know; but will it answer? Will it make you happy? Will it not be wiser to accept the society of the good ladies in Laura-Place, and enjoy all the advantages of the connexion as far as possible?' (p. 150)

Again, in the context of Sense and Sensibility, Drew points out that the key word 'integrity' refers not to the effect of actions but to their origins:

Mrs Jennings was very warm in her praise of Edward's conduct, but only Elinor and Marianne understood its true merit. They only knew how little he had had to tempt him to be disobedient, and how small was the consolation, beyond the consciousness of doing right, that could remain in him in the loss of friends and fortune. ... Elinor gloried in his integrity. (S&S, p. 270)

There is then some evidence for believing that if Jane Austen had read, or read of, Shaftesbury and Butler, she would have sided with Butler over the question of a utilitarian or an intuitional basis for moral judgements. She could of course have arrived at her position without having read much of or reflected upon either



of these philosophers. What is more relevant than the intellectual provenance of her views is the manner in which she adjusted what could be a severe ethical stance to the requirements of social comedy.

As Drew puts it, she maintained 'the central keep' of her ethical position 'without in the least compromising her principles', but she also, 'does much to ensure that they are not applied intolerantly or uncharitably' (p. 142). She achieves this mainly by recognising the complexity of the problems involved. For example, she is clearly aware that simple, unreflective reliance on intuition courts disaster as when Marianne Dashwood thought, 'that we always know when we are acting wrong' - a half-true proposition, which was valid for Fanny Price in her situation, but was false for Marianne in her application of its negative or reverse form: 'if we do not feel we are acting wrong, then we must be acting right' (p. 68). All intuitive judgements have to be made with a sensible consideration of 'persons or circumstances' (p. 49). The necessary but difficult task is to steer a path between steadiness of principle and a just and sympathetic consideration of other people's opinions and other people's circumstances.

A novelist unlike a philosophical essayist, deals in felt truth. (George Eliot was later to be specific about this': 'to conceive with that distinctiveness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like

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1. Middlemarch, (Middlesex, New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965, rpt. 1981), p. 243.

the solidity of objects ...'). The force of an argument based on universal premises which cannot by their nature be proved inductively or deductively - for example, 'in general, there is in reality an universally acknowledged standard of it [virtue]. It is that which all ages and all countries have made profession of in public' (Butler, Dissertation ii, 313) - cannot provide the kind of persuasiveness a novelist or poet seeks. So that, while Jane Austen's ethical position can be shown to have more in common with Butler than with Shaftesbury, her manifestations of this particular position will be very different from both; for her characters have to be involved in believable relationships and probable situations. This means that the untidiness of life, the role of contingency, must be acknowledged, even at the risk of undermining the ethical position which in theory the novelist maintains.

Drew sees the dilemma for Jane Austen in very general terms, as applicable to all novelists:

While it is all very well for a philosopher to represent the value of an action as something distinct from its actual consequences, [here he is referring to Butler's insistence on virtue as an end in itself] ... it is scarcely possible for a novelist to indicate in narrative terms which actions he approves of except by the traditional device of allowing the good man to find his reward at the end of the book: ...  
(Drew, p. 147)

There are of course other means, even leaving out direct authorial comment, of showing that a character is on the side of the angels: Uncle Toby in Sterne's Tristram Shandy is clearly established as such early in the novel; the reader of this work would be very frustrated if he had to await the normal process of narrative

development before deciding how to take the main protagonists. Nevertheless it is very often the outcomes of the narrative which endorse and substantiate the author's judgements. In other words, a novelist, qua story-teller, will tend to be a consequentialist; that is, he will usually make it appear that the rightness of an action resides in its consequences.

Drew himself suggests a possible defence for the novelist who writes to tell a story with a happy ending, while nevertheless asserting that good actions justify themselves regardless of consequences. In effect, his defence is to acknowledge that there are two levels of reasonable response to a social comedy such as Mansfield Park or Persuasion: on the one hand we respond to Fanny Price's and Anne Elliot's consistency of principle at a time when they could not know what the outcome would be; on the other we accept the demands of the genre which drive the author to deliver the happy ending. Thus, the happiness of these protagonists is to be read, not as the consequence of their actions, but as a gift from the author. Drew suggests that Jane Austen, as one who 'has been given a place among the British moralists' (p. 149), was sufficiently aligned with writers of 'didactic or exemplary fiction' not to have any hesitation about deliberately satisfying the reader's sense of poetic justice. If this were agreed, we could say that in this Jane Austen aligns herself with Butler who, while being opposed to consequentialism, was sufficient of an educationist to concede:

there can no access be had to the understanding, but by convincing men, that the course of life we would persuade them to is not contrary to their interests.  
(Butler, The Complete Works, II, Sermon xi, 145)



While accepting the aptness ('happiness' in one sense) of Drew's suggested resolution, it is one of the main themes of this thesis that his resolution of the novelist's dilemma is, with regard to Jane Austen, too neat. While she must have been influenced by the 'didactic or exemplary' fiction she had read and enjoyed, in her own novels she moved away from the practices and compromises of that fiction. For example, in several of her novels Austen draws the reader's attention to the fact that the happy or morally tidy ending is a convention. In doing so, in embarking on what George Eliot was later to call 'sets of experiments in life', in recognising the role of contingency in man's affairs, she sets up fruitful tensions between the conflicting demands of writing psychologically realistic and morally exemplary fiction.

It is a reiterated theme of this thesis that the principles of art which prevail are those that contribute to psychological realism. Marilyn Butler draws a distinction between 'realism' and 'naturalism' and asserts that it will not,

do to call Austen 'natural' in her portrayal of psychology. Upon the individual's life she imposes ... censorship ... natural though her portraits might seem in the manner of presentation, they are also systematically exclusive ... The rational mind and the conscience are given ascendancy over irrational kinds of experience that no more seemed true to life in Austen's day than it does now. Here, especially, she is a polemicist ... and not a realist.'

This is persuasive particularly in the context of Marilyn Butler's proposition that Austen, contrary to received opinions, did

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1. Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, p. 295.

'involve herself in the events and issues of her times' (p. 295) - that she was a polemicist. This thesis, however, is concerned to explore how far Austen was, in comparison with Burney and Edgeworth, more driven by artistic than polemical considerations. In Marilyn Butler's own terms, her 'achievement is to naturalise a didactic tradition' (p. 167).

The use of the term 'psychological realism', like the use of 'day to day realism' and 'truth to life' by Marilyn Butler, does not imply an adherence to the naive realism which assumes a 'reality out there' as given and merely waiting to be recorded. The psychological realism of Jane Austen, and indeed of many other eighteenth-century novelists, can certainly be aligned to what Raymond Williams discusses as a twentieth-century use of 'realism' - 'fidelity to psychological reality'; but it can also be related to and support what Williams sees as 'the highest realism [where] society is seen in fundamentally personal terms, and persons, through relationships, in fundamentally social terms'. Jane Austen obviously did not think of epistemology in the same terms as Raymond Williams, but it is clear from the effect of her work that she did not 'suppose that realism was a simple recording process'; she did 'create the world' she saw and her creation was 'dynamic and active' (p. 275), as were to some extent the creations of her predecessor Richardson and many of her contemporaries.

In the context of a different debate, Jane Austen can be assumed

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1. The Long Revolution, (London, Toronto: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1961), p. 275 & p. 287.

to be a realist, even a naive realist. As Marilyn Butler points out in Jane Austen and The War of Ideas, both Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen strain 'every nerve to command the reader's acceptance ... of contemporary actuality.' Marilyn Butler accepts the seeming paradox that, 'the same novels can be at once dramas of the consciousness, and ... "realistic" in terms of the external world' (ibid. p. 155). This paradox, and the placing of Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen on this occasion in the same camp, is explicable in terms of their common reaction against revolutionary idealism and the thinking derived from Hume's emphasis on the irrational and the arbitrary in human psychology: as Marilyn Butler puts it, 'in the era after Hume, simultaneous stress on the conscious mind and on the objective, prosaic external scene, suggests only one thing: the dismissal of doubts about the material world; the demotion of the wayward senses' (pp. 155-56).

Austen's concern for 'day to day realism' made her more concerned than some of her predecessors and contemporaries to avoid the pure burlesque. Even her grotesque characters like Mrs Norris and Mrs Allen always evoke convincing responses in other characters in a way that, for example, Sir Sedley Clarendel and Mr Dubster in Camilla sometimes do not. Thus we can agree with Marilyn Butler that the character Sir Edward Denham in Sanditon, had Austen lived to complete the novel, would not have been left as a mere caricature of literary dialogue. Unlike Burney, for example, she did not, in her six main novels, indulge in linguistic caricature whereby grotesque characters perform their idiolectical set-pieces before conventionally passive and temporarily tongue-tied auditors.



Austen's greater success arises partly from her lighter touch which, in the context of this thesis, means her greater willingness to let her characters' speech and actions convey moral ideas. Narrator comment occurs but not as an attempt at a systematic underpinning of an authorial point of view. The relationship between the narrator and the leading characters is established through a supple discourse which allows other possibilities than that of didactic or explanatory commentary on significant speech and action.

Nevertheless in incorporating the theme of upbringing in her novels, particularly the upbringing of young women protagonists, Jane Austen encountered similar problems to those experienced by Burney and Edgeworth. As Marilyn Butler claims in Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography, education is a difficult subject for a novelist to handle, particularly where, as with Maria Edgeworth, the novelist is committed to a form of educational determinism (p. 333). One obvious problem arises when the information given about a character's upbringing can be read as having a bearing on the corrigibility or salvageability of that character. For the moral consequentialism inherent in the genre - the need to lead the heroine, for example, to happiness or fulfilment, often at the expense, or at least in marked contrast to the casting down, of less 'deserving' characters - can be seen to have a distorting effect on what has been said or implied earlier in a novel about upbringing and corrigibility.

What is of great and lasting interest, however, is how Jane Austen coped with the problems that must arise in handling this 'difficult' subject in her novels and particularly how far she was

willing to move beyond, even to undermine, received wisdom in the interests of portraying complex and convincing characters. It could be said that, unlike, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft, of whom her husband William Godwin said, she wished to make her story subordinate to a great moral purpose, Jane Austen wished to subsume her moral purpose in a powerfully realised story: this was one of the main principles of her art.

## 2. NATURE VERSUS NURTURE IN MANSFIELD PARK.

In the context of upbringing Austen's narratives betray some inconsistencies. She was not totally able to avoid the conflicts which tend to arise for a novelist when emphasis is given to the importance of early education.

Several critics who have explored the treatment of upbringing in Mansfield Park have been too willing to ignore or explain away her relatively unsatisfactory explanations of the good Price children - Fanny, Susan and perhaps William.<sup>1</sup> Because upbringing is given a fairly sustained treatment in Mansfield Park, difficulties arise which do not occur so pressingly in, for example, Sense and Sensibility with the more perfunctory handling

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1. D. D. Devlin, Jane Austen and Education, (London, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975).

2. Jocelyn Harris, Jane Austen's Art of Memory, (Cambridge, New York: CUP, 1989).

of the question of the differing roles of nature and nurture in the development of Lucy Steele. However, even in the form it is touched upon in Sense and Sensibility, the issue still gives rise to some unanswered, and probably unanswerable, questions in that novel. The main questions of that kind come in relation to Lucy Steele's flawed character and her corrigibility. Although Lucy Steele is not as central to the novel as the Prices and the Crawfords are to Mansfield Park, it is interesting to consider her case briefly, since it illustrates the same awkward pressures of narrative logic which we have noted in Camilla and Belinda.

Lucy, we are told, 'was naturally clever': a commonplace judgement which in most conversations within the realm of common sense is well enough understood. But we are also told that she 'was ignorant and illiterate' and that Elinor, 'saw, and pitied her for, the neglect of abilities which education might have rendered so respectable, ...' (S&S, p. 127). This is also a clear, commonplace account of character and leads on to an equally clear commonsense judgement that Lucy cannot be entirely to blame for her faults. But Elinor goes on to note, ('with less tenderness of feeling'): 'the thorough want of delicacy, of rectitude, and integrity of mind, which her attentions, her assiduities, her flatteries ... betrayed' (p. 127). Are we now faced with a moral flaw which has not been and could not be removed by education? Is this lack of integrity in Lucy Steele an inherited and incorrigible state, as the presence of integrity in three of the Price children is an inexplicable gift of grace? The questions arise; though it would be better if they did not, for they cannot be sensibly answered. We do not know whether to



place Lucy with Robert Ferrars and other characters whose moral failings were left untouched by their education, or whether to put her with those who could be saved by, for example, a mentor-husband such as Edward Ferrars might have been. In the end, since Lucy is important to the progression of plot but is not one of the main protagonists, we are not encouraged to pursue such questions; we accept, and become solely interested in, the depiction of Lucy in her main role as 'villain'. Her behaviour is so uniformly bad during the course of the narrative that the question of whether or not her upbringing should mitigate our judgements does not arise. The same is not true of characters like the Crawfords, and, as will be seen, in their cases the question of upbringing and its relationship to blameworthiness and corrigibility becomes more complex.

The readers of Sense and Sensibility are faced with simpler but genuine kinds of moral discrimination. Unlike, for example, readers of Maria Edgeworth's Belinda and Patronage, they have not been encouraged - by a series of debates and commentaries involving a wide range of the major and minor characters in the novels - to expect a consistent theory of education to be illustrated; nor has the very possibility of moral discrimination been put in danger by the bleak acceptance of original sin which holds it to be a desperately difficult task in the case of all, and an impossible task in the case of many children to do anything about their probably inevitable damnation. (See below, p. 248, for Hannah More's views on this in Strictures).

1. Nature versus Nurture and the Prices

At the close of the novel Sir Thomas offers a diagnosis of what has gone wrong with the education of his two daughters:

Too late he became aware how unfavourable to the character of any two young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with his own severity. He saw how ill he had judged, in expecting to counteract what was wrong in Mrs Norris, by its reverse in himself, clearly saw that he had but increased the evil, by teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence, ...

.....  
To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments - the authorised object of their youth - could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that which could profit them.

(p. 463)

What is said by Sir Thomas here is amply supported by what the narrative has already told us about the development of Maria and Julia; it is almost a resumé of their stories. The author has been careful to signal to the reader the damaging effects of Mrs Norris's indulgence and Sir Thomas's severity. As early as page 19, the narrator tells us that:

Such were the counsels by which Mrs Norris assisted to form her nieces' minds; and it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him. (p. 19)

However Sir Thomas's analysis of the origins of the Price childrens' goodness is not so congruent with what the reader has learned so far.

In [Susan's] usefulness, in Fanny's excellence, in William's continued good conduct, and rising fame, . . . Sir Thomas saw repeated, and for ever repeated reason to rejoice in what he had done for them all, and *acknowledge the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure.* (p. 473) (my italics)

Unlike the earlier example of Maria and Julia, Sir Thomas's explanation here is not echoed and reinforced by earlier sections of the narrative. His version throws doubt on what we may previously have inferred about the upbringing of Susan and Fanny. For example, the only 'discipline' Susan has known was that offered for a mere six weeks by her elder sister. The absence of this element in her world over fourteen years, was, so the narrative implied, responsible for impeding and obscuring her moral potential. And, while Fanny's time at Mansfield Park has not been free from either hardship - in the shape of general neglect - or perverse discipline - at the hand of her Aunt Norris - the narrative has throughout indicated that her moral education resulted from the interest and kindness shown by Edmund, working upon a character disposed to respond to such gentle influences.

D. D. Devlin and Jocelyn Harris (op. cit. above, p. 215), appear to accept Sir Thomas's 'explanation' here; they overlook the possible areas of contradiction in the interests of producing coherent arguments based on the premise that Jane Austen is, in this novel, giving a consistent endorsement to the power of environment in shaping character. This is in itself acceptable



where the 'power of environment' refers mainly to the powerful influence of love and affection in mentor or substitute parents, but, if the point is put in terms of Jane Austen's being a 'Lockean environmentalist', then it has to be said that it ignores other very plausible readings. The text permits another reading in which the Price's essential moral integrity is an innate quality. These two contradictory readings arise precisely because Austen cannot really be claimed to have resolved the impossible question of determining what in character formation is the result of nature and what nurture.

The suggested anti-environmentalist reading is supported by various aspects of the text: the allocation of the term, 'delicacy'; the relatively unconvincing portrayals of Edmund and Fanny in their roles as mentors; and the moral integrity of Susan Price.

'Delicacy' is often used in this novel when one character extols the virtues of another. For example, Mrs Norris tells Mrs Rushworth that her future daughter-in-law, 'has such a strict sense of propriety, so much of that true delicacy ...' (p. 117). The narrator however ascribes this quality only to Fanny and Susan. Comparing Fanny and Mary Crawford, we are told the latter 'had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling' (p. 81). The narrator's use of 'delicacy' here, may be taken as a correct or paradigmatic usage, against which the other character's abusages may be judged, since there is nothing ironic in the context in which it is given. Fanny's 'natural delicacy' accords with Dr Johnson's definition of this quality; for in this novel she shows, 'exactness of judgement and purity of

affection'. It was also suggested in chapter 1 (p. 31 above), that Johnson's definition of 'sensibility' was, in part at least, synonymous, or overlapping with, the term 'delicacy'. It could be argued that Austen's allocation of 'innate' and 'natural' 'delicacy' to Fanny and Susan Price deliberately echoes those delineations of spontaneous sensibility which lead to, 'untaught goodness, [a] hasty moral! sudden sense of right!'; or, 'natural impulses' which allow a person to judge matters by the 'first intuitive glance, without any elaborate process of reasoning'.<sup>1</sup> If Austen is using delicacy as connotative of sensibility in this sense, and her use of the prefixes, 'innate' and 'natural' would support such a reading, then in the development of moral discrimination, Edmund is as unnecessary as a mentor to Fanny as Fanny is to her sister Susan.

The narrative is quite specific in denying 'delicacy' to Maria Bertram and Mary Crawford. For example, in attempting to persuade Maria not to take part in the theatricals at Mansfield Park, Edmund Bertram invokes the concept of female delicacy: 'Show them what true delicacy is. ... The play will be given up and your delicacy honoured' (p. 140).

Two other narrative features contribute to the problem of accurately assessing the strength of environmental influences on character formation in this novel. Edmund is regularly shown

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1. Hannah More, 'Sensibility: A Poetical Epistle to the Hon. Mrs Boscawen' in Sacred Dramas and Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, ed. Conor C. O'Brien (Harmondsworth, England, 1968), p. 176. Both quoted in Stephen Cox's, 'Sensibility as Argument', Sensibility in Transformation, ed. Synty McMillen Conger, p. 64.

misunderstanding Fanny's situation. For example, while he appears to be giving a series of cogent reasons in favour of Fanny's removal to her Aunt Norris's house, he clearly does not wish, in spite of the evidence, to see the grim reality which would await Fanny. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator even makes some sarcastic jibes about Edmund's advisory role. When Edmund advises Fanny to marry Henry Crawford, she recognises that, in talking of the advantages of uniting disparate tempers, he is attempting to rationalise his own hopes about a marriage with Mary. At the close of this conversation, in which he has again not heard Fanny, the narrator makes the following observation:

Still, however, Fanny was oppressed and wearied; he saw it in her looks, it could not be talked away, and attempting it no more he led her directly with the kind *authority of a privileged guardian into the house.* (p. 355) (my italics)

As Edmund's involvement with Mary Crawford deepens, his judgements are shown to err, and no longer to concur with Fanny's or the narrator's. His inability to deploy the term 'delicacy' appropriately also marks this failure of judgement. In a statement which directly contradicts what the narrator has said one hundred and forty pages earlier, he suggests that 'Mary and Fanny resemble each other in true generosity and natural delicacy' (p. 264). Only at the end of the novel, when his engagement with Mary has ceased, is he able to see that her 'faults' are due in part to her 'blunted delicacy' (p. 456).

The doubts one may feel about a mentor's role in Fanny's moral character formation are exacerbated further by the appearance of



Susan Price. Fanny wonders at finding such sterling moral qualities to exist in her sister:

Her greatest wonder ... [was] ... not that Susan should have been provoked into disrespect and impatience against her better knowledge - but that so much better knowledge, so many good notions, should have been hers at all; and that, brought up in the midst of negligence and error, she should have formed such proper opinions of what she ought to be - she, who had *no cousin Edmund to direct her thoughts and fix her principles.* (my italics)

Susan is apparently:

acting on the same truths, and pursuing the same system, which (Fanny's) own judgements acknowledged. (pp. 397-98)

Susan has a range of endowments which appear to be hereditary or congenital: she has an 'open temper', (p. 397) an 'innate taste for the genteel' (p. 419) and a 'more fearless disposition and happier nerves' than Fanny (p. 472). She also proves to have 'delicacy' at a significant moment in the narrative during which Fanny recognises the true merits of Susan's disposition and expresses her wonder that they could exist in that environment (p. 396).

The narrative however suggests, though not convincingly, that Fanny has a crucial role to play in Susan's moral development. For example, we are told of the regret Fanny anticipates feeling about leaving Susan in Portsmouth: 'that a girl so capable of being *made*, everything good' (p. 419). Yet in all moral essentials, Susan is already 'everything good'. Fanny's contribution seems to have more to do with adjusting her sister's manners - manners moreover which have to be read in terms of David Lodge's 'social or secular order of values'. (Lodge argues

convincingly that Fanny and Edmund use 'manners' in its older OED sense as being concerned with morals and spiritual virtues; whereas most of the other characters in this novel use it in its late eighteenth-century sense, to denote social behaviour only.)' Susan, we are encouraged to understand, has already aligned herself with those who put greater weight on moral conduct and principle, those, who, unlike Julia Bertram, do not see 'duty' merely in terms of 'polite behaviour'.

These elements point to a reading in which Fanny and Susan Price are innately or congenitally good characters who would thrive morally whatever their environment. Yet, it seems unlikely that the author intended to give this hint of uncovenanted grace since this would risk undermining our acceptance of some of the moral judgements made about the blameworthiness of some of the other characters. My purpose has been to point out those areas of contradiction which environmentalist interpretations explain away.

It seems more likely that, on this issue, Jane Austen has adopted the kind of novelistic, 'commonsense' shorthand which does not bear too close an inspection. In Burney's Cecilia we find a similar example of this shorthand usage in the allocation of innate 'delicacy' to Henrietta Belfield and her brother. Like the Prices, the Belfield children cannot be said to have derived their talents and qualities from their early environments. We are told that Mrs Belfield is a

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1. The Language of Fiction, (London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, 2nd edn. 1984), pp. 99-100.

coarse and ordinary women, not more unlike her son in talents and acquired accomplishments, than dissimilar to her daughter in softness and natural delicacy.'

In speaking to Cecilia of his unsuccessful employment with Lord Vannelt, Belfield also seems to be supporting the case for natural virtuous endowments:

for delicacy, like taste, can only partially be taught, and will always be superficial and erring where it is not innate. (IV, v, 666)

Cecilia believes Henrietta has a 'natural rectitude in her heart' and that she is,

artless, ingenuous, and affectionate; her understanding was good, though no pains had been taken to improve it; her disposition though ardent was soft, and her mind seemed informed by intuitive integrity. (III, iii, 345)

However, in Cecilia it would be misleading to read into this reference to innate qualities evidence of the author's belief in the power of uncovenanted grace to establish virtuous characters, or in the consequent mitigation of 'blameworthy' characters who have not been so fortunate. For, in the event, 'delicacy', from wherever it may come, is not in itself sufficient to guarantee an infallible 'sense of moral right'. Henrietta's 'natural delicacy' does not place her on an equal footing with the heroine, Cecilia (IV, i, 833-44); and her brother's delicacy is seen to be excessive, self-defeating, and allied to the more dubious values

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1. Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress, eds, P. Sabor & M. A. Doody, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1988, 1st published as a World's Classic ppbck, 1988), II, x, 314.



of the sentimental movement.

It seems that terms like 'delicacy' and 'natural integrity' are more safely read as rhetorical contributions to a narrative rather than systematic contributions to a debate on nature versus nurture. Although Austen's usage seems more consistent, and is not as easily and obviously qualified as Burney's, a critic would be rash to suppose that Jane Austen intended her readers to see the possession or lack of innate delicacy as the main key to moral worth.

In a lengthy novel about upbringing like Mansfield Park, such commonsense usage risks raising awkward questions and potential contradictions about the relative roles of nature and nurture. Nevertheless Austen's treatment of these contradictions is more successful than either Burney's or Edgeworth's. The general reader does not find Mansfield Park a novel in which glaring thematic contradictions disturb the unfolding of the plot and the portrayal of convincingly realised characters. A combination of factors allows this to be the case.

This concern with art as opposed to polemical issues may be seen as part of what Marilyn Butler has called Jane Austen's 'naturalis[ing of] a didactic tradition'. The naturalisation of didactic elements is, as will be suggested in chapters 6 and 7, due to more positive factors than mere avoidance of a systematic treatment of issues like education; it is due to the fact that the novels are positively character-driven in a way that an exemplary novel could not be. This in turn is made possible only by the more supple and powerful use of speech, so that, for example, we do not expect Sir Thomas Bertram to be a mouthpiece for the

author's views on upbringing; we expect and get further revelations of a complex and troubled character.

11. The Crawfords: Narrative Complexity and the Question of Corrigibility

The critic Jocelyn Harris (Jane Austen's Art of Memory) sees in both Mary and Henry Crawford instances of negative educational determinism. The example of the Admiral and his associates have ruined their 'natural gifts', and encouraged 'habits' which have their foundation in self-interest rather than 'active principle'. And it seems that the narrative endorses this view. For example, in his last interview with Mary, Edmund believes he sees in her, 'half a wish of yielding to truths, half a sense of shame', but that after a 'short struggle', she reverts to old habits: 'but habit, habit carried it' (MP, p. 458). In the final chapter, the narrator reiterates that Henry has been 'ruined by early independence and bad domestic example' (p. 467). This however seems a questionable reading, for while, in the end the Crawfords are indeed seen to be incorrigible, Jane Austen is able, by sustaining narrative suspense in this matter, to ensure that this is not the unambiguous example of Lockean principles which Harris proposes. At the end of the novel, it is not at all certain that these victims of a faulty upbringing would, under all circumstances, have been incorrigible. Jane Austen is able, through her long-term suspension of final judgement on the Crawfords, to bring into play the role of contingency in her narratives in a way that the more fully determined texts of Burney

and Edgeworth do not allow. However, while Jane Austen has made an enormous advance in subtlety of characterisation, with correspondingly higher demands on her readers' awareness in making their judgements of corrigibility and blameworthiness, the complex narrative strategies by which she achieves her goals give rise to some problems and leave some gaps.

That Mary and Henry should in the event prove to be incorrigible is in one sense a narrative necessity. The moral consequentialism of the genre to which Mansfield Park belongs insists on the virtuous characters being finally rewarded. Yet, if the reader were given no sense that either Mary or Henry was capable of being reformed by the respective influence of Edmund and Fanny, then the equally important element of narrative suspense would be missing. Attempting to reconcile the pull of these two opposing demands has led to an interesting, though at times confusing, picture about how far love has the power to amend character at this courtship stage in their lives.

Corrigibility as a specific theme relating to the Crawfords is introduced when Mrs Grant announces to Mary and Henry that, 'Mansfield will cure you both' (p. 47). The reader is given a clear picture of the defective aspects in the Crawfords' characters - neither has developed, for example, a capacity for serious reflection. We are told that Henry had no capacity to express good principles 'by their proper name' (p. 294). And Edmund, even while trying to persuade Fanny of Henry's good qualities, has to admit that, owing to the Admiral's influence, Henry has never given any thought to 'serious subjects' [religion and its relationship to personal principles]. Similarly, the



narrator states that Mary is, 'not equal to discuss with herself' the qualities she finds refreshing in Edmund's character (p. 65). Yet, in contrast to Maria and Julia Bertram, who are merely given 'no positive ill-nature' (p. 20), Mary and Henry are seen to possess positive qualities - qualities which might, under auspicious influences, lead to their achieving higher levels of moral awareness. So, while Mary may lack Fanny's 'delicacy of mind of taste and of feeling', the narrator tells us nevertheless of the 'really good feelings by which she was almost purely governed' (p. 147). Henry shows, in his love for Fanny, that he appreciates the value of moral worth and can further see its essential relationship to domestic happiness. He has, the narrator comments, sufficient, 'moral taste' (p. 235) to appreciate the fraternal relationship of Fanny and William. We are also told that he:

had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name; but when he talked of her having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observation of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious. (p. 294)

Both brother and sister recognise, and are drawn towards, the integrity and sincerity which Fanny and Edmund offer, qualities of which they have had little experience in their previous social life. Henry feels he 'could ... wholly and absolutely confide in [Fanny]' ... and appears to be emphatic in his desire to do this, 'that is what I want' (p. 294). One of Mary's regrets about visiting London is that the inhabitants of Mansfield Park,

'have all so much more *heart* among you, than one finds in the world at large. You all give me a feeling of being able to trust and confide in you; which, in common intercourse, one knows nothing of.' (p. 359)

One of the means by which the reader is kept in suspense about how deeply the Crawfords have been influenced and altered, lies in the alternative judgements offered on them by Fanny, Edmund and the narrator. For example, in the discussions between Edmund and Fanny about the behaviour and character of Miss Crawford, Edmund's defence of Mary rests initially upon his optimistic conviction that the disadvantages of her upbringing have affected only her manners and not her mind. Fanny, on the other hand, not only believes that it is Mary's mind which is 'tainted', she is also convinced that Edmund's influence will not alter this. Although she cannot make her position clear to Edmund during their dialogues, she is still prompted to ask some surprisingly challenging questions. In the first of these, Fanny suggests that Mary's impropriety in talking of Admiral Crawford shows great ingratitude; this prompts Edmund to begin his defence:

'Ungrateful is a strong word. ... She is awkwardly circumstanced. With such warm feelings and lively spirits it must be difficult to do justice to her affection for Mrs Crawford, without throwing a shade on the admiral. ... but it is natural and amiable that Miss Crawford should acquit her aunt entirely. I do not censure her *opinions*; but there certainly *is* impropriety in making them public.'

'Do you think,' said Fanny, ... 'that this impropriety is a reflection itself upon Mrs Crawford, as her niece has been entirely brought up by her? She cannot have given her right notions of what was due to the admiral.'

'That is a fair remark. Yes, we must suppose the faults of the niece to have been those of the aunt; and it makes one more sensible of the disadvantages she has been under. But I think her present home must do her good.'  
(pp. 63-64)



A similar conversation takes place later in the novel, and this time Fanny expresses her wish not to have to take part in these awkward and pointless dialogues. Edmund begins:

'I know her disposition to be as sweet and faultless as your own, but the influence of her former companions makes her seem, gives to her conversation, to her professed opinions, sometimes a tinge of wrong. She does not *think* evil, but she speaks it - ...'

'The effect of education', said Fanny

Edmund tentatively voices his fear that there may be some damage beyond that of manner, and it is noticeable that for the rest of the novel he reconciles himself to this possibility by suggesting that, considering her upbringing, Miss Crawford has turned out remarkably well:

'Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind! - for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than manner; it appears as if the mind itself was tainted.'

Fanny imagined this to be an appeal to her judgement, and therefore, after a moment's consideration, said, 'If you only want me as a listener, cousin, I will be as useful as I can; but I am not qualified for an adviser.' (p. 269)

It is particularly striking that later in the novel the narrator disagrees with Fanny's pessimistic diagnosis of Edmund's chances of being an improving influence on Mary:

and she [Fanny] may be forgiven by older sages, for looking on the chance of Miss Crawford's future improvement as nearly desperate, for thinking that if Edmund's influence in this season of love, had already done so little in clearing her judgment, and regulating her notions, his worth would be finally wasted on her even in years of matrimony. Experience might have hoped more for any young people, so circumstanced, and impartiality would not have denied to Miss Crawford's nature, that *participation of the general nature of women*, which would lead her to adopt the opinions of the man she loved and respected, as her own. - But as such were Fanny's persuasions, ... (p. 367) (my italics)



Reconciling the point made here with the views expressed in the final chapter causes the narrator some difficulties. At the close of the novel, Edmund has to agree with Fanny that the damage done to Mary's mind has made her irredeemable. He does this in language which echoes and develops that used by Fanny one hundred pages earlier. In their last conversation, Fanny notes that, Miss Crawford, in spite of some

amiable sensations, and much personal kindness, had still been Miss Crawford, still shewn a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so darkened, yet fancying itself light. (p. 367)

Edmund produces the following comment:

'The evil lies yet deeper; in her total ignorance, unsuspectingness of there being such feelings, in a perversion of mind which made it natural to treat the subject as she did. ... - Her's are faults ... of blunted delicacy, and a corrupted, vitiated mind'. (p. 456)

Once the outcome of the novel is known, we can see in retrospect, that it is Fanny alone who has judged accurately about Mary throughout. She has proved more correct in her assessment of Mary's incorrigible character than either Edmund or the narrator. For example, the content of Mary's letter to Fanny in Portsmouth - particularly the scarcely concealed hope that Tom Bertram will die - confirms for Fanny, and leaves the reader in little doubt, that Edmund's influence has been small. Edmund himself, as Fanny bitterly, if only temporarily, reflects, imagines he has overcome Mary's prejudice about his joining the clergy. Confirmation that she has not moved at all towards Edmund's position is provided by the terms in which she encourages her brother's project to marry

Fanny:

'I know you, I know that a wife you *loved* would be the happiest of women, and that even when you ceased to love, she would yet find in you the liberality and good-breeding of a gentleman.' (p. 296)

This is in the tradition of Chesterfield's advice and is far removed from the anglicanism which Sir Thomas, Edmund and Fanny take seriously. With hindsight, one may also feel that Fanny is more than justified in her hope that Edmund's union with Mary does not corrupt him: 'God grant that her influence do not cease to make him respectable' (p. 424). For, in one crucial respect Mary has already done this by persuading or manipulating Edmund into taking part in the theatricals at Mansfield Park which he knew to be wrong. It seems that in the final chapter the narrator has to abandon the earlier more charitable position and to adopt instead Fanny's long-held pessimistic view. For although 'better taste' (p. 469) can be claimed for Mary, the narrator nevertheless opens the chapter with: 'Edmund was no longer the dupe of Miss Crawford' (p. 461). One can understand the narrator's earlier stance (p. 367) as necessary in maintaining suspense about Edmund and Mary until the end of the novel; it does however lead to a confusion of viewpoints - a confusion of the sort we might encounter in experienced life.

While the text is equally successful in creating suspense over the possibility of Henry's moral rehabilitation through Fanny's influence, some of the narrative decisions this entails give rise to other difficulties in the novel. These difficulties arise particularly from the time of Fanny's stay in Portsmouth. It is

likely that Henry's behaviour during this episode will encourage the reader to infer that changes have occurred; that he both 'rationally' and 'passionately' loves Fanny is not denied or thrown into doubt, even at the end of the novel. And, in spite of her prior attachment to Edmund, Fanny herself finds Henry more acceptable and imagines him to be improved. On the occasion of the Price family's Sunday outing to church, Mr Crawford joins them, he and Fanny walk together:

The loveliness of the day, and of the view, he [Henry] felt like herself. They often stopt with the same sentiment and taste, ... and considering he was not Edmund, Fanny could not but allow that he was sufficiently open to the charms of nature, and very well able to express his admiration. (p. 409)

Yet, at the end of the chapter the narrator intervenes, perhaps in order to prepare the reader for the possibility of the elopement with Mrs Rushworth which will shortly take place:

The wonderful improvement which she [Fanny] *still fancied in Mr Crawford*, ... Not considering in how different a circle she had been just seeing him, nor how much might be owing to contrast, she was quite persuaded of his being astonishingly more gentle, and regardful of others, than formerly. (p. 413)

This instance of the narrator implying that no change has taken place in Henry has repercussions in the final chapter, when the happy alternative scenario for Henry, had he gone from Portsmouth to Everingham as he 'intended' and 'knew he ought' (p. 467), is introduced.

Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him.



*His affections had already done something. Her influence over him had already given him some influence over her. Would he have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained; especially when the marriage had taken place, which would have given him the assistance of her conscience in subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward - and a reward very voluntarily bestowed - within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary.* (p. 467) (my italics)

There is for the twentieth-century reader, whose sympathy for Henry may have increased during his visits to Fanny in Portsmouth, a sense of the injustice of this outcome made necessary by the moral consequentialism of the genre. Convinced by the earlier account of Henry's disposition and upbringing, the modern reader may feel that this character could never have chosen those actions which would lead to 'success' and 'felicity', and that Austen's depiction of these alternative scenarios is, in the context of this subtle novel, incongruously redolent of the tradition of overtly didactic exemplary fiction. The reader may feel that this incongruity is increased by Fanny's judgement: 'And, alas! how always known no principle to supply as a duty what the heart was deficient in' (p. 329). One is left to speculate what these absent qualities of the heart were. Had Henry naturally possessed them, would they have given him immunity against the corrupting influence of Admiral Crawford? Would it have put him into the charmed circle of the morally graced Susan and Fanny? We may see in Fanny's comment two ways of reading terms like 'heart', 'disposition' and 'temper' - as genetic inheritance, or as habit developed by early and intensive learning. In either case, Henry neither inherited a moral sense, nor was he able to develop one as

a habit through his early teaching. Yet the expected moral judgement of this final chapter insists that he ought to have done so.

The projected scenario in itself raises some interesting questions. Although it is suggested that influence has gone each way between Fanny and Henry, the narrator still talks in terms of Henry's 'conquest' and uses the word, 'exultation' which suggests he is essentially unchanged. If the reader speculated on this scenario, he might ask how far Fanny's influence would have gone had the two actually married. Edmund and Mary feel that Fanny would have made Henry truly happy- have 'made him everything'. Yet, Mary has also said that had Fanny married him, as she 'ought', the business with Mrs Rushworth would have issued in a 'twice yearly flirtation' (p. 456). Here, it seems both Henry and Mary are, and would continue to be, guilty of precisely that lack of moral rigour which Edmund finally rejects - the failure to see anything as bad except by its consequences. If Henry was going to act in marriage as Mary suggests, we can hardly credit Fanny with having had much influence. In considering this question, we may also be reminded of the narrator's scepticism, when Henry leaves Portsmouth, about any real change having taken place. What then is this projected scenario supposed to mean? The narrator was able to suggest earlier in the novel, by way of a generalisation, that Mary, had she married Edmund, would have adopted his opinions; apparently the same would not have been the case for Fanny and Henry.

In the depiction of Mary and Henry Crawford, Jane Austen took considerable risks; her need to make these characters compelling

put a great deal of pressure on the requirements to round off the narrative so that the moral characters triumph and marry. Mansfield Park has moved us very far from the courtesy novel: Mary and Henry are not mere foil characters and neither the narrator, Fanny Price, Sir Thomas, Edmund nor any combination of them, acts as a 'choric voice' echoing the narrator's message. The risks were worth taking: the characters are powerfully realised and they drive the narrative along to the generically expected conclusion; there are no contradictions sufficiently glaring to distort the character development or the unfolding of the tale.

In taking such risks Austen seems to wish to foreground the role of contingency in the lives of her protagonists. Her doing this leads the critic Gene Koppel to suggest that Austen has been able to bring 'romantic comedy into a tense, complex, and fruitful relationship with actual life.' Such a reading justifies some of the apparent contradictions noted above as the means by which Austen reinforces, through the comments of her narrator, the reader's sense that the match between Fanny and Edmund is not a wholly satisfying outcome. Thus the narrator's relation of the union of Fanny and Edmund is deliberately followed by our learning that had Henry persevered Fanny would have married and loved him. Similarly a few paragraphs later we are reminded that Fanny is the woman whom Henry both 'rationally and passionately loves'. The passage cited earlier in this section in which the narrator and Fanny disagree about the improving effects upon Mary of her marriage to Edmund is regarded as a similar

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1. The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels, (London: U.M.I. Research Press, 1988), p. 69.



strategy. As in experienced life this rich text offers us differing possible interpretations of character and event.

### 3. JANE AUSTEN A LOCKEAN ENVIRONMENTALIST?

An example of the problems raised by a critic who writes to defend a determinate reading, albeit a very subtle one, of Mansfield Park is seen in D. D. Devlin's Jane Austen and Education. For this critic, the project is to show that Austen's acceptance and depiction of the complexities of human nature can fit with the theory that she was influenced by Locke in the nature versus nurture debate.

As far as it goes, Devlin's case for saying that Locke 'can throw some light on the idea of education' (p. 7) in Jane Austen's novels, is a strong one. Yet its strength depends to some extent upon its partiality or incompleteness. This is not merely to make the obvious point that there is a great deal more to the novels than Jane Austen's 'idea of education'; nor even that 'some' light implies that the whole picture cannot be revealed; nor even that Locke is notoriously ambiguous in his attitude to predispositions as opposed to innate ideas.' It is rather that even as subtly

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1. Frank Musgrove, 'Two Educational Controversies in 18th Century England: Nature and Nurture; Private and Public Education', Paedagogica Historica, (Leicester: 1962), 81-94, suggests, for example, that:

'Between the appearance of Emile and the Treatise on Man [Helvetius] it was possible for Locke to be quoted in support of the supremacy of

argued a case as Devlin's must fail to catch all that Jane Austen reveals of the complexity of her main characters and their interrelationships. Devlin asserts, for example, with justice, that, in Emma 'Jane Fairfax's education is described in words which sum up Locke':

She had fallen into good hands, known nothing but kindness from the Campbells, and been given an excellent education. Living constantly with right-minded and well-informed people, her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture; and Colonel Campbell's residence being in London, every lighter talent had been done full justice to by the attendance of first-rate masters. Her disposition and abilities were equally worthy of all that friendship could do. (E, p. 164)

(D. D. Devlin, Jane Austen and Education, p. 17)

'The foundation of it all', continues Devlin is the 'living constantly' with 'kindness' and 'friendship'. Jane Fairfax is given a

full moral education which looks after both her heart and her understanding; and the discipline which can be learnt only by example creates that excellent disposition (Jane Austen's equivalent term for Locke's 'character') which is the end of all education and which alone can guarantee character. (ibid., p. 17)

Later Devlin says, 'Locke, ... like Jane Austen comes down on the side of nurture in the controversy between environment

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innate endowment over environmental influence in opposition to Rousseau as the apparent defender of the environmentalist position; for Locke had written not only that children are "as white paper, or wax, to be moulded or fashioned as one pleases" but, [also] "We must not hope to change original tempers,...God has stamped certain characters on men's minds, which, like their shapes, may perhaps be a little mended, but can hardly be transformed into the contrary." Although Locke rejected innate ideas, he recognized deep-seated differences in attitude, temper and disposition.' p. 84.

(meaning education) and genetic inheritance' (p. 18). 'Education, which includes, tutor, parents, home and what we call environment is all powerful', and then, 'in Mansfield Park the reader is not invited to expect much extraordinary virtue from the family in Portsmouth for whom ... education had done so little' (p. 19).

All this is clearly true, but it is not the whole truth; it is not the whole truth about Jane Fairfax and, as we have seen, it is very far from the truth about Susan Price. In Emma, while we are likely to read Emma as being genuinely contrite, willing to admit her gross misjudgement of Jane Fairfax, we can also read her residual doubts. Even at the end we are allowed to judge by her post-reconciliation scene with Emma that there was and remained in Jane Fairfax a lack of openness, a reserve deeper than that required to meet the very tricky situation imposed on her by Frank Churchill. Even after everyone has recognised the real virtue of Jane Fairfax, who had been put in an impossible situation, and whose 'steadiness and delicacy of principle' (p. 448) are just what Frank Churchill needs (according to Mr Knightley); even after Jane Fairfax has gone out of her way to seek a reconciliation with Emma (and to admit her fault arising from her 'terrible situation', 'my manners' to you Emma 'so cold and artificial - I had always a part to act ...' (p. 459) she is still not perfectly open with Emma. It is Emma who has to drag out of her her real plans for the future:

'And the next news, I suppose, will be, that we are to lose you - just as I begin to know you.'

'Oh! as to all that, of course nothing can be thought of yet. I am here till claimed by Colonel and Mrs Campbell.'

'Nothing can be actually settled yet, perhaps,' replied Emma, smiling - 'but, excuse me, it must be thought of.'

The smile was returned as Jane answered, 'You are very right;



it has been thought of. And I will own to you, (*I am sure it will be safe*), that so far as our living with Mr Churchill at Enscombe, it is settled. There must be three months at least of deep mourning; but when they are over, I imagine there will be nothing more to wait for.' *'Thank you, thank you. - This is just what I wanted to be assured of. - Oh if you knew how much I love every thing that is decided and open! - Good bye;...'* (p. 460) (my italics)

This is evidence as strong as that cited by Devlin above, and it has been foregrounded in the readings of other, equally subtle critics, Marilyn Butler for instance:

But ethically Jane's fault is not that she is too polished: it is that for once 'her affection must have overpowered her judgement' (p. 419).

Nor, after all, does the reserve which Emma initially dislikes prove to be merely manner, an aspect of her elegant composure—as everyone discovers when the truth about the engagement emerges. ... Jane's secretiveness proves to have been motivated by a culpable desire to hide a truth which should have been known. Knightley, who in general is her advocate, confesses at last that there is a censurable lack of openness about her:...

.....  
Jane Fairfax, although handled with sympathy, is almost as much an anti-heroine as Mary Crawford.

(The War of Ideas, pp. 267-69)

We are left, as we are left in experienced life, with an insistent, if unanswerable question: how much should our judgement of character be swayed by recognising congenital traits which seem to be proof against even the best 'moral education'?

In dealing with Susan Price the reading offered earlier in this chapter suggested that doubt could be thrown on the claims of a purely environmentalist explanation for her character. Devlin, however, sees in the Portsmouth episode, the 'vivid ... power of environment to shape character and make our decisions' (p. 117).

There is no suggestion that the text may also be offering a contrary reading here. Instead, the reasonable point is made,

that 'natural qualities exist but will not of themselves go far' (p. 117). Johnson's authority is invoked in order to elucidate Jane Austen's intention in depicting Susan here.

when we find worth faintly shooting in the shades of obscurity, we may let light and sunshine upon it, and ripen barren volition into efficacy and power.

(D. D. Devlin, Jane Austen and Education, p. 119 cites Johnson's Rambler, No. 166)

Such a reading, is supported by one aspect of the narrative. Yet the text does not consistently support a reading which asserts that the factors which tend (or dispose) a character to be virtuous need to be actuated by a mentor. Devlin's reading here, fails to question the narrative validity of Fanny's role as Susan's mentor which lasts for six weeks only. Nor does it recognise the power of the innate tendencies Susan already has. Devlin suggests that, 'Fathers and mothers are ... either dead, absent or disasters ... because [Austen] wishes to play down the importance of heredity in shaping the disposition of her heroines'. He continues,

Although Locke qualifies his position and makes concessions, ... he is in crucial ways more restrictive than Jane Austen because he does not see, as she does, that education is inseparable from love. (p. 18)

The latter half of this statement is developed in the final chapter of Devlin's book, when he says:

Jane Austen insists ... many times [that not] even Fanny could withstand the addresses of Henry Crawford unless she had loved elsewhere. ... It is only through love that there is freedom from the conventional social and economic pressures. If Fanny Price and Anne Elliot are the only Jane Austen heroines who are free from the beginning of the novel to the end, it is because they alone are in love throughout the novel. (pp. 102-103)

But there is also evidence from the text which indicates that Fanny would not under any circumstances have married Henry. The possible scenarios for Henry Crawford are offered far more speculatively by the narrator than Devlin's reading suggests. While the latter half of Devlin's assertion concerning Persuasion may offer a reason for Anne Elliot's freedom, her not marrying Mr Elliot in spite of Lady Russell's recommendation, it is only one reason: the text provides us with others, equally powerful. Anne's own 'innate' perceptiveness, her 'natural penetration, which no experience in others can equal' (p. 251), (a quality Lady Russell does not have), allows Anne to make up her mind about Mr Elliot's suitability as a future husband without reference either to her love for Wentworth, or the later revelations of her friend, Mrs Smith.

Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character. ... Mr Elliot was rational, discreet, polished, but he was not open.  
(pp. 160-61)

It is later in the novel, when Anne recognises that Wentworth is jealous of the attentions Mr Elliot is paying her, that she reflects on the constancy of her attachment to Wentworth, and its effects on what might have transpired between Mr Elliot and herself. 'How might she have felt, had there been no Wentworth in the case, ... Their union she believed could not divide her more from other men, than their final separation' (p. 192).

While the absence of parental figures, may, as Devlin suggests, be read in terms of authorial intention - to emphasise the central role of environment in character development - such an



interpretation does not account for the total narrative. Gaps still remain which prompt speculations about the role of innate factors. For example, qualities are suggested or given in Austen's novels which cannot be explained as the work of environment. What quality in Anne Elliot made her susceptible to her mother's influence, and her two sisters not? Where does her superior judgement come from 'which no experience of nature can supply'? What are we to make of Mrs Smith, whose imperturbable calm in the face of suffering is explained by Anne in the following terms:

this was not a case of fortitude or of resignation only. - A submissive spirit might be patient, a strong understanding would supply resolution, but here was something more; here was that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was *from Nature alone. It was the choicest gift of Heaven; ...* (p. 154) (my italics)

Or indeed, Frank Churchill, who claims to have inherited his optimistic disposition from his father, Mr Weston (p. 424). What are the factors which allow Jane and Elizabeth Bennet to have so different an apprehension of duty from their sisters and parents?

Devlin, in fact, suggests that a consistent use of the terms 'temper' and 'disposition' can be seen across the canon of Austen's major novels. In the juvenilia he proposes that the two terms are used nearly synonymously, that is to denote, 'a natural bias of the mind, as something which cannot be altered' (Devlin, p. 22). While he acknowledges that 'the confident abstract nouns which are a feature of Austen's vocabulary ... are perhaps less monolithic and more shifting, than they seem' (p. 20), he

nevertheless suggests that, in the major novels, priority is given to 'disposition' over 'temper':

Temper is less important than disposition. Henry Crawford has a temper at once lively and good, ... Good temper is a natural gift; disposition is the character of a person as shaped by this natural gift and (far more importantly) by the vital influences of education and environment. Jane Austen dismisses temper ... since a natural gift has no place in a novel that is considering the powerful effect of circumstances on the development of character. (p. 112)

Examples are given to illustrate Austen's consistent use of these two terms. Mary Crawford's faults are 'not faults of temper'. 'Darcy's temper is bad, but his disposition, as a result of having been taught good principles, is good' (p. 112). But a relatively random selection of their usage in the novels may make one feel that it is too heavy-handed to attempt to gloss them in the context of a systematic contribution to the nature-nurture controversy. For example, Darcy's own use of the two terms suggests that 'temper' may be a genetic endowment but, like 'disposition', it is not something which cannot be altered. 'As a child, I was taught what was right; *but I was not taught to correct my temper*' (p. 369). The implication here is that 'temper' can and should be modified during education. We are told that the union of Elizabeth and Darcy will improve the latter's 'temper'. We may then, if we wish to be sufficiently leaden-footed, enquire what logically the term 'temper' is doing, if it is so readily changeable: at what stage does it become eventually conflated with the 'disposition' which drives the formed character?

In the last chapter of Mansfield Park, during Sir Thomas's

brooding on the deficiencies of his plan to educate his daughters, he uses the terms 'temper', 'inclination', 'character' and 'disposition' interchangeably to refer to those areas of personality which his educational regime left unaffected:

Wretchedly did he feel, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper. (p. 464)

There is at first a suggestion that he is going to offload some of the blame on to deep-seated or congenital faults:

Here had been grievous mismanagement; but, bad as it was, he gradually grew to feel that it had not been the most direful mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been wanting within, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect. (p. 463) (my emphasis)

The word '*within*' gives a hint of hereditary endowment, yet he goes on, in words which significantly make no reference to individual agents, to suggest that even in relation to what was 'wanting within', some change could or should have been brought about.

He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which alone can suffice. (p. 463)

These pages must surely be read not as an exposition of educational theory but as a poignantly credible picture of a disappointed man trying to come to terms with what has gone wrong. We are left, not with a clear answer but with a series of unanswered questions: could a 'better' plan of education have



succeeded? Or is Sir Thomas still misunderstanding the implications of 'within'? What did Jane Austen believe? To that last question we cannot base a certain reply on the evidence of any consistency of her usage of 'temper', 'disposition', 'character' or 'inclination'.

With regard to 'temper' and 'disposition' themselves, the last word may perhaps be given to the narrator of Mansfield Park when she talks of Mrs Grant and uses the telling adjective 'same':

with a temper to love and be loved, [she] must have gone with some regret, from the scenes and people she had been used to; but the same happiness of disposition must in any place and any society, secure her a great deal to enjoy, ... (p. 469)

It is significant that Maria Edgeworth, who in many of her novels is unarguably promoting the view that environmental influences are all important in the development of character, is also not able to be consistent in her use of terms which refer to, pin down, or account for personality. In Patronage, Alfred Percy can scarcely bring himself 'to believe that Buckhurst Falconer had acted in the manner represented, with a rapacity, harshness, and cruelty, so opposite to his natural disposition' (p. 5). We know that Maria Edgeworth would have wanted us to read 'natural' - and indeed 'innate' - as rhetorical intensifiers rather than as an attempt to isolate the congenital factors in Buckhurst's personality. In Practical Education, she appears to dismiss completely the significance of innate factors - 'virtues, as well abilities, or what is popularly called genius, we believe to be the result of education not the gift of nature' (II, 713); but in the later Madame de Fleury, Edgeworth refuses to commit herself or

enter into the unsolvable question of the original influences of temper or genius. In Madame de Fleury she refers to a child 'Victorie', 'the most intelligent and amiable of these children', but admits,

Whence her superiority arose, whether her abilities were naturally more vivacious than those of her companions, or whether they had been more early developed by accidental excitation, *we cannot pretend to determine*, lest we should involve ourselves in the intricate questions respecting natural genius - a metaphysical point, ...' (my italics)

It seems at first sight that other polemical writers like Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft did 'pretend to determine' and that they, as Devlin asserts, were influenced by Locke's work, and like him stressed the importance of early environmental influences on the development of character.<sup>2</sup> But the force they give to their statements also derives from their rhetorical power rather than from their consistency. Hannah More is concerned with original sin which seems to manifest itself in 'a disposition to evil' as well as in 'natural tempers'. These 'dispositions' and 'tempers' should be altered if possible by education; but the tone of her utterances suggest that this might not be possible.

Is it not a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weaknesses may, perhaps, want some correction, rather than as beings who bring into the world *a corrupt nature, and evil dispositions, which it should be the great end of education to rectify?*  
(Strictures p. 47) (my italics)

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1. The Good French Governess in Maria Edgeworth's Tales and Novels, 18 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), III, p.71.
  2. The Novels and Journals of Fanny Burney, p. 77.

Wollstonecraft, who did not share More's views on original sin, is equally certain that early education is the most important agent in forming a personality, but is equally slippery in her use of words describing the origins of personality, - the raw material or 'given' factors. In Thoughts on Education of Daughters she devotes a chapter to 'The Temper':

The forming of the temper ought to be the continual thought, and the first task of a parent or teacher. For to speak moderately, half the miseries of life arise from peevishness, or a tyrannical domineering temper. The tender, who are so by nature, or those whom religion has moulded with so heavenly a *disposition*, give way for the sake of peace - ...' (my italics)

It is not surprising therefore that a novelist, even one like Maria Edgeworth who was also a very active polemicist, would be driven to the use of the commonsense, imprecise terms available for speaking of these matters. In Belinda Edgeworth uses 'innate' on one occasion in a manner which suggests Johnson's dictionary definition. (Both Johnson and the OED give definitions of 'innate' which cluster round a central idea of 'given/inborn/not the result of later additions').<sup>2</sup>

Mr Vincent is 'confident rather of his innate than acquired

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1. The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft in 7 volumes, eds. Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler, (London: William Pickering, 1989), IV, 23.

2. The adjectival examples in both these dictionaries illustrate this kind of usage. Interestingly they do not reflect the peculiar usage to be found in Miss Betsy Thoughtless, 1751: 'The innate rage which, during the whole time he had been talking, swelled her breast almost to bursting...' (IV, v, 463). 'It is certain indeed, the yet unsubdued vanity of this young lady made her feel so much innate satisfaction in the admiration their



virtue' (II, 271) but in this instance the use is qualified by its context in a novel which is disputing the existence of such 'innate' moral virtues, and may be read as Mr Vincent's delusion. When Edgeworth's polemical concerns dominate, as they do at times in Patronage (written to promote the views expressed in Professional Education), she cannot avoid the imprecision which must arise when the author is not able continually to qualify or explicate her usage.

We are, for example, told in volume one of Patronage of the younger Percy daughter, Rosamond:

Prudence had not, ...been a part of Rosamond's character in childhood; but, in the course of her education, a considerable portion of it had been infused by a very careful and skilful hand. Perhaps it had never completely assimilated with the original composition. (pp. 120-21)

We are told throughout the novel that Rosamond's learned prudence is just sufficient, particularly as her education has disposed her to reflect on her own and others' behaviour. The main test of her prudence arises during the period in which her marriage to Mr Temple is delayed. Of her behaviour at this time, the following claim is made:

Rosamond was rewarded by seeing the happiness of the man she loved, and hearing him declare that he owed it to her prudence.

'Rosamond's prudence!' - Who ever expected to hear this?' Mr Percy exclaimed. 'And yet the praise is just. So, henceforward, none need ever despair of *grafting* prudence

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noble visitor had expressed of her person and accomplishments,...' (IV, xiii, 502).

(It is not the 'vanity' which is 'innate', but the emergent feeling of 'satisfaction').

upon generosity of disposition and vivacity of temper.'  
(Patronage, III, xliii, 153-54) (my italics)

It seems that in this novel Edgeworth is isolating 'prudence' as a learned or at least a teachable phenomenon. However, there are other characters who are said have this prudence naturally: whether this be the result of early excitation or hereditary luck, is not a question Edgeworth feels inclined, or in a novel can afford, to clarify. For those who have not read Practical Education, Professional Education or Madame de Fleury the language of grafting, and indeed this whole episode, may - given the theme of the novel - seem to raise untoward questions about hereditary factors and the effect of luck on moral judgement.

The characters of Rosamond, Miss Hauton and Buckhurst Falconer give the general impression that sensibility is prior to education and therefore very probably inherited. Edgeworth seems to have realised that she could have started dangerous speculation, for in volume three, she brings the question out into the open in order to dismiss it in a parenthesis as interesting but futile.

Speaking of Rosamond and her husband's intended visit to Lord Oldborough, Mr Percy says,

'Though I am her father, I may venture to say that Rosamond's sprightliness is so mixed with solid information and good sense that her society will become agreeable to your lordship.'

Lord Oldborough replies:

'I shall rejoice to see Mrs Temple here. As the daughter of one friend, and the wife of another, she has a double claim to my regard. And (*to say nothing of hereditary genius or dispositions - in which you do not believe, and I do*), there can be no doubt that the society of a lady, educated

as your daughter has been, must suit my taste.'  
(III, xliv, 167) (my italics)

Some critical readings attempt to place a novelist in the same camp as a philosopher:

Locke ... [and] Jane Austen come down on the side of nurture in the controversy between environment (meaning education) and genetic inheritance.

(Devlin, Jane Austen and Education, p. 18)

But while Locke in Some Thoughts Concerning Education, was taking part in such a controversy, Jane Austen was not; and even Maria Edgeworth, who tried to propagate her ideas in a novel, was compelled to use imprecise terminology and to duck out of this controversy.

A second critic, Jocelyn Harris in her book, Jane Austen's Art of Memory, also invokes Locke as her central authority for determining the intentions of both Richardson and Jane Austen as they centre on the question of upbringing.

'Northanger Abbey is ... a close realisation of ideas from Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, while Catherine's education derives from his influential thesis' - [Some Thoughts Concerning Education] (Harris, p. 1). She claims that the account of Catherine's upbringing in the early pages of the novel can be matched point by point with Locke's recommendation in his treatise: even, her 'busy mother's tolerant neglect, together with her own determined choices make up, in fact an educational programme exactly like that prescribed by Locke' (p. 3). The efficacy and inappropriateness of Henry Tilney's, 'tutorial methods' can also be matched with Locke's comments, as can the more benign



methods of Eleanor Tilney. Catherine's misuse of ideas obtained from her reading illustrate Locke's warnings about 'taking a Liberty in forming complex ideas'. The whole experience of visiting Bath and Northanger can be interpreted as performing the function of Locke's recommended Grand Tour which should 'crown a pupil's wisdom' (p. 9).

Jocelyn Harris also reflects Locke's ambiguous attitude to inherited dispositions when she aligns Catherine's 'innate principle of general integrity', with those dispositions which Locke allows, even while denying 'innate ideas'. So, Catherine is born with, 'general integrity, but ... the tabula rasa of her mind lays her open to ambush' (p. 15).

It is a plausible, and in its own terms a consistent reading. But the point being made throughout this thesis still stands: the better the novelist at presenting her characters in depth, the more the reader is tempted or stimulated to speculate about origins and causes, and the more, as in experienced life, he is faced with situations which are puzzlingly under-determined. With Catherine Morland, as with Susan Price, the influences of family and mentors do not fully explain how she comes to be what she is during and at the end of the novel; or, at least, as always, they are relatively adequate to explain her faults and bêtises, but not her partial insights into Henry Tilney's character, or her eventual unscathed, even triumphant, escape from the effects of her innocence and ignorance. A basic 'general integrity' which may be an inherited characteristic of some people or a disposition common to all humanity, to be developed or ruined by education, seems to be required to bear more weight than it can stand.

In a later chapter, Harris asserts that, 'Educational determinism controls both Sir Charles Grandison and Mansfield Park' (p. 145). It has already been suggested above, that educational determinism does not provide an adequate reading of Mansfield Park. Harris, like Devlin, does not question the role given to mentors in the narrative. As a consequence, the problematic episode at Portsmouth is read in the following manner: 'Susan and Fanny' have 'natural genius' on which the forces of formal learning, and more importantly, example, exert their influence. In this way, Susan is preserved in the midst of negligence and error by the 'natural light of a mind which could so early distinguish justly'... and 'improved by her teacher Fanny, and a course of regular reading from the library' (Harris, p. 146). Fanny's role as mentor to Susan, is, inadvertently weakened, by the next piece of evidence Harris offers to support her thesis. Richardson says in Sir Charles Grandison,

that from seven to fourteen ... the foundations of all female goodness are to be laid. ... Jane Austen's message is essentially the same as Richardson's. All that happens to her characters may be ascribed to education. (p. 145)

Susan is already fourteen when Fanny arrives for her six-week stay in Portsmouth, so we must infer that Susan's 'foundations' have already been 'laid'. It is noticeable too that Jane Austen is quite willing to move the age at which characters become 'fixed' as the convenience of her story requires; thus in the case of Lydia Bennet, Elizabeth warns her father that Lydia's character will, by the age of sixteen be 'fixed'.

Harris's argument is perhaps more convincing in the case of Sir

Charles Grandison. Plenty of evidence, both textual and external, can be found to show that Richardson was familiar with Locke's, Some Thoughts Concerning Education. Yet some of Harris's assertions are still questionable. For example, in considering the upbringing of the Grandison sisters, this determinist claim is made: Caroline, the eldest, having spent 'more time' under her mother's tutelary influence has been 'impressed with enough virtue to last. Charlotte's 'flightiness', on the other hand, is seen to result from 'her mother's early death' (p. 144). This seems a reductive reading, and perhaps does not do justice to a well-written novel in which the characters give rise to livelier moral speculation than is suggested here. Could it not be claimed, for example, that Charlotte's 'flightiness' is part of a genetic inheritance from her father? Her father's 'penetrating wit' and strong 'spirit' were, we are given to understand, distinctive aspects of his personality. The following illustrations could support the view that Charlotte and Sir Thomas Grandison shared hereditary traits. Sir Charles tells Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, Mr Jordan and Mr Merceda, that his 'father was a man of spirit' (II, iv, 260). Later, in the novel, Sir Charles in defending his father's behaviour to Lord W, says, 'My father, who saw very far into other men; but was sometimes led, by his wit, into saying a severe thing; ...' (III, ix, 43).

References to Charlotte's 'vivacity', 'brilliance of spirit/temper' and 'liveliness' abound in the text. Sir Charles, while admiring these aspects of his sister, nevertheless seems to fear that, unless controlled, they may lead to her becoming 'severe' like her father. As the following conversation shows, he



is anxious about the possibly damaging effects these traits might have in her future marriage (to Lord G). Charlotte claims that her 'brilliancy of temper' is an inherent part of herself: 'It is *constitution*, you know, brother; and she cannot easily cure it:' Sir Charles' replies,

I love you for the pretty playfulness, on serious subjects, with which you puzzle yourself, and bewilder me: ..... You'll tell the man, in courtship, I hope, that all this liveliness is 'constitution', and 'that you know not how to cure it.' (III, xvii, 99-100)

A comment made by Sir Charles to Charlotte concerning her over-lively wit, earlier in this volume, echoes what he says about his father to Lord W: 'content yourself now-and-then to make him [your future husband] start, by the lancet-like delicacy of your wit, without going deeper than the skin' (III, xvii, 94). Harris's further suggestion, that, 'Sir Charles has been taught on a Lockean model by his mother' (p. 148), is on one level obviously true. Sir Charles himself says:

My mother was an excellent woman: She had instilled into my earliest youth, almost from infancy, notions of moral rectitude, and the first principles of Christianity; ... She frequently enforced upon me an observation of Mr Locke's, ...' (II, iv, 261)

But Harris overstates the case when she adds that it is this alone 'which allowed Sir Charles to resist so easily the temptations of the Grand Tour' (p. 148), since other areas of the narrative are ignored. How, for example, are we to account for what is said of Dr Bartlet's influence during this period?

We could not but congratulate the Doctor on having so considerable a hand in cultivating his innate good principles, (as Sir Charles always, Lord L. said, was delighted to own)

at so critical a time of life, as that was, in which they became acquainted. (III, xii, 61)

Austen's relative lack of interest in education, compared for example with Maria Edgeworth, allowed her to use commonsense shorthand in delineating characters, particularly minor characters. The same kind of usage is also found in Burney and Richardson. This commonsense usage usually has an environmentalist flavour, since early environment is, in these unreflecting contexts, almost always cited as the cause of a character's later failure. These 'explanations' of behaviour remain acceptable however precisely because they are not explanations which are developed or sustained in the course of the narrative. In such a context it seems inappropriate to cite Locke or indeed to try to offer a philosophical or quasi-philosophical account for such an environmentalist position. In the novels under consideration the common factor of all the commonsense judgements is that characters have been given too much freedom too early. Thus, Sir Charles Grandison compares his mother with her brother:

we see in my mother, and in her brother, how habitual wickedness debases and how habitual goodness exalts, the human mind. In their youth they were supposed nearer an equality in their understanding and attainments, than in their maturity, when occasion called out into action their respective talents. But perhaps the brother was not the better man for the uninterrupted prosperity that attended him, and for having never met with check or controul; (III, x, 48)

Mr Lorimer, Dr Bartlett's incorrigible pupil, was 'over-indulged' by his mother, who, 'ruined the morals of her child (never suffering him to be corrected or chidden, were his enormities ever

so flagrant)' (II, xxxvi, 462).

Characters can be found from Burney's novels who fit into this mould. Mrs Delvile (Cecilia) for example, talks about the upbringing of Honoria Pemberton.

'... how wild, how careless, how incorrigible she is! she lost her mother early; and the Duke, who idolizes her, and who, marrying very late, is already an old man, she rules entirely; with him, and a supple governess, who has neither courage to oppose her, nor heart to wish well but to her own interest, she has lived almost wholly'. (III, viii, 497)

Similar explanations are given in The Wanderer for the behaviour of Mrs Ireton's nephew, Loddard (III, Liii, 495) and for the Miss Crawleys (II, xxiv, 231). This kind of explanation, or even excuse, for character deficiencies is to be found throughout Jane Austen's novels. Elinor suggests Willoughby's moral failure is due to too much early independence; Frank Churchill appears to have absorbed the selfish habits of Mrs Churchill's household; Wickham's failures are in part at least put down to the influence of his spendthrift mother; Lydia Bennet's mother is deemed culpable in over-indulging her daughter.

Devlin and Harris provide subtle and to a great extent convincing, readings which, however, on the question of upbringing, raise more questions than are answered. This I suggest will always be the case where we are encouraged to explore how characters are supposed to have become as they are. This is not because there can never be determinate readings of texts (particularly if that is taken to mean that no one reading is better than another), but because there can never be determinate



readings of human character. The more helpful question to be asked of a realistic novelist is whether we can believe in her characters.

That Jane Austen's characters have, or give the illusion of having a life of their own is due to many aspects of her skill as a novelist. Some are negative aspects; they depend on artistic tact in avoiding the jarring discrepancies of narrative and characterisation of other novelists who invite comparison with her. Other aspects are more positive, and the most obvious of these is her power of conveying, or giving the impression of, speech. The particular nature of this power (which was not, for example, like Fanny Burney's in hitting-off idiolects of ill-educated or lower-class characters) is explored in the next chapter. But the point may be made more generally and briefly at this stage that complex characters will differ from static or one-dimensional characters in being heard in a variety of roles, some of which, in Jane Austen's novels, seem deliberately to subvert the role in which we may at first expect to hear them.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**SPEECH AND CHARACTER IN JANE AUSTEN**

Speech plays a major role in character presentation, ... dialogue, and various substitutes for dialogue, play a very important part in [Pride and Prejudice] narrative technique.

Jane Austen uses dialogue not as an occasional diversion but as a major resource for conducting the business of her fiction. Moreover, it is often of unprecedented realism; (though the concept of realism, as applied to literary dialogue, needs to be handled with caution, ) ...'

There is a profound congruity between the ways in which we apprehend characters in literature, ... and people of whom we have what we think of as direct knowledge in life. ... even the clues that we take in and use to construct an image of a person are virtually identical in literature and life.<sup>2</sup>

These citations from Norman Pages's well known book on Jane Austen's language, and from Baruch Hochman, introduce the development of a theme which has been running through the first six chapters of this thesis: that Jane Austen's psychological realism ensures that her characters' roles in driving the narratives are not blurred or distorted by their being too readily recognisable as vehicles for views and attitudes contributing to polemical debate. Her works in total have led to Jane Austen's being termed, quite justifiably, 'A great British Moralists'<sup>3</sup>; yet there are no overt polemics to distort her narratives. As we have seen, this is not to say that Jane Austen is always consistent when 'difficult' subjects such as education, upbringing,

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1. Norman Page, The Language of Jane Austen, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp. 25, & 115.

2. Baruch Hochman, Character in Literature, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 36. (cited by Gene Koppel, The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels, p. 47).

3. Philip Drew, 'Jane Austen and Bishop Butler', p. 149.



corrigibility and blameworthiness arise in her novels; but that most difficult questions arising from these issues are, as often in experienced life, held in abeyance. The thesis is not denying that many of Jane Austen's novel-writing contemporaries also produced memorable characters, nor that some of them wrote powerful scenes beyond her scope; but it is suggesting that she achieved overall a depth of psychological realism beyond theirs. I do not believe this judgement to be the result of social conditioning, since it can be supported by evidence of her use of new, or newly-developed, techniques for evoking speech in writing. John A. Dussinger suggests that the greater realism I am referring to arises from Austen's particular use of 'speech-based prose':

Rather than imitate regional and class dialect as in Scott's novels, Jane Austen's speech-based prose does something more subtle in its 'selection of the language really used by men': it incorporates ... every day discourse with a narrative economy ...<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will examine some of the forms of this 'psychological realism'.

First, however, I believe it is necessary to anticipate and confront the criticism that what I have asserted by implication to be the result of a positive artistic achievement is mere sleight of hand; a display of literary skills which overcomes the critical faculties of a bourgeois readership because that readership has been conditioned to respond too easily to detectable tricks of the

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1. 'The Language of Real Feeling: Internal Speech in Jane Austen's Novels', The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century, ed. R. W. Uphaus, (Missisipi: Colleagues Press, 1989), p. 97.

trade. This kind of criticism can be seen in a very challenging form in Lennard J. Davis's Resisting Novels.

Davis believes that novels should be 'resisted' for a variety of reasons all concerned with the fact that they are ideological constructs contributing to social indoctrination.

... if we understand that all characters in novels are in some profound sense 'one-dimensional', then we can penetrate the mythology surrounding [them] ...'

He cites Mr Bennet from Pride and Prejudice as an example of a character whom the reader mistakenly takes to be 'complex'. He suggests it would be easy to, 'list the rules, as it were, by which he is constructed' (p. 117). He also uses the term 'easy' (albeit in scare-quotes) when he describes how, 'to make a set of rules about a character appear complex'. What makes it all 'easy' is that the reader does most of the work; for the reader is conditioned by previous experiences of 'character' in novels to have, 'faith that personality is, first, understandable and, second, capable of rational change' (p. 119). All Jane Austen had to do was to provide a few lines of dialogue to establish Mr Bennet as a character; for the reader is also conditioned to share with Jane Austen the faith '[in] the possibility of encapsulating a character' (p. 115):

In any situation with his wife he will be sarcastic and superior. He will be given the opportunity of turning the occasional sharp phrase. He will like Elizabeth and be

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1. Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction, (New York, London: Methuen, 1987), p. 117.

superior to his other daughters, ... The rest of his character will be outside the scope of the novel. (p. 117)

To make this simple construct from a few lines of narrative and dialogue into a 'complex character', Austen had merely to add, 'what Aristotle in his Poetics called "recognition"' (p. 118). In this case the few lines after, 'Who should suffer but myself?'

With this moment of recognition, Mr Bennet will become a better father, a better husband, a better person, and most of all a complex character. (p. 119)

Clearly one cannot dispute Davis's statement that Mr Bennet's character is established and developed in a relatively few lines and that the reader's contribution is important. Davis is also right to remind us that characters and novels are 'in some profound sense one-dimensional', if by that he means that they are readers' constructs in the context of social codes shared between authors and readers. What is disputable is the nature of the interaction between author and reader, even the nature of the 'conditioning', if that term is insisted upon.

Another critic, John Burrows (Computation into Criticism), claims that his research reveals the need to 'transcend and refine' the concept of 'social conditioning' as an explanation of readers' responses to a novelists' characters (p. 94). His research employs statistical evidence of the patterns of usage of the thirty most common words in the language (often considered to be 'grammatical' rather than 'lexical' words) to test how far the idiolects of Jane Austen's characters remain identifiable. He originally conceived of this as 'testing to destruction' but found that, 'Jane Austen's language has withstood a most unreasonable



trial and shown an astonishing tensile strength' (p. 105). What he discovered was that 'the correlation measures show that for each of Jane Austen's major characters, the frequency patterning of the very common words assumes a distinctive and identifiable shape' (p. 113).

From the point of view of my argument, this research seems to show that the 'social conditioning' that makes readers judge that Jane Austen's characters are consistently distinguishable, is not primarily a matter of what Burrows calls 'gross and long lasting social influences' (p. 94), but of interpretive strategies which are inherent in native speaker usage. They are the strategies by which throughout our lives we cope with situations ranging from understanding a lyric poem, a tabloid headline, a hint or a joke. These interpretive strategies, like other forms of language competence, work effectively on surprisingly small inputs.

While, however, Burrows' evidence is 'utterly at variance with the assertion, ... that "character" itself is an abstraction, imposed by the bourgeois reader (intent on shoring up his own precious sense of individuality) on a more or less reluctant text' (p. 94), he concedes that, 'a literary character ... is a construct of the words he speaks and the things he does', and that 'whole personalities are not the stuff of literature' (p. 93). Readers therefore do contribute a great deal themselves to these 'constructs'. And it is Davis's main focus of criticism that readers contribute excessively in a way, he implies, that is utterly different to what goes on in 'real' speech. Thus, Davis criticizes 'spoken prose' in novels because it differs from real

speech in so many linguistically definable ways' that 'it seems astounding that anyone would consider dialogue to be a rough mimesis of speech' (p. 181). Spoken prose for example does not generally indicate variations from a standardised intonation, or include non-grammatical pauses, stuttering, hesitations or arbitrary silences; nor does it refer very much to accompanying body-language. Yet, by exploiting our failure to recognise these differences, novelists

... can offer the reader, as silent conversationalists, the illusion of a social relation without the attendant anxiety and responsibility of that relation. ... Readers become specialized receivers of commodified conversations. ... [it is] a feature of social alienation since readers are separated from the means of language production and from the linguistic market place of free interaction. (pp. 180-81)

But this is to put upon the novelists a responsibility, or 'blame', which we should all share. For in our ordinary interchanges we frequently report, as did our ancestors long before the birth of the novel, what other people have said, and in doing so, we filter out or transform, except where they are relevant, a great many of the sounds and gestures which we have actually heard or seen. We do this out of a classless and intuitive sense of decorum: the process belongs to mother-tongue usage and is developed by that usage. In most cases only an academic linguist could describe in detail what items or processes are filtered out or amended, and, without the use of a

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1. Davis sets out in full, deriving his items from Abercrombie's, Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics, (Oxford: OUP, 1965), 13 ways in which 'spoken prose' differs from 'real speech'. Davis, p. 181.

tape-recorder, even a linguistician would be unable to reproduce them in their entirety. '

Perhaps Davis is on firmer ground in allocating 'blame' to novelists for their failure to handle group linguistic behaviour. In his list of differences between spoken prose and conversation he includes the failure of spoken prose to reflect the difficulties of finding the right opportunity to contribute to, or intervene in, a conversation. It is certainly true that this skill may not develop naturally and that a severe sense of social alienation can be felt by people who find it difficult to negotiate openings and closings or turn-taking. It is also true that in novels (and even more in plays) these aspects of group linguistic behaviour are rarely exemplified.

Nevertheless, the effects of transforming actual speech in order to make it more acceptable to, say, Shakespeare's audience or to Jane Austen's or Dostoyevsky's contemporary readers, must have resulted in language which still had a clear, if distant, relationship to actual speech. For example, Elizabethan speakers who reported an incident or carried a message certainly did not speak in blank verse, but what they said, how they thought of themselves as speakers in that context, must have been more like Mountjoy speaking to King Henry the Fifth than would be the delivery of twentieth-century English speakers in similar contexts. In the same way Dostoyevsky's readers must already have

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1. See David Crystal and Derek Davy, Investigating English Style: (London, Harlow: Longmans, 1969), 'The Language of Conversation', pp. 95-123.



had a greater tolerance for long, self-excoriating monologues than we have; and Jane Austen's readers in their own lives were probably more protected from the fears and frustrations of negotiating their contributions to conversations than we are, owing to their greater willingness and need to practise a measure of decorum in social intercourse. If Jane Austen's and the other novelists' conventions are cultural constructs rather than mimetic reflections of 'real life' (Davis, p. 179), they are still parasitic on 'real life'; so that, if novelists' conventions contribute to social alienation, it is because reasons for social alienation already exist. It is life rather than novels that needs to be 'resisted'.

Davis is not primarily concerned with literary criticism and certainly not with any finely discriminated account of Jane Austen's use of dialogue. He uses examples from Pride and Prejudice and a reference to Fanny Price in Mansfield Park, merely to illustrate what he means by the 'new, linguistic elect'.

Readers of the novel [Pride and Prejudice] are made to feel, by a kind of pride of association, that they belong to [those who are bright in conversation] even if in reality they are not facile speakers. (ibid., p. 187)

There is obviously some truth in this: we do feel we belong to the same charmed circle as Emma and Mr Knightley and we recognize their (and our) superiority to Miss Bates and Mrs Elton; we are impelled to side with the Elizabeths of the world against the Mrs Bennets or the Mr Collinses. Indeed Jane Austen was herself famously aware of the danger of allowing the claims of integrity and moral worth to be distorted by the brilliance of wit and

epigrammaticism.' Yet working, as she had to, within the conventions whose limitations Davis so vigorously denounces, she was able to make social and moral discriminations of the very kind which Davis claims to be impossible for a novelist.

The complex rituals of beginning, continuing, and ending are eliminated by the constraints of the form. ... the contentious and anxiety-producing aspect of being in a conversation is eliminated, rendering what might be considered a somewhat stressful, ... social interaction pleasant, easy, and uncomplicated. (Davis, p. 179)

But it is just this sense of stress and anxiety which Jane Austen conveys as affecting both Fanny Price and Anne Elliot (to say nothing of Miss Bates and Harriet Smith), and as determining their actions and developments. Davis in effect admits the exception of Fanny Price, but claims that she is allowed to be 'likeable', and therefore to have some moral leverage on the reader, only because 'her silence is balanced by authorial intrusions ... through the use of free indirect discourse'. It seems that Jane Austen can't win: FID is a kind of cheating, 'the re-creation of a kind of conversation that does not require interactivity'.

It will be the contention of chapter 7 below that not only does FID demand 'interactivity' but that the kind of interpretive activity it encourages in its most developed forms goes some way to explaining why Jane Austen achieves a deeper level of psychological realism.

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1. Letter to Cassandra, February 4th, 1813, Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others, ed. & collect. R. W. Chapman, pp. 299-300.

## 1. Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence

Julia Bertram had been taught, or rather, brought up, to be polite. 'The politeness which she had been brought up to practise as a duty made it impossible for her to escape ...' However, 'that higher species of self command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right': these qualities had 'not formed any essential part of her education' (p. 119).

The textual evidence of Jane Austen's novels leaves us unconvinced about whether an apprehension of 'the principle of right' could have been 'an essential part' of the education of any of her characters; nor are we generally entirely clear what part is played by natural attributes such as Fanny Price's 'innate delicacy' and Susan Price's 'natural taste'.

However, in the narrower context of linguistic competence, it is easier to accept that, and to some extent imagine how, upbringing may have contributed. For example one can speculate that Julia Bertram's education in the duty of politeness must have included a linguistic element, although, within great houses like Mansfield Park, the skills involved in practising linguistic decorum would, we can assume, generally be 'caught' rather than 'taught'. On the other hand, Henry Tilney certainly uses direct instruction to try to improve Catherine Morland's choice of vocabulary (pp. 108-12). It would also be reasonable to speculate that Fanny Price would not have hesitated to comment on Susan's usage and abuse of language; or that, if Mr Bennet had been less irresponsible, he could have taught his daughter Kitty to be less linguistically



gauche, even if he could not have had any effect on her, or her sister Lydia's, apprehension of 'the principle of right'.

Jan Fergus, in Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel, concludes that, 'the ways in which [Jane Austen] manipulates the perceptions, judgement and feelings of her readers' are convincing and absorbing because they are

so close to the ordinary concerns of daily life: forming impressions of people, modulating them as closer relationships are established, and producing those adjustments and compromises between the pressures and demands of others' personalities and one's own which are required to sustain affection and intimacy in the relations one already has.  
(p. 149)

Jane Austen needed to develop techniques capable of generating the 'absorbing' conversations of convincing characters while also allowing her to incorporate her own ironic comments and manifest her own value system.

The author's difficulties may be approached by considering the attempt in our own times to distinguish between linguistic competence and communicative competence.' Linguistic competence refers to the ability to select the right vocabulary and operate the right syntactical and phonological rules. 'Right' in this context may mean sufficiently to be accepted as a fellow speaker of an English dialect, or sufficiently to say what you want to say and be understood in simple social situations. Communicative

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1. J. S. Bruner, 'Language as an Instrument of Thought', The Problems of Language and Learning, ed. Alan Davies, (London: Heineman Educational Books Ltd., 1975), p. 72.  
The term 'communicative competence' as distinguished from 'linguistic competence' was used first by Del Hymes.

competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in a great variety of contexts, for example, to be able to make the appropriate contributions to, or 'moves' in, conversations or 'discourses'. The word 'competence' seems to imply that there are identifiable and teachable skills involved. Yet, even when the distinction is set out as crudely as this, it is easy to see that we are concerned with a spectrum of skills or competencies, and that these are not all teachable. At one end there are teachable or catchable skills, such as not confusing personal pronouns, or not using an assertive intonation when you intend to ask a question; and at the other, the kinds of discernment shown in deciding whether a tactful silence or a witty remark would be more effective in taking the heat out of an emotionally charged situation.

At this latter end of the spectrum degrees of competence will depend on 'personality' or 'character'; and it would be a rash latter-day sophist or jesuit who claimed that he could prescribe the linguistic elements of an upbringing which would guarantee tact and discernment. Indeed the dilemma is that the more communicative competence is reduced to teachable skills, the less necessary connection it will have with civilised virtues such as compassion and magnanimity, or, in Jane Austen's terms, with 'sensibility', 'delicacy' and 'elegance'. Leland E. Warren in a recently published essay - 'The Conscious Speakers', makes a similar point in relation to 'conversation and sensibility': it is possible to accept 'an art of conversation' which could be taught, but not an 'art of sensibility',

... it would appear that we are dealing, on the one hand with

a quality that is more or less innate and ... with a skill or art that can to some extent be learned or improved. ' 1

Jane Austen had probably read at least one author, Lord Chesterfield, who attempted to give detailed advice to both his son Philip and to his godson on achieving what he perceived as essential communicative competence. Much of what he said may have seemed sound advice, although the general context in which the advice was given, as well as some of the means for making one's way in the world of fashion, must have appalled Jane Austen.

Chesterfield's advice is given in the general context of the need to be 'amiable'<sup>2</sup>

I shall, ... write you a series of letters ... upon the *duty*, the utility, and *means* of pleasing - that is, of being what the French call *aimable*; ... Remember this, ... that whoever is not *aimable*, is in truth *nobody at all* with regard to the general intercourse of life, ...

The Earl constantly reiterates the maxim - 'il volto sciolto, i pensieri stretti' - (An open countenance and close thoughts, p. 298); a maxim whose power was understood by Jane Austen, as she shows with Frank Churchill, Willoughby, Mr Elliot, but certainly not favoured by her. On the other hand, some of the Earl's further expansion of the concept of discretion might have appealed

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1. Sensibility in Transition, (London, Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), p. 28.

2. Letters to His Son and Others, introduced by Robert K. Root, (London, New York: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1929), p. 287.

F. W. Bradbrook claims that there is a great deal of indirect evidence in the novels to suggest that Jane Austen 'was acquainted with Lord Chesterfield's, Letters to His Son'. Notes and Queries, (February 1958), p. 80.



to her:

Discretion will teach you to have particular attention to your *moeurs*, which we have no one word in our language to express exactly. *Morals* are too much, *manners* too little. *Decency* comes nearest to it, though rather short of it. Cicero's word *decorum* is properly the thing; and I see no reason why that expressive word should not be adopted and naturalized in our language, ... (pp. 297-98)

Chesterfield's more detailed advice about pleasing are, like most attempts to teach communicative competence, negative in tone - the avoidance of common errors. For example,

A minute attention is also necessary to time, place and character; a *bon mot* in one company is not so in another, but, on the contrary, may prove offensive. Never joke with those whom you observe at the time pensive and grave; and, on the other hand, do not preach and moralise in a company full of mirth and gaiety. Many people come into a company full of what they intend to say in it themselves, without the least regard to others; and thus charged up to the muzzle are resolved to let it off at any rate. (p. 297)

These injunctions sound sensible but, like much advice of this type, are of little use except to confirm the practices of those who, through whatever conjunction of luck and judgement, have already become competent communicators. We know that this, and a great deal more in the same vein, had little effect on either the Earl's son or godson; and it would be difficult to defend a reading of Jane Austen's novels which suggested that, for example, John Thorpe, Mrs Allen, or Mr Collins were communicatively incompetent because their upbringing had not included this sort of instruction.

In the novels which Jane Austen wrote and in those which she is known to have read, linguistic competence is the norm and linguistic incompetence usually the mark of eccentric or burlesque

characters. Jane Austen herself does not portray or try to 'hit off' characters whose dialects are regional, or for whom English is a foreign and not well-learnt language. We can assume this to be a deliberate choice on her part, since she had most probably read Fanny Burney's Evelina and would have been able to judge the comic effects of Madame Duval.

'Here, my dears, - here's a relation you little thought of; but you must know my poor daughter Caroline had this child after she run away from me, - though I never knew nothing of it, not I, ...''

The double negative and incorrect past tense are intended to indicate linguistic incompetence since they were not in the acceptable dialectical variations of the upper classes.<sup>2</sup> However, although here Madame Duval may have laid herself open to Captain Mirvan's charge of 'speaking gibberish', her basic communicative powers are usually quite effective. In fact, only Monsieur du Bois, her companion who has no English at all, is shown to be totally at a loss: so incompetent as to 'make a profound bow' when the Captain informs him, 'Do you know, Monsieur, that you're the first Frenchman I ever let come into my house?' (Evelina, I, 56).

In practice, it becomes very difficult to maintain a clear distinction between linguistic and communicative competence once one moves from the un-English speech of foreign learners to the 'inappropriate' or 'unacceptable' dialects of native speakers.

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1. Evelina, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 1988), I, p. 68.

2. For example, Lady Beauchamp to Sir Charles: 'Was you ever, Sir Charles ...' Sir Charles Grandison, IV, p. 277.

There is, for example, the phenomenon of lower class characters deliberately choosing to maintain non-standard dialect in order to communicate more effectively. That linguistic incompetence or unorthodoxy does not entail communicative incompetence is exemplified, according to Janet Egleston Dunleavy, by Thady Quirk in Maria Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent.<sup>1</sup> While Jane Austen must have been aware of this possibility, it is not one she chose to exploit; indeed she avoids illustrating the language of a 'lower class' character reputed to be surprisingly competent. The 'sensible' Robert Martin is said to have written a 'very good letter', but the author gives no example either of his written language or idiolect. Jane Austen usually indicates departures from the linguistic norms she has established by telling details. All her speaking characters, are shown as capable of using the lexis, syntax and pronunciation of standard English and whatever was the 'received pronunciation' of the time: we are to assume that even the idiolects of John and Isabella Thorpe did not deviate from this sufficiently to deny them entrée to respectable society in Bath.

In the case of Sir John Middleton, we are given a respected member of society who has clearly felt no need to rely on more than a limited range of stock phrases and syntactical patterns. These limitations could in theory lead him to communicative

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1. Thady Quirk is in control of all interchanges between himself and his various masters; hence the irony - an irony which Dunleavy claims has been missed by readers who consider Castle Rackrent to be merely an exercise in the comic hitting-off of an outlandish dialect. 'Maria Edgeworth and the Novel of Manners', Reading and Writing Women's Lives, pp. 53-55.



incompetence, but we are shown him as being all too effective in dealing with Marianne Dashwood:

'That is an expression, Sir John,' said Marianne warmly, 'which I particularly dislike. I abhor every common-place phrase by which wit is intended; and "setting one's cap at a man, or making a conquest," are the most odious of all. Their tendency is gross and illiberal; and if their construction could ever be deemed clever, time has long ago destroyed all its ingenuity.'

Sir John did not much understand this reproof; but he laughed as heartily as if he did, and then replied, - 'Aye, you will make conquests enough, I dare say, one way or other. Poor Brandon! he is quite smitten already, and he is very well worth setting your cap at, I can tell you, in spite of all this tumbling about and spraining of ancles.' (p. 45)

Lady Bertram's relative linguistic incompetence is shown by an attenuated range of speech patterns to mark her deliberately attenuated pattern of life. As part of a long-term strategy this might be said to be communicatively effective, although it can be assumed that when on occasion she betrays a monstrous selfishness she was not aware of doing so and was to that extent communicatively incompetent or lacking in sensibility. Lady Bertram's thinly expressed, empty-headed response to Mr Rushworth's enthusiasm to have Sotherton drastically improved:

'Mr Rushworth, ... if I were you I would have a very pretty shrubbery. One likes to get out in a shrubbery in fine weather.' (p. 55)

contributes nothing to the conversation, but is less incompetent than Fanny Price's attempt to express her genuinely deep feelings by a piece of misplaced rhetoric:

'Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does not it make you think of Cowper? "Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited."' (p. 56)

John Thorpe's linguistic habits are indicated, as are his sister Isabella's, by a marked reliance on inappropriate intensifiers and insulting epithets,

'the old devil of a coachmaker was such an eternity finding out a thing to fit to be got into, and now it is ten thousand to one, but they break down before we are out of the street'.  
(p. 61)

Yet this can be seen as the dialect of 'a rattle' - a relatively acceptable sub-dialect of the accepted standard dialect of Bath society in general. His very real social inadequacies are more appropriately categorised as communicative rather than linguistic incompetence, in that they arise from a defective personality making defective social judgements. He is, for example, a prime example of what Lord Chesterfield refers to as 'people who come into a company full of what they intend to say in it themselves, without the least regard to others.' However, he also shows some interesting manifestations of linguistic incompetence which, paradoxically, may elicit some sympathy from the reader.

'That is kind of you, however - kind and good natured. - I shall not forget it in a hurry. - But you have more good nature and all that, than any body living I believe. A monstrous deal of good nature, and it is not only good-nature, but you have so much, so much of every thing; and then you have such - upon my soul I do not know any body like you.' (NA, p. 123)

This indication of a desperate struggle for words by someone who is obviously not used to articulating new and slightly more complex emotions, is a reasonably clear example of linguistic incompetence. However, the sadly ironical fact is that, had he been more linguistically competent, he would merely have laid bare his communicative incompetence, since, like Mr Collins, he would

have been articulating efficiently the right words to the wrong person.

It seems paradoxical to include the sardonically witty Mr Bennet among those who are shown to have a degree of linguistic incompetence. However, Howard S. Babb draws attention to the limitations of his verbal strategies - limitations which might be considered analogous to those of John Thorpe.

Indeed he responds to life as predictably as [Mrs Bennet and Lydia] do, for whatever the situation, he encounters it with a joke - and pretty much the same joke at that. The essence of his wit lies in that literalistic manner by means of which he converts whatever is said to him ... into absurdity.'

Similarly, if one wishes to add to the very few occasions on which Jane Austen gives more significance to her characters' linguistic, rather than communicative incompetence; one can cite the occasional looseness of lexis and syntax of Mary Crawford. On these occasions the author seems to be signalling the deeper faults of Mary<sup>2</sup> which are not apparent on a first, or a superficial reading, as they are not yet to Edmund Bertram. This sloppiness of syntax and lexis can be seen at times, both in Mary's manipulative speeches and also in her 'brilliant' and

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1. The Fabric of Dialogue, (USA: Ohio State University Press, 1967), p. 129.

2. Graham Hough, in his paper on Jane Austen's dialogue, cites many examples from Emma to illustrate his contention that in Austen's novels there is a linguistic style - formally correct with a 'Johnsonian cadence' - which signals authority and weight. Modifications of this style are used for various degrees of 'coloured narrative' until we arrive at loose and colloquial usage which often signals unreliability of either character or information. 'Narrative and Dialogue in Jane Austen', Critical Quarterly, XII, 1970, 201-29, pp. 208-13.



'entertaining' contributions to discourse. An example of the former can be highlighted if a comparison is drawn between speeches in which Mary Crawford and Emma Woodhouse attempt to influence characters in weaker positions than themselves. In the first, Mary reminds Fanny Price of all that her brother Henry has done for William:

'I know he must have exerted himself very much, for I know the parties he had to move. The Admiral hates trouble, and scorns asking favours; and there are so many young men's claims to be attended to in the same way, that a friendship and energy, not very determined, is easily put by. What a happy creature William must be! I wish we could see him.' (p. 364)

in the second, Emma Woodhouse is seen trying to influence her friend Harriet:

'... I would have you so firmly established in good society, as to be independent even of Hartfield and Miss Woodhouse. I want to see you permanently well connected - and to that end it will be advisable to have as few old acquaintances as may be; ...' (p. 31)

Although these are both manipulative ploys, Emma is nevertheless allowed to maintain her linguistic decorum, even if not her dignity. Similar syntactical elements of Mary Crawford's idiolect can be seen in her 'brilliant' and 'entertaining' speeches - a looseness which hints at both her attractiveness and her moral inadequacy.

'There is a beauty in every family. - It is a regular thing. Two play on the piano-forte, and one on the harp - and all sing - or would sing if they were taught - or sing all the better for not being taught - or something like it.' (p. 288)

In contrast, the obvious limitations shown in Miss Bates's idiolect may be read as a deliberate strategy on the character's

part: a kind of defence mechanism to ensure that she cannot be seen to be imposing her views where she is conscious of being socially accepted only on sufferance. At times Miss Bates may be seen as an example of the paradox that linguistically incompetent people can be more effective in conveying their meanings than the more fluent participants in a discourse.

Whereas the examples of Jane Austen's giving particular significance to incompetent linguistic performance are relatively hard to find - Anne Steele provides some examples of uneducated speech (S&S p. 123) and her sister Lucy of a poorly written letter (p. 365) - instances of communicative incompetence abound in her novels. An example can be given to illustrate precisely what Lord Chesterfield would have regarded as a culpable failure to please owing to being 'charged up to the muzzle and resolved to let it off ...' In Mansfield Park, after Sir Thomas Bertram's return from the West Indies, the garrulous Mr Yates is totally unable to realise that on the subject of the abortive theatricals, silence is the only possible linguistic choice:

... without discernment to catch Sir Thomas's meaning, or diffidence, or delicacy, or discretion enough to allow him to lead the discourse while he mingled among the others with the least obtrusiveness himself, would keep him on the topic of the theatre, would torment him with questions and remarks relative to it, and finally would make him hear the whole history of his disappointment at Ecclesford. Sir Thomas listened most politely, but found much to offend his ideas of decorum and confirm his ill opinion of Mr Yates's habits of thinking from the beginning to the end of the story; ... (p. 184).

The ingredients of communicative incompetence are set out fully in the first sentence - a lack of intelligence or judgement and a lack of social awareness or sensibility.

Perhaps the most famous example of a lack of communicative competence in the whole of English literature is to be found in Mr Collins's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet. What makes it particularly and horrifyingly comic is that Mr Collins is shown to be linguistically very competent, even polished. One may agree with Howard Babb (op. cit., 279) in finding his 'overly formal rhetoric, constant polysyllables and overripe metaphors' absurd, but they are not inherently or linguistically so. It is because the 'little elegant compliments' have been worked out before-hand that they are likely to be laboured in their effect, as are the polite usages of Mr Elton in *Emma* (according to John Knightley): 'I never in my life saw a man more intent on being agreeable than Mr Elton. It is downright labour to him where ladies are concerned' (p. 111). But unlike, for example, the eccentric idiolects which Dickens gives to his characters, Jane Austen does not show Mr Elton or Mr Collins committing lexical or syntactical solecisms. Nor, unlike the absurdly pedantic Mary Bennet's contributions, is the register or style which Mr Collins employs during his notorious proposal in itself absurd. 'Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections' (p. 105). It is possible to imagine a context in which irony had no place and where two fairly simple-minded and self-satisfied eighteenth-century middle-class young people responded favourably to this kind of thing. It is not the choice of register which is grotesque but the inappropriateness of that sentiment, expressed in any words at all, in that context.

Mr Collins is linguistically competent, even fluent, but servile



reverence for the titles and forms of aristocracy and his total inability to separate dignity and true worth from self-importance have blinded and deafened him to the behaviour and words of anyone who does not fit into his distorted picture of society. He cannot therefore understand the contributions that Elizabeth is making to the interchange: he reads them as coquettish evasions because he is too incompetent a communicator to respond to a totally unexpected conversational move; - in this case a rejection of the advances of Lady Catherine de Bourgh's protégé.

At first sight then, the phrase 'showing communicative competence' seems preferable to the phrase 'showing sensibility', since it seems to avoid the ambiguities, even the incoherence, of the latter word's eighteenth century usages. As Raymond Williams admits in Keywords "'sensibility" is a very difficult

word'.<sup>1</sup> But, if the pervasiveness with which 'sensibility' was used is matched by its ambiguity, the apparently more clearly-focused term 'communicative competence' fails to deliver what it promises. The word 'competence' suggests skills which can be taught or copied. But if this is so, we find that 'communicative competence' must have a very limited use, particularly in Jane Austen's novels, and certainly cannot be synonymous with 'showing sensibility'.

The Crawfords, for example, are presented as highly articulate characters who can dominate conversations through keeping one jump ahead of the other participants. No great difficulties arise when

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1. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. (London: Fontana Press, 1976, 1990), pp. 280-83.

the author makes it clear that the highly competent communicator is a skilful manipulator. Henry Crawford, for example, is a manipulative character who needs to be more communicatively skilful than, say, Mrs John Dashwood. For the latter needs only to manipulate an almost equally ignorant and selfish husband, whereas Henry Crawford wishes to control the apparently well educated Bertrams. It is easy to judge that Henry Crawford, like his sister, has developed communication skills from his London background, and that such skills can be taught or caught. But where great communicative competence is intended to be the mark of a morally exemplary character, one like Sir Charles Grandison 'acting uniformly well through a variety of scenes', or a Mr Knightley, the mentor to a powerfully portrayed heroine, then what is manifested, if it is to be convincing, must be more than a set of teachable social skills. The competence must be seen to arise from exemplary powers of discrimination employed sensitively and with charity. This is particularly true where the fictional world being portrayed is permeated, as in Jane Austen's novels, by moral values. In the case of Mr Knightley, Jane Austen shows that he does not deploy the same sort of manipulative communication skills as Frank Churchill (who, like the Crawfords and unlike Mr Elton, is a very polished performer). She credits him with the kind of 'plain blunt' English which Henry the Fifth (disingenuously) claimed to be his only linguistic resource when he courted Princess Katharine. Knightley is reported as having proposed to Emma in 'plain unaffected gentlemanlike English' (p. 448).

Jane Austen, from the evidence of her novels, could not really have believed that there is an all-purpose 'gentlemanlike English'

which is effective in all circumstances; she may well, however, have recognised from her own reading of, for example, Sir Charles Grandison, that supposedly equal participants in a discourse can appear to be borne down by the fluency and word-power, rather than by the superiority of character, of more fluent communicators.

In that novel, we are usually to assume that Sir Charles, when he exerts the full force of his communicative powers to dominate a discourse, is not, unlike his sister Charlotte, displaying his wit to score points off his less quick witted opponents. But it is in these episodes that it is difficult to find the responses of other parties credible. For example, in the scene where Sir Charles demonstrates to Sir Hargrave, Mr Bagenhall, Mr Jordan and Mr Merceda the evils of duelling, he dominates both the vocal and physical interchange. It is a virtuoso performance but at the cost of rendering most of the other protagonists' contributions stilted and even, at times, ludicrous:

Mr Jordan, Had you always, Sir Charles, that magnanimity, that intrepidity, that steadiness, I know not what to call it, which we have seen and admired in you? . . . .  
Mr Bagenhall, What poor toads, Merceda, we are!  
Mr Merceda, Be silent, Bagenhall, Sir Charles has not done speaking. (SCG, II, iv, 255-56)

The strength of Jane Austen's conversations is that the participants make positive contributions in character; they do not act as sounding boards - passive recipients of wit, wisdom or eccentricity.

However, while the difficulties arising from the establishment of powerful communicators are unlikely in Jane Austen's novels to be judged of the same order as those illustrated from Sir Charles



Grandison, problems have arisen with the reading of mentor characters in her novels. J. H. Dussinger, in 'The Language of Real Feeling' has noted that in Jane Austen, 'the talkative characters have speeches that [are] uninterpreted [and are] ... 'free of normative closure' (p. 112). The question can arise whether the 'uninterpreted' fluency of Henry Tilney and Mr Knightley tends to undermine their roles as mentors.

It has been suggested that Jane Austen was aware of the dangers of long passages of 'uninterpreted', sparkling repartee, and, her most famous suggested 'remedy' was to achieve greater balance by a 'long chapter of sense ... something that would form a contrast and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammaticism of the general style' ((Letter to Cassandra, February 4th, 1813, op. cit. p. 269). Yet, 'a long chapter of sense', we may feel, might only have undermined our pleasure in the interchanges between Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland; Emma and Mr Knightley; Elizabeth and Darcy. The question is not one of 'epigrammaticism' but of the prepotent effect of fluency. It may be that Henry Tilney sounds more of an intellectual bully and Mr Knightley somewhat more self-deluding than is consistent with their roles as mentors. With Jane Austen, of course, one is on dangerous ground in deciding what is or is not consistent with her intentions. Her view that 'seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken' (E, p. 431), allows the constant possibility of subtler interpretations.

It could be said in the case of Mr Knightley that Jane Austen takes some deliberate risks in the interests of convincing characterization. We have for example the scene in volume one,

chapter eighteen, where Mr Knightley and Emma argue over Frank Churchill's behaviour in failing to visit Mr and Mrs Weston. Emma, who at this stage did not truly care very much that Mr Frank Churchill had sent his excuse and would not be visiting his father and Mrs Weston, decides that she ought to simulate disappointment to demonstrate her friendship with the Westons. She chooses to indulge in this spurious concern with Mr Knightley. In the light of their previous conversational encounters in the novel, one might have expected that Mr Knightley would dismiss this as an over-inflated treatment of a basically simple issue and that Emma would, by agreeing with him, have established that for the two of them real issues are clearer, less distorted by parochial enthusiasms, than for most of their neighbours. And indeed Mr Knightley makes the first step - the way the reader expects: 'the Churchills are very likely in fault, said Mr Knightley coolly 'but I dare say he might come if he would'. Emma, however, feels the need to tease: 'to her great amusement, perceived that she was taking the other side of the question from her real opinion' (p. 145). She rallies Mr Knightley on his inability to put himself in the position of a dependent who cannot always do what he wants. Here, Emma is deliberately confusing 'doing what he wants' and 'doing what is right'. Mr Knightley therefore, in response to her, 'You are the worst judge in the world, Mr Knightley, of the difficulties of dependence' (p. 146), embarks on a lengthy argument to prove that Frank Churchill is perfectly capable of leaving the Churchills in pursuit of pleasure, and responds to Emma's further, (and now only half sincere) plea for tolerance and charity: 'There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if

he chuses, and that is, his duty, ... by vigour and resolution'.

In the context of their relationship this is a reproof, not for Frank Churchill, but for Emma herself who has been blurring a real moral issue with language games. She seizes on the one weakness in Mr Knightley's argument - that he should be so emotionally involved and detailed in his account of what Mr Frank Churchill ought to have said to his benefactors. If Frank Churchill spoke in the terms and tone suggested by Mr Knightley, 'there would be no opposition made to his going'.

'No,' said Emma laughing; ... 'but perhaps there might be some made to his coming back again. Such language for a young man entirely dependent, to use! - Nobody but you, Mr Knightley, would imagine it possible. But you have not an idea of what is requisite in situations directly opposite to your own.' (p. 147)

The conversation now takes on a very different tone. What is interesting to note first, however, is that it is difficult to imagine any other pair in the novel reaching such a stage in the context of normal social intercourse. This pair seem to live on a different linguistic plane from the other characters and, potentially, on a different moral plane, in the sense that they are capable of seeing - when they allow themselves to - moral issues with more acuity than most of the other inhabitants of Highbury. Mr Knightley defends even more energetically the need for integrity against social expediency and suggest that even meaner spirited people will be affected by a strong moral stand.

'Respect for right conduct is felt by every body. If he would act in this sort of manner, on principle, consistently, regularly, their little minds would bend to his.' (p. 147)



Now Emma responds energetically. She sees not only the force of Mr Knightley's argument against her own less than sincere defence of Frank Churchill's lightness, but also that she is being criticised and, even more, that the man whom she respects is, with the phrase 'their little minds', being untrue to his own standards.

'I rather doubt that. You are very fond of bending little minds; but where little minds belong to rich people in authority, I think they have a knack of swelling out, till they are quite as unmanageable as great ones.' (p. 147)

After that rebuke for his patronising, even sneering tone, Emma's defence becomes more sincere, more intelligent and, (as Mr Knightley would have realised, if he had been able to listen with his normal perspicacity) more complimentary to Mr Knightley. Emma goes on to say that she has no doubt that in Frank Churchill's situation Mr Knightley would take the moral line and that it might have very good effect. But that would be because he would not have on his shoulders the weight of gratitude for what the Churchills had done for him earlier in his life. She appears to be defending Frank Churchill personally when in fact she is trying to make Mr Knightley respond with his usual fairness and intelligence: 'He may have as strong a sense of what would be right, as you can have, without being so equal under particular circumstances to act up to it' (p. 148). In fact she has the opposite effect on Mr Knightley, without her being able to see why. Just as Mr Knightley cannot see why he is pressing his attack against Frank Churchill, whom he has never met, so vigorously.

The irony in the encounter now depends on the fact that their conversation achieves a very high level of argumentation, subtlety and linguistic skill; for example, Mr Knightley's play on the word 'amiable' and his suggestion that perhaps Emma really should use the French 'aimable' which is, he claims, to do with good manners rather than an ability to elicit friendly (or loving) feelings in others. Yet, overall, these two articulate participants behave quite obtusely in being unable to appreciate what lies behind the vigour of their contributions - 'His letters disgust me' [Mr Knightley], 'you turn every thing to evil' [Emma] - Emma is disturbed by the glimpse of a flaw in the character of a man she always admired, and now feels more strongly about; Mr Knightley cannot see that he has become emotionally involved as a result of the woman he loves speaking so strongly in the defence of a younger and, by repute, highly personable young man.

'He is a person I never think of from one month's end to another', said Mr Knightley, with a degree of vexation, which made Emma immediately talk of something else, ...  
(p. 150)

Their ability to talk across and above the trivia of Highbury life is temporarily shattered. Emma is left to ponder; and we have the benefit of a comment in free indirect discourse which may be partly the narrator's and partly a glimpse into the heroine's mind. This is an example of what John Burrows in, Computation into Criticism, terms 'character narrative' and it is this (as will be discussed below) which, ensures that fluent and powerful speakers like Knightley are not 'uninterpreted' (Dussinger, p. 112).

To take a dislike to a young man, only because he appeared to be of a different disposition from himself, was unworthy the real liberality of mind which she was always used to acknowledge in him; for with all the high opinion of himself, which she had often laid to his charge, she had never before for a moment supposed it could make him unjust to the merit of another. (pp. 150-51)

The contest, swings first towards Mr Knightley and then towards Emma; Emma 'wins' because of Mr Knightley's overheated response. Nevertheless Mr Knightley is right. Social expediency is defended by Emma and moral integrity by Mr Knightley. Mr Knightley comes off worse in the argument and is temporarily diminished as a character. Yet Jane Austen knows Mr Knightley is right and not Emma. We see the distorting effects of communicative skills. We also have an example of how Jane Austen is willing to take risks with what we know, from the totality of her work, to be her moral convictions in the interests of her 'principles of art'; in this case the overriding demands of convincing characterization and a powerful story line.

The failure of Henry Tilney to match his communicative competence with his deeper sensibilities is not likely to have been unintended by the author: Jane Austen does, after all, have Eleanor Tilney rebuke her brother.

'Henry, ... you are very impertinent. Miss Morland, he is treating you exactly as he does his sister. He is for ever finding fault with me, for some incorrectness of language, and now he is taking the same liberty with you.'  
(pp. 107-108)

But Eleanor's interpolation only partially mitigates the impression of intellectual bullying. The real mitigation we must assume is not the friendly acceptance of his sister's rebuke, but



the burgeoning sexual attraction Catherine and Henry feel for one another. Nothing else could extenuate the continued deflation of Catherine even after Eleanor's attempt to defend her new friend:

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

'Very true,' said Henry, 'and this is a very 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 every thing. 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 comprised in that one word.' (p. 108)

The effect of this blast of well articulated sarcasm is, as elsewhere in the interchanges between Catherine and Henry, of a Benedick exercising his powers of wit on a Hero rather than on a Beatrice. We may suspect that Jane Austen was aware of a discrepancy and attempted, with some success, to redress the balance by giving Catherine some surprisingly effective responses and perceptions. For example: 'Then we are on very unequal terms, for I understand you perfectly well.' 'Me? - yes; I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible' (pp. 132-33). Catherine is also allowed to observe to herself at the start of the acquaintance that Henry 'indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others' (p. 29). She understands and does not entirely approve of the way he is playing his own language game with Mrs Allen. She also shows that she does not want (though possibly she is unable) to join Henry in any kind of social complicity to share critical perceptions of other people's limitations without appearing to depart from the most polite and decorous behaviour.

Laura G. Mooneyham, suggests that Catherine Morland's

development is one towards greater 'linguistic competence'; but even if one substitutes the broader term 'communicative competence', as I am using it, it is still inadequate to encompass the development of unexplained and inexplicable endowments which by the end of the novel make Catherine a suitable wife for Henry Tilney despite her inadequate schooling and her even more inadequate response to it.

It could be said that Catherine does not wish to belong to the kind of charmed circle in which Emma and Mr Knightley live within Highbury society. For, in Emma we are presented with a contrast between those human beings who are intelligent and perceptive enough to use language obliquely, yet sharply and pointedly, who think of themselves as always aware of social undercurrents (hence Emma's frustrated fury at not being aware of what underlay Jane Fairfax's reticence), and those who are congenitally unable or too socially inexperienced to interpret any communication which is not firmly placed in a well worn, anticipated context. In the case of Mr Woodhouse this is the context of his own and his family and friends' physical comfort, or avoidance of the slightest discomfort. In the case of Miss Bates it is the context of establishing and maintaining social harmony despite her lack of a secure place in the social hierarchy of Highbury. The incongruity arises from the fact that Miss Bates has not the linguistic equipment to cope with this uncomfortable situation, nor the social sense of a Jane Fairfax to avoid the shoals and reefs

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1. Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels, (Basingstoke, London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. x.

through a policy of deliberate reserve, which would allow her to opt out of many of the language games being played.

There is in Emma, as well, a more obvious and overt contrast between those characters who exhibit sense and worth and those who fail to do so; indeed the main theme of the novel arises from the fact that Emma, who rates high in the scale of social competence, fails badly in social responsibility. Emma's 'cleverness' and communicative competence do not prevent her from acting stupidly and unworthily. We are warned of the 'real evils' of her situation on page one. Yet in the end it is difficult to rank Miss Bates, Mrs Elton, or even Jane Fairfax, higher in the scale of civilised human values than Emma; and if we accept Mr Knightley as her equal, it is as much because he has been able to give as good as he gets in linguistic combat, as because he has shown more decorum or moral worth. He belongs to her charmed circle, as do the reader and author.

When news of Mr Elton's impending marriage is announced, we are left by the subsequent interchanges with a clear impression that Emma and Mr Knightley are not merely more communicatively competent than Mr Woodhouse, Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, but that they live fuller lives. They are, by the evidence of this text, more civilized, more developed than the others.

'Well, Mr Knightley, [says Miss Bates] and so you actually saw the letter; well - ...' [this is the letter announcing Mr Elton's engagement].

'It was short, merely to announce - but cheerful, exulting, of course.' - Here was a sly glance at Emma. ...' (p. 174)

This is not just the 'sly glance' between a pair who have a temporary social advantage; but a communication between two people



who are used to having to live politely at one, rather low, level of social awareness and are yet able to express in parallel a far higher level of perception at the same time. Emma is momentarily too surprised by the news to communicate at the charmed circle level with Knightley, so she plays for time with a contribution at the lower level: 'Mr Elton going to be married! ... He will have everybody's wishes for his happiness'. This is followed by a predictably vacuous contribution from Mr Woodhouse, 'He is very young to settle...he had better not be in a hurry', and a sad piece of predictable exuberance from Miss Bates.

'A new neighbour for us all, Miss Woodhouse!' said Miss Bates joyfully; 'my mother is so pleased! - ... Jane, you have never seen Mr Elton! - no wonder that you have such a curiosity to see him.' (p. 174)

As the narrator points out, Jane has no such curiosity - 'Jane's curiosity did not appear of that absorbing nature as wholly to occupy her.' The sarcasm of that interpolation puts the author firmly on the side of those who are in the charmed circle - who are able to contribute fully in social exchanges - and distances her (and us) from those outside the circle who play the wrong language game; or who, like Jane Fairfax, are too self-absorbed to be able to marshal their skills to make an appropriate contribution: '- is he - is he a tall man?' asks Jane. Jane Austen, without comment, now allows Emma to reveal her prowess as a communicator to several audiences at once, and to reveal her potential for wounding those, like Miss Bates, who cannot see what is happening: 'Who shall answer that question? ... My father would say, 'yes', Mr Knightley, 'No', and Miss Bates and I that he is

just the happy medium' (p. 174). The potential cruelty is seen in the implied assumption, which Emma knows to be false, that she is quoting the opinions of four people who are all taking part in the same language game, whereas we know, that only Mr Knightley and Emma are communicating fully. Emma then appears to include Jane Fairfax in the conversation, as by all conventions of decorum she should, but in practice puts her further outside the circle by a statement the sarcasm of which will be picked up only by Mr Knightley, and perhaps only guessed at by Jane Fairfax herself. 'When you have been here a little longer, Miss Fairfax, you will understand that Mr Elton is the standard of perfection in Highbury, both in person and mind.' 'Very true, Miss Woodhouse, so she will' (p. 174). The agreement of the imperceptive Miss Bates with the overt meaning of Emma's statement, her failure to pick up a rather unsubtle piece of malicious irony, consigns that character to the margins of civilisation and leaves the centre to Emma, Knightley, Jane Austen and the reader. But the high level of communicative competence which puts Emma in her charmed circle is seen to be a double-edged weapon: the terms she later uses to Mr Knightley in condemning Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill for having been so secretive can be applied to the private and excluding communications which she and Mr Knightley have exchanged when they appeared to be taking part in a general conversation: 'Here we have been, the whole winter and spring, ... fancying ourselves all on an equal footing of truth ...' (p. 399).

It is certainly true that in Jane Austen's six main novels the female protagonists who attain through their developing self-knowledge a qualified state of grace, are all shown to have at

least the level of communicative ability which would earn them entry to the charmed circle of Emma and Knightley. Some: Emma Woodhouse herself, Elizabeth Bennet and Marianne Dashwood are seen to perform as active participants in exchanges of wit; the others, Fanny Price, Anne Elliot, Elinor Dashwood qualify because, although they take fewer conversational risks, they are usually aware of what is going on in a conversation, both the overt and covert meanings: they are usually sensitive (as, for example, Mrs Allen always, and Miss Bates most of the time, are not) to the effects both of what is being said and of what they themselves are saying or might say. It is the concern for the possible effects of what she might say which contributes to Fanny Price's silence in the first half of Mansfield Park and which also lies behind Anne Elliot's taciturnity with her family.

Catherine Morland is a borderline case. We are at some disadvantage in that we do not witness her developing self-awareness from the inside, as we do with Emma Woodhouse. We are told by the narrator/author that 'her manners [are] just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl', and from the same source we learn that she is not yet aware of what is involved in the behaviour of any kind of charmed circle. For example,

... she was not experienced enough in the finesse of love, or the duties of friendship, to know when delicate raillery was properly called for, or when a confidence should be forced. (p. 36)

Nevertheless, we observe that she learns fast and, on the evidence of her, 'Me? - yes; I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible' (pp. 132-33), we may surmise that Mrs Henry Tilney



will not become a Mrs Allen.

There are in Catherine Morland, and more markedly in the naval characters, Admiral and Mrs Croft in Persuasion, strong indications that a relatively narrow range of communication skills can accompany a high level of sensitivity about more important matters than what is going on in a conversation. We are a long way from Hardy's Woodlanders - from Giles Winterbourne or Marty South, whose sensitivity and awareness are shown to be so highly developed precisely because they are not socially sophisticated; nevertheless, there is a suggestion that naval officers, if not the other ranks, can, through their experiences, develop a grace of their own.

With these possible exceptions, however, the level of communicative awareness and communicative skills exemplified by Emma and Knightley seems to be a necessary, though not sufficient, qualification for moral growth and even final felicity. That communicative competence in this sense is not sufficient for that eventual endorsement by the author is clear throughout the novels. Charlotte Lucas's membership of Elizabeth Bennet's charmed circle does not prevent her making a wrong moral choice, and the Crawfords provide clear examples of social skills which are self-destroying. Mr Elliot in Persuasion, is less well developed than the Crawfords, but he also provides an interesting example, in that Jane Austen introduces him as one displaying just those aspects of high communicative competence which ought to be the sign of true virtue, in that they appear to be far more than an array of teachable social skills: he seems, in Knightley's terms, to have progressed from 'amiable' to 'aimable':

He sat down with them, and improved their conversation very much. There could be no doubt of his being a sensible man. Ten minutes were enough to certify that. *His tone, his expressions, his choice of subject, his knowing where to stop,* - it was all the operation of a sensible discerning mind. (p. 143) (my italics)

Jane Austen was well aware that what could be experienced in 'ten minutes' of conversation is insufficient evidence of the 'operations of a sensible and discerning mind'; we and Anne Elliot, come to learn that,

'Mr Elliot is ... a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness.' (p. 208).

Yet there is no doubt that for Jane Austen, without a certain level of sensitivity to others - a sensitivity which is most likely to be manifest in conversation - in experienced life as in novels -, even a good character's moral worth is suspect: because of Lady Russell's lack of 'a quickness of perception' it has to be admitted that although 'she was a very good woman ... there was nothing less for [her] to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, ...' (p. 249). It is significant that Lady Russell's lengthy persuasive discussions with Anne Elliot are not reported or illustrated. The companionship and social alliance of this pair is not manifested in the kind of communicative sensitivity which Emma and Knightley display even in their disagreements. An even more striking contrast is with Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy where a high degree of conversational awareness is shown, even, ironically, as Elizabeth accuses Darcy of an irresponsible neglect of communicative skills.

Having forced Darcy to admit that at the Hertfordshire Ball he

failed in his social duty, she shatters his feeble excuse that he knew no ladies outside his own circle. She appeals to Colonel Fitzwilliam:

'Shall we ask him why a man of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill qualified to recommend himself to strangers?'

Despite the Colonel's blunt assertion that his apparent failing is 'because he will not give himself the trouble', Darcy prefers to defend himself by admitting to a kind of innate defect which incapacitates him from dealing with strangers:

'I certainly have not the talent which some people possess, ... of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done.'

'My fingers,' said Elizabeth, 'do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see many women's do. ... But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault - because I would not take the trouble of practising.' (p. 175)

Darcy's soft answer to this attack is consummately polite, and, even more ironically, shrewdly appropriate: in answering Elizabeth he agrees she has no inherent musical incapacities and that she has no doubt had better things to do with her time than practise the piano.

At this stage no judgement is forced upon the reader by narrator intervention ('interpreted' - vide Dussinger above). We are free to suspend judgement until the end of the novel when we can decide whether Elizabeth really believed that the sort of communicative competence which Darcy claimed he lacked could be achieved by methods analogous to practising the piano; or whether, in making her clever and stinging response, she betrayed a fault in herself.



With hindsight we are also able to speculate, since the narrator has forced no closure, whether what Elizabeth partly detected and partly resisted was the paradox of a character capable of great magnanimity in important matters who could so misjudge the responses appropriate for ordinary social affairs. Jane Austen makes no overt comment but guides us indirectly through, for example, an implied contrast between Darcy and his sister, who is gauche because she has been kept ignorant of how to deal with people. From the totality of her work we can be certain that Jane Austen did not rate highly a social competence which, taught or caught, could be improved by diligent practice, as opposed to open involvement with other human beings. What she displays through her dialogues is her characters' attainment of, or failure to attain, a level of awareness of others which transcends such competencies. As Gene Koppel puts it:

Austen's art places its most powerful emphasis ... on the relationship between ... characters, and on what fulfills those relationships - on sensible, responsible interactions and the kind of moral-spiritual commitment that makes them possible.' (The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels, p. 34)

In her novels these 'sensible, responsible interactions' are observed in conversations. Yet the art which 'naturalised a didactic tradition' could not, even by the conventions within which Jane Austen was writing, consist only in depicting skilful, powerful or sensitive contributions to dialogue. To revert to the citation from Norman Page at the beginning of this chapter, not just 'dialogue', but the 'various substitutes for dialogue' play an important part in Jane Austen's 'narrative technique'. The

next and final chapter considers the importance of a range of these 'substitutes'.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

**FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE AND  
MORAL COMMITMENT**



It is the contention of this final chapter that Jane Austen's achievement in 'naturalising a didactic tradition' owes a great deal to her development of the use of free indirect discourse as a means of 'schooling' her readers to accept or take on board a moral standpoint that is not obtrusively spelt out. In other words the artistic tact, which critical readers have long recognised' and which has been seen to reside in the conversations and in the overt interpolations of the narrator, can also be found in the minglings of narration, dialogue and monologue which have latterly been grouped together in a separate category of 'discourse'. This category has been given a variety of names - free indirect discourse, le style indirect libre, die erlebte Rede,<sup>2</sup> and 'character narrative', where the narrator is no longer speaking of but for a character' (Burrows, pp. 74-75).<sup>3</sup> Burrows uses the term 'character narrative' in his work Computation into Criticism. He justifies the term by suggesting that in Jane Austen's novels

the narrator not only performs the conventional functions of supplying necessary information, shaping and pacing the action,

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1. Archbishop Whately, Quarterly Review, 1821, (op. cit., p. 130, above), refers to this 'artistic tact' in terms of Jane Austen's 'good taste and practical utility' which ensures that 'her religion [is] not at all obtrusive' p. 95.

2. See Introduction (pp. 10-11, above) for a brief explanation of why free indirect discourse (FID) was chosen as the most appropriate term.

3. Burrows suggests that 'character narrative' amounts to about one fifth of all Jane Austen's narrative, but 'that the proportion rises from less than 5% in Sense and Sensibility and 10% in Pride and Prejudice to almost one third in Mansfield Park and Emma. p. 166.

and commenting on the characters' ideas, but also renders the thoughts of her characters ... (p. 166).

He believes, and his research goes some way to show, that at its subtlest (in Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion) this technique

affords the heroines something like 'second idiolects', more or less akin to their speech idiolects but adapted to the expression of ideas too private or, as in Emma, too outrageous for open utterance. (p. 166)

He comments (and goes on to support his comments by his statistical research) that in Northanger Abbey, 'Catherine's thoughts do not seem to differ much from what she is prepared to say'; whereas with Emma, Anne Elliot and Fanny Price, 'the constraints on their ability to say what they are thinking require a different mode of narrative' (p. 166). The comparative dearth of character narrative in Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility exists, Burrows believes, because, 'there is seldom any requirement for anything more than a running commentary on what the heroine is thinking' (p. 167).

An earlier critic was relatively dismissive of Jane Austen's use of 'free indirect speech', 'seeing it merely as an economic device or as a means of avoiding difficult mimesis: 'to abbreviate what would otherwise be ... tediously conventional dialogue, ... to present verbal interchanges which she cannot quite trust her ear

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1. A. H. Wright, Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953). Wright does not use the term FID, but the examples he provides are what I have called 'character-indexed' narrative or FID. Wright includes them under 'indirect discourse - the more or less verbatim report, in the third person, of a conversation' p. 82.

to reproduce exactly'. But a closer reading of the novels, particularly of Emma and Persuasion, shows that free indirect discourse (FID) covers a wide range of effects, and can be seen as one of Jane Austen's most flexible and powerful instruments. It is true that this range of effects certainly includes the curtailment of unnecessary direct speech. For example, in chapter three of Persuasion the characters of Sir Walter Elliot, Mr Shepherd, Mrs Clay and Anne Elliot, and their relationships with one another, are established very clearly by three pages of direct speech interspersed with a minimum of narrator comment. A move is made into FID, when there seems no longer any need for lengthy samples of character utterances:

Mr Shepherd hastened to assure him, that Admiral Croft was... a little weather-beaten, to be sure, but not much; and quite the gentleman in all his notions and behaviour. (p. 22)

Mr Shepherd's voice is still heard through this brief exposition of the Admiral's application until the move is made into an even greater proportion of narrator comment: 'Mr Shepherd was eloquent on the subject; ...' (p. 22). Nevertheless, even at this stage, the narrative commentary still carries echoes of the character being reported: the narrative is, we may say, 'character-indexed'. While it could be said that the main purpose of this particular example of character-indexation is to achieve a greater brevity, - so that the narrative can move more rapidly towards the introduction of the name of Wentworth, - the method can be, and is, used for much subtler effects.

It is possible to claim however, particularly from a grammatical point of view, that FID is more appropriately considered as



involving no narrator at all. One writer expresses her fears of the 'prospect ... for narrators behind narrators to distinguish texts whose narrators are reliable from more complicated ironic ones'.<sup>1</sup> Far better, it is implied, to accept the concept of the 'real author' behind it all, but one working on these occasions without assuming the conventional reporting or commentating narratorial voice (pp. 37-38).

As Roy Pascal pointed out in The Dual Voice, not the least problem with this attempt to eliminate the concept of a narrator is that it fails to explain the ironic tone in many powerful passages of FID. He refers to Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks and claims that, 'while in some instances the irony may belong to one of the characters, in many it is so subtle and sophisticated that it is beyond the mental scope of a Buddenbrook' (p. 16). He cannot accept the argument that FID entails no narrator:

Critics have indeed often maintained that the use of free indirect speech permits the reader to experience fully and exclusively in terms of, and from the perspective of, the character, the subject. But this is not the case. Mimicry itself ... implies a mimic as well as the person being mimicked; and the effect of mimicry depends on our awareness of the difference between the imitation and the real thing, as well as the likeness. That is, the narrator is always effectively present in free indirect speech. (p. 137)

Pascal is among those whose main concern is literary criticism and who find ultimately unhelpful the attempts to apply rules to syntactical patterns that are as free and idiosyncratic as those found in some novelists' uses of FID: Brian McHale suggests in

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1. Ann Banfield, 'Narrative Style and the Grammar of Direct and Indirect Speech', Foundations of Language, X, 1973, pp. 1-39.

'FID: A Survey of Recent Accounts', 1978, that direct discourse, indirect discourse and FID should be considered as sections of a continuum which correspond to a range of diegetic and mimetic possibilities. As part of such a spectrum, FID can be seen as converging a wider area than would be covered by 'Banfield's overly restrictive rules ...' (p. 258). But

any attempt to account for the perceptibility of FID solely or primarily in terms of contextual clues or arresting grammatical anomalies must fail to capture the full implications of an approach based on categories of literary representation instead of grammatical categories. According to this approach, the decisive indices of FID ought to be not the marks of its syntactical distinctiveness, or even its traces in the surrounding context, *but the signs of its mimetic character*, whether formal signs (the 'words' of a character, his characteristic registers and idiom) or semantic signs (the 'content' of utterances, the 'thoughts' or 'intended meanings' of a character as distinguished from those of the narrator). ... FID is not so much the syntactical frame which 'permits' the appearance of otherwise inadmissible mimetic material, as it is formal or, more problematically, semantic materials *which evoke a 'voice' or presence other than the narrator's*, ... (pp. 268-69) (my italics)<sup>1</sup>

Norman Page points out in The Language of Jane Austen, that 'free indirect speech ... offers the possibility of achieving something of the vividness of speech without ... silencing the authorial view' (p. 134). In novel writing generally, character-indexation allows an ironic counterpoint whereby the narration (the diegetic function) is modified or even subverted by hints of characters' voices (mimetic function). In Jane Austen's novels we

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1. 'Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts', pp. 268-69, (cited above, p. 11). I refer to the kind of effect described in this quotation as 'character-indexation', a term which includes what Graham Hough calls 'coloured narrative' and John Burrows 'character narrative'.

are so well 'schooled' to expect such ironic modification of the narration that even very slight character-indexation may suffice.

In Pride and Prejudice, for example, when Collins and Charlotte are showing Elizabeth round their house, we have, 'he welcomed them a second time, with ostentatious formality to his humble abode' (p. 155). By the time Jane Austen wrote Emma and Persuasion, she might well have considered the phrase 'with ostentatious formality' unnecessary. In Emma, in the passage ostensibly reporting Knightley's and Emma's recognition and confirmation of their mutual love, the narration appears at first to be concerned only to report the happy outcome as briskly as possible, while at the same time giving a flavour of what Knightley said in his account of past misconstructions: 'He would save himself from witnessing again such permitted, encouraged attentions. - He had gone to learn to be indifferent.' But we are also confronted with two mimetic phrases which do not seem to be placed merely to hurry the narrative along: 'this sweetest and best of all creatures' and 'faultless in spite of all her faults' (pp. 432-33). We hear an ironic note because the first phrase may well be a reasonably accurate echo of what Knightley said, or said to himself; the second is not. It may well be what Knightley thought, but even with suitable syntactical adjustment, it is probably not something he said to Emma. Emma is out of it: the reader and Jane Austen alone contemplate the rational Knightley allowing himself to be pleasantly deluded. This kind of speculation is given support by the succeeding sentences which, heavily character-indexed, give further evidence of the forgiveable irrationality of a man in love.



Of the many forms of irony we encounter in Jane Austen's novels, we may well consider that it is this mingling of the diegetic and the mimetic through character-indexation of narrative which provides the most persistent and influential form. It is through this pervasive irony, not found to anything like this degree in Maria Edgeworth or Fanny Burney, that we are schooled to accept features of experienced life which would either undermine an overt didactic expression of Jane Austen's standpoint, or alternatively, might call for a lengthy philosophical apologia totally out of place in her chosen genre. Thus she acknowledges the existence of moral luck' - as she must if she is to be true to experienced life - without allowing awkward issues of determinism, free will and individual responsibility to occupy the foreground of her readers' attention.

Moral luck raises the question of whether, or how far, we regard the world as meaningless. The answer is simple for Christians writing in a theological or evangelical mode: there can be no such thing as moral luck. Bishop Butler (see chapter one) simply denies that there can be differing interpretations of conscience. Kant, writing much less simply about the moral law within a Christian tradition, flatly denies that understanding the causes or 'sources' of bad conduct, alters the extent of blame:

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1. 'Where a significant aspect of what someone does depends on factors beyond his control, yet we continue to treat him in that respect as an object of moral judgement, it can be called moral luck.' Thomas Nagel, 'Moral Luck' in Mortal Questions, (CUP, 1979), p. 26, cited by H. Jensen in, 'Morality and Luck', Philosophy, vol. 59, no. 229, (July 1984), 23.

let us take ... a malicious lie ... First of all, we endeavour to discover the motives to which it has been due, and then, secondly, in the light of these, we proceed to determine how far the action and its consequences can be imputed to the offender. As regards the first question, we trace the empirical character of the action to its sources, finding these in defective education, bad company, in part also in the viciousness of a natural disposition insensitive to shame, in levity and thoughtlessness, not neglecting to take into account also the occasional causes that may have intervened ... *But although we believe that the action is thus determined, we none the less blame the agent.*

... Our blame is based on a law of reason whereby we regard reason as a cause that irrespective of all the above-mentioned empirical conditions could have determined, and ought to have determined, the agent to act otherwise ... In the moment when he utters the lie, the guilt is entirely his. *Reason, irrespective of all empirical conditions of the act, is completely free, and the lie is entirely due to its default.'*

But a novelist, who relies so much on her reader's satisfaction in recognising and empathising with the common experiences of humanity, can have no similar recourse to a denial of moral luck. For common humanity recognises intuitively that people are blamed for actions over which they had no control; and that people are able to behave well often because of uncovenanted and inexplicable talents and traits of character. In ordinary human affairs moral luck is recognised but not accepted, or perhaps, not found acceptable: moral discriminations are made in the light (or shade) of this ambivalence. So that a careless driver who kills is commonly accepted as having a degree of moral culpability not shared by an equally careless driver who has been lucky enough not to kill; a certain unfairness will be noted but shrugged off.

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1. Cited by A. W. Moore: 'A Kantian View of Moral Luck', *Philosophy*, (No. 253), 65, (July, 1990), p. 315, (my italics). Moore's reference is to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan, 1933), [A 554-555 / B 582-583].



The sort of moral realism within which a novelist must operate accepts as given certain attributes of characters. Cards are dealt at birth and on the whole these tend to be accepted as brute facts of life, or tacitly acknowledged as part of a providential design. Thus blameworthiness may be qualified but seldom to the extent of denying an agent's freedom of action. If a significant amount of freedom were not granted, there would be little point in writing a novel. However, the question of upbringing of characters brings to the fore, not just the cards dealt at birth, which, by the nature of things, can only be surmised from later events, but also the new cards which are drawn in the process of socialisation and education. As we have seen, a novel writer may land herself in difficulties if she tries to be too explicit about which stages of life are concerned with receiving as opposed to playing the cards. For example, distinctions between character formation and character development in Camilla not only seemed excessively arbitrary but fail to underpin the moral judgements made: (see above, pp. 106-113).

The value system within which Jane Austen makes her moral discriminations is clearly a Christian one, yet she indicates that she is aware of contingency, including good moral luck, in the context of upbringing. Nevertheless she does not pre-empt our interest in or sympathy with her characters by denying their freedom of action and their consequent responsibility for their own actions.

She appears to take the view that moral luck exists but must not detract from our treating people as moral agents; the more we like and potentially respect them, the more this is true. For example, by moral conviction, Elizabeth Bennet refuses to accept, as her elder sister appears to do, that the 'unlucky' Charlotte Lucas has been



sufficiently unlucky to marry Mr Collins. Captain Wentworth accepts that it is his duty not to dishonour his commitment to Louisa Musgrove, despite the fact that it was 'unlucky' carelessness or thoughtlessness which put a relatively unpractised naval officer in that situation. Equally the author seems appropriately ambivalent about the countervailing luck which lets Wentworth off the hook, regarding it as part of the contingency which makes up our life rather than as a morally satisfying equalising of chances which gives a worthy man his deserts.

She encourages us to accept, as we have to in experienced life, the arbitrary nature of the 'given', the way the cards have been dealt to her characters; we accept a mismatch between cause and effect in their formation. That Emma in fact received excessive attention from adults when she was a child cannot explain, let alone excuse, her faults; still less can Mr Collins be found acceptable because he contingently suffered from the contrary handicap - denied any sympathetic audience as a child. These kinds of contingently contrasting influences contribute most to a background of irony against which we make our judgements, noting, for example, that Anne Elliot and her sister Mary were both orphaned, but with very different results. But, in order to encompass these arbitrary factors within a rational order, we are, in experienced life as in novels, persuaded to invoke unexamined and unexaminable concepts of natural goodness and badness, predispositions, natures and tempers: by this means we retain a conviction - a Christian conviction for Jane Austen - that characters are ultimately responsible for what they become.

As readers we are encouraged to accept the fact that what we can know and rationally understand about human nature depends upon a

great deal that we cannot know. On the one hand we have the overall sense of living in a world where it should be possible, and where it is certainly preferable, to act and think rationally; on the other, we are made aware that this rationality must be developed in a contingent world where its results may well be influenced by arbitrariness - where, for example, the marriage of two people who have learned, or are learning, to be governed by right reason, may still have to depend on some turkeys being stolen in the neighbourhood.

This contingent world is mainly evoked by narrative incident, but we are also schooled to expect and accept it in Jane Austen's novels by the fact that the controlling rational voice of the author/narrator is often commingled with the voices of less rational characters who have not achieved and maintained control over their lives. Sometimes the character-indexation is obvious, so that we know how to take the narrative information. For example, when we hear that Edward Ferrars was 'deprived' of a good education at Westminster, having to make do with Mr Pratt's: it is the voice of Robert Ferrars that we hear and we know that he is no advertisement for the merits of the Westminster curriculum. At other times we cannot place our information so clearly. The narrator who tells us about Anne Elliot's 'sweetness of character' and 'elegance of mind', tells us also that while she was 'nobody' to the rest of her family, she was to Lady Russell a 'favourite and friend' (pp. 5-6). At this stage in the novel we have no reason to believe that this can be anything but proof of Lady Russell's great perception and disinterested love. There is no obvious character-indexation in what appears to be straight narration; it contrasts strongly with the

heavily character-indexed narrative two paragraphs later:

... Sir Walter might be excused, for thinking himself and Elizabeth as blooming as ever, ... amidst the wreck of the good looks of every body else; ... Anne haggard, Mary coarse, every face in the neighbourhood worsting; ... (p. 6)

Was Anne 'haggard'? Probably not. This is clearly Sir Walter's suspect judgement at work. But whose judgement is at work in the following?

[Anne] believed she must now submit to feel that another lesson, in the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle, was become necessary for her; - (p. 42)

[Anne] could only resolve to avoid such self-delusion in future, and think with heightened gratitude of the extraordinary blessing of having one such truly sympathising friend as Lady Russell. (p. 42)

These are Anne's judgements; but are they being endorsed by the narrator? Probably not, or not intentionally, since we may well feel that 'only Anne' hardly required lessons in the 'art of knowing [her] own nothingness', and that Lady Russell's 'truly sympathising' friendship had persuaded Anne into her present negative state. On the other hand, we may be tempted to accept more readily the 'pure' narrator comment on Anne's 'elegance of mind' and on Lady Russell's perceptiveness. Yet, while the 'elegance of mind' (from wherever such a quality can be derived) is fully borne out by the later narrative and by Anne's speech and behaviour, the perceptiveness of Lady Russell is not; in fact the narrator intervenes later to underline Lady Russell's lack of perceptiveness - hinting at an 'innate' lack.

It is not I think overstating the case to call some of the mismatches between narrator comment and narrative incident 'indeterminacies'. It is also possible to see that 'critical repair' of



these indeterminacies can sometimes lead to 'greater meaning', at other times to a 'recognition of aesthetic fault' (See Introduction above, p. 3). As we have seen in chapter 5 above, a 'critical repair' of the mismatches between what we are told about the influence on Fanny Price of Mansfield Park, particularly of Edmund Bertram, and what the narrative implies about the upbringing of both William and Susan Price does not lead to a deeper understanding of the issue raised - the relative importance of nature and nurture in character development. The most important comments on this issue involve the voice of Sir Thomas Bertram, and his comments serve only to endorse the unconvincing diagnoses made or implied by the narrator but contradicted by the narrative itself. This certainly provides a background of irony, but, on this issue, is it helpful irony?

On the other hand, in the following episode in Emma, Jane Austen totally distances herself from any involvement in deciding accurately between nature and nurture: yet she does not feel the need, as Maria Edgeworth does (see chapter 5, p. 248) to state overtly, in propria persona, that this is an absurd enterprise. The contributions to the 'debate' are Emma's and arise from her attempts to explain away her misjudgement about Robert Martin's abilities:

No doubt he is a sensible man, and I suppose may have a natural talent for - thinks strongly and clearly - and when he takes a pen in his hand, his thoughts naturally find proper words. It is so with some men. Yes, I understand that sort of mind.  
(p. 50)

These are desperate graspings after straws - opinions based on experience Emma could not have had, ('It is so with some men': how many men did she know?) These are Emma's words and Emma's judgements and there is no question of their being endorsed by the

narrator; we are aware above all of Emma's thought processes: 'She read and was surprised. The style was much above her expectations.' These could be the comments of the narrator, but, 'There were not merely no grammatical errors, but as a composition it would not have disgraced a gentleman ...' - this is the voice of Emma finding herself reading a proposal as well written as that which might have been sent by the only gentleman she would think of in such a laudatory context - Mr Knightley. As one critic points out, the narrative sentences are enclosed 'by phrases betokening Emma's presence'.<sup>1</sup>

There are also examples in Emma where a judgement expressed by a character is certainly endorsed by the distanced narrator, but where the reader can be reasonably certain that the character herself is not fully committed to the judgement. After her experience with Mr Elton, Emma appears to forswear matchmaking:

It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more. (pp. 136-37)

The narrator has in a sense backed off, but only to allow the character more scope for self-revelation. At the same time, however, in the context of the whole novel, we recognise the endorsing presence of the narrator, even in the expression of sentiments used in the context of ironic self-betrayal.

As I have suggested, Jane Austen was not concerned to portray human beings or society collapsing into disintegration and

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1. John F. Burrows, Jane Austen's Emma, (Sydney, London: Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 29.

incoherence. Her novels reflect overall the play of a controlling mind. She differs from Maria Edgeworth in allowing that controlling mind to mingle with, even sometimes to be drowned by, other voices; confident that her 'tact and artistry' will result in a picture of human affairs which matches her moral commitment.

As we have seen in chapter 2 above, Margaret Anne Doody believes that Fanny Burney's Camilla is multivoiced and that she also used free indirect discourse. As was noted, what multi-voicedness there is in Camilla is not integrated into the general effect of the novel: while a semblance of integration is imposed at the end of the novel, it is achieved by the silencing, or drastic modification, of many of the voices we have heard. The happy ending and reconciliations, the dispersal of a sense of chaos, are achieved unilaterally by the author. As Doody herself says, 'characters in Camilla do not connect' (Frances Burney: The Life in the Works, p. 261).

Doody reads Camilla as a world of 'dis-integrations'. Even if one cannot read it as Doody does, as a novel where, 'modern (or post modern) modes of allegorical reading seem legitimately applicable' (ibid, p. 269), one cannot fail to contrast the disconnectedness of the various voices with the sense of interaction evoked in Jane Austen's novels. In Camilla, for example, Mr Dubster acts out his eccentric role with the minimum response from those round him: the effects he is having on his listeners are conveyed by simple narrator comment (even when he is unwittingly insulting Camilla's sister in Camilla's presence) and by the turns of the plot: he looks forward to the army of Dickens's eccentrics who are integrated into the novels by chains



of coincidence and symbolism rather than by a developing discourse between all the involved characters and the narrator.

We can contrast the disconnectedness of Mr Dubster or Sir Hugh in Camilla with the multivoiced discourses in which the eccentric Miss Bates is involved in Emma. In that novel we have her strange idiolect evoked in direct speech; we hear Emma mimicking it and Mrs Weston commenting on her mimicry; we hear Miss Bates involved in three and four-way conversations with other characters and failing to understand all that is going on in the language games around her; and when at the Boxhill picnic she plays a crucial part in the development of the plot, it is through her full participation in the many-sided conversation that she plays it. Finally the character-indexation of the narrative which closes the Box Hill episode connects Emma and the narrator with the previous conversations:

She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed - almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, ... She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! - How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! (p. 376)

She weeps, observed by the silent Harriet. This is a significant silence, since we can interpret it as a positive decision of Harriet's, not as a failure of the author to make her characters connect.

The power and flexibility of free indirect discourse in Jane Austen's novels is summed up by Norman Page:

... the peculiar advantages of both direct and indirect speech are combined to fashion a medium which brings the reader close enough to the character's consciousness to [resemble interior

monologuel, yet at the same time preserves the kind of objectivity, and frequent reminders of an impartial authorial presence, which makes explicit comment possible.  
(The Language of Jane Austen, p. 132)

It is not however just that 'explicit comment' is 'possible', but that it can be integrated with other voices. Maria Edgeworth also makes explicit comments, but while Belinda, and even more Helen, are multivoiced in the sense that some of the stronger characters, as Marilyn Butler puts it, 'tend to be critics of their own world', their voices are endorsed or criticised unequivocally by the author/narrator. This is not to suggest that Maria Edgeworth's characters are mere ciphers in an intellectual debate controlled by the author/narrator: in Belinda, Lady Delacour is but the most distinctive and fluent of many lively characters, who, as Marilyn Butler says, 'act out the people they are by their manner of using words' (The War of Ideas p. 143). But compared with Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth as narrator takes fewer risks; her intellectual position is established, not by ironic mingling of plain narrative and character-indexed narrative, but by clear narratorial statements explaining what no reasonably competent reader could have missed:

Lady Delacour spoke with such polite earnestness, and the baronet had so little penetration and so much conceit, that he did not suspect her of irony: ... (I, xi, 203)

the acuteness of his [Mr Vincent's] feelings was to his own mind an excuse for dissimulation; so fallacious is the moral instinct, unenlightened or uncontrolled by reason and religion. (II, xxviii, 279)

An even more glaring example of otiose narrator explanation follows a passage of powerfully effective dialogue between Harriot

Freke and Belinda:

She began by flattery of her beauty; but as she saw this had no effect, she next tried what could be done by insinuating that she had a high opinion of her understanding, by talking to her as an esprit fort. (I, xvii, 320)

We are indeed allowed to enter into the mind of a powerfully drawn character like Lady Delacour, but the dramatic revelation of these workings is introduced by the narrator before, as it were, the curtain is raised and, to make quite sure we have rightly interpreted the impact, is closed by the narrator as she lets the curtain fall: 'The moment Lady Delacour's mind turned to suspicion, her ingenuity rapidly supplied her with circumstances and arguments to confirm and justify her doubts' (I, xiv, 254). This introduces three lengthy paragraphs of Lady Delacour's thought which, while not using later conventions conveying the random nature of a 'stream of consciousness', do nevertheless powerfully convey, in full grammatical and sequential sentences, the force of Lady Delacour's anger and disappointment. But, to make doubly sure that we place these powerful emotions correctly, the narrator sums up: 'Exhausted by the emotions to which she had worked herself up by the force of her powerful imagination, Lady Delacour, ... fell asleep ...' (I, xiv, 255).

It is not merely that Jane Austen's views are usually expressed by the narrator more subtly or ironically than this, it is also that we feel she has more faith in the power of her chosen genre than does Maria Edgeworth. For example, Mr Knightley in Emma, is allowed, without direct comment, to express a Butlerian certainty about man's nature, and a Lockean certainty about the efficacy of



instilling good habits:

Respect for right conduct is felt by every body. If he would act in this sort of manner, on principle, consistently, regularly, their little minds would bend to his. (p. 147).

As has been discussed, (pp. 203-208, above), we cannot be sure what Jane Austen thought about Butler's unprovable assumptions, and can be only slightly more sure about her endorsement of the educational necessity of encouraging virtuous behaviour by instilling consistent habits. She may well have felt strongly about both issues but in the interests of story and credible characterisation she exercises restraint. The principled Mr Knightley is to be shown in the wrong; Emma, rhetorically advancing the claims of expediency, is to be the victor on this occasion. Nevertheless, later in this episode, there is a clear endorsement of moral principle - an endorsement which has a 'felt truth' more powerful than Maria Edgeworth's affirmations, because the truth is character-indexed (see p. 291, above).

In making such contrastive critical judgements as I have made, there is a constant danger of appearing to be too subjective - conditioned to hear 'distinctive voices'. It would be helpful in support of one's judgements to be able to anchor them to specific linguistic patterns. For example, it would have been helpful to show that Jane Austen's greater flexibility and sense of confidence in her control of her characters' and narrator's discourse is manifested by her dispensing with the use of inverted commas as speech markers in her free indirect speech.

Unfortunately Jane Austen, like her contemporaries, uses inverted commas in the more obvious instances of free indirect discourse,

and dispenses with them only in the more subtle and interesting uses.' John Dussinger ('The Language of Real Feeling') points out, 'until about the time of Dickens quotation marks could be used in reported as well as direct speech' and suggests that the conscious application of free indirect discourse may have occurred, 'as a by-product of the effort towards typographical standardisation'.

Narelle Shaw in an article published in 1990, reminds us that Jane Austen does use inverted commas to indicate passages where, 'A character's idiom is audibly mimicked by the author who retains ultimate control of the operative passage'.<sup>2</sup> The citations Shaw makes are all taken from Northanger Abbey. For example,

... Mrs Allen's opinion was more positive. 'She had no doubt in the world of its being a very fine day, if the clouds would only go off, and the sun keep out.' (p. 82)

There is indeed some consistency throughout the novels in using inverted commas for free indirect discourse which mimics what was actually spoken out loud. In Persuasion, Captain Wentworth's abrupt leave taking of Anne at the musical concert in Bath, - 'He must wish her good night. He was going - "he should get home as fast as he could"' - is indicated by inverted commas and is the

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1. For example, Mrs Inchbald uses what we would regard as anomalous punctuation of indirect speech forms to great dramatic effect where Miss Milner, Dorriforth (Lord Elmwood), Mr Sandford and Miss Woodley attempt polite conversation in what is for them all a ghastly situation. A Simple Story 1791, ed. & intro. J.M.S. Tompkins, (London, New York: OUP, 1967), II, p. 182.

2. 'Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of Northanger Abbey', udies in English Literature 1500-1900, vol. 30, (1990), 591-601, p. 592.

norm for this kind of free indirect discourse. But Jane Austen is not consistent in this usage throughout her novels. She will sometimes dispense with the inverted commas in the interests of economy, or when only a few significant fragments of an idiolect are required:

... and Mrs Norris thought it an excellent plan, and had it at her tongue's end and was on the point of proposing it, when Mrs Grant spoke ... (MP, p. 80).

Inverted commas are not used when the narrator's voice remains alongside, or never far away from, the voice of a participating character. When Frank Churchill surveys the ballroom at the Crown Inn, his revealing tones are not marked: 'No, it was long enough, broad enough, handsome enough. It would hold the very number for comfort' (E, p. 198). There is no direct speech marking, except for the question and exclamation marks which nowadays would be regarded as anomalous, 'Why had not Miss Woodhouse revived the former good old days of the room? - she who could do anything in Highbury!'

Narelle Shaw is interested in the uses of free indirect discourse which are 'characterized by a number of reliable indicators' (p. 592). But the more subtle, multivoiced forms of free indirect discourse in Jane Austen's novels, the uses which can be grouped under the general heading of 'character indexation of narrative', are not in this sense 'reliably indicated': they share the same grammatical features and punctuation as indirect speech forms. Yet, even if they have no distinctive grammatical marking, the distinctive multivoicedness is there, as may be illustrated by the following episodes from Camilla, Belinda and



Emma.

These three episodes might be called 'dressing-table monologues': in each of them a heroine contemplates past errors in the privacy of her room. In the first, Burney uses unambiguous single-voiced narrative comment alongside directly quoted interior thoughts. There is at this stage no commingling of narrator and character voices, no question of Camilla 'ironically' taking over 'the narrator's job' (M. A. Doody, p. 257).

And here, her heart-breaking disappointment received the cruel aggravation of the most severe reproach, when, in facing the mirror to deposit her ornaments upon the toilette table, she considered the expensive elegance of her whole dress, now, even in her own estimation, by its abortive purpose, rendered glaringly extravagant. ... 'Would Edgar', thought she, 'wait the event of a meeting at a ball to decide his conduct? ...' (CM, V, iii, 721)

As the scene develops, a faint flavour of ironical comment may be detected: is the steady, informative flow of the narrating voice perhaps coloured by Camilla's own self-deluding inner voice?

... and a yet greater dissatisfaction ensued with herself, for trusting the smallest commission to so vain and ungovernable an agent. She could only hope to hoard the payment from the whole of her next year's allowance, by living in so forbearing and retired a manner, as to require nothing for herself. (V, iii, 721)

In the second episode, from Maria Edgeworth's Belinda, what is illustrated from all the possibilities of free indirect discourse is the most 'bound' usage. It is 'free' in the sense that it allows us to hear something of the voice of the heroine: for example, the italicised sentence below may be better read, not as the narrator informing the reader about Lady Delacour's character, but as the thoughts of Belinda herself. Yet this passage, even in

mid-sentence, moves into unmistakable narratorial mode. The whole account is controlled by the directing voice of the narrator.

... she feared to indulge the romantic hope of ever being loved by a man of superior genius and virtue, with a temper and manners suited to her taste. The only person she had seen, who at all answered this description, was Mr Hervey; and it was firmly fixed in her mind, that he was not a marrying man, and consequently not a man of whom any prudent woman would suffer herself to think with partiality. She could not doubt that he liked her society and conversation; his manner had sometimes expressed more than cold esteem. Lady Delacour had assured her that it expressed love; *but Lady Delacour was an imprudent woman in her own conduct, and not scrupulous as to that of others. Belinda was not guided by her opinions of propriety; and now that her ladyship was confined to her bed, and not in a condition to give her either advice or protection, she felt that it was peculiarly incumbent on her to guard, not only her conduct from reproach, but her heart from the hopeless misery of an ill-placed attachment. She examined herself with firm impartiality; she recollected the excessive pain that she had endured, when she first heard Clarence Hervey say, that Belinda Portman was a compound of art and affectation; but this she thought was only the pain of offended pride - of proper pride.*  
(I, xi, 190-91)

In each of these episodes the author takes us into the mind of her heroine. In each we might expect to hear the voice of the heroine alongside, above, in counterpoint with, or even to the exclusion of the narrator's voice. However, the traces of character-indexation in both episodes fail to leave the narrators' voices in any but a dominant role, since the heroines' idiolects are not sufficiently distinctive. With Maria Edgeworth this seems to be a question of not wishing to take the risk of lessening the didactic potential of her narrator: as we have seen, even a forceful character with a much more distinctive style of speaking, such as Lady Delacour, is not allowed to escape the narrator's tight rein.

The third, more famous, example from Emma has received a great

deal of critical comment - (Emma, chapter 16, pp. 135-36). Here it is offered as an example of the powerful effects that can be achieved by the use of character-indexation of narrative. It is from the mingling of voices that we develop the conviction that, while there are qualities of mind which Jane Austen considers to make some people superior to others, the way these qualities are discussed can be dangerously mistaken. What is more, we are made aware that there is a complex relationship, offering great scope for irony, between judgements of qualities like 'delicacy', 'taste', 'intelligence', and judgement of matters such as rank, status and income. We hear the narrator's cool ironic voice alongside Emma's as the latter recognises her own judgemental blunders: but we are left with an indeterminate mingling of the two voices when we read of Mr Elton's misjudgement of Emma's superiority of 'fortune and consequence'.

Emma reflects internally on her own behaviour and humiliation. Only in one grammatically indicated sentence, 'If I had not persuaded Harriet into liking the man ...' is the narrator's voice totally absent, and we may assume that Emma spoke this as a complete sentence, either to herself or even out loud into the room. But in the following sentences the narrator's voice re-appears:

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; and she would gladly have submitted to feel yet more mistaken - more in error - more disgraced by mis-judgment, than she actually was, could the effects of her blunders have been confined to herself.



In the ensuing passage the narrator's voice almost disappears as Emma appears to embrace painful self-knowledge, but still reveals herself as self-justifying and self-deluding:

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 wit' - but then, the 'soft eyes' - in fact it suited neither; it was just a jumble without taste or truth. Who could have seen through such thick-headed nonsense? (p. 134)

It is worth quoting a later passage at length to illustrate how problematic it can be to place the commentating voice. In this passage the narrator's voice predominates, but what is the status of the comments? It is clear, for example, that the narrator endorses Emma's view that it was her own fault that she has been 'provoked'; but when she expresses herself even more angry by Mr Elton's failure to recognise her superior social consequence than she was by his failure to recognise her superior talents, are her views still being endorsed by the narrator?

She need not trouble herself to pity him. He only wanted to aggrandize and enrich himself; and if Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, the heiress of thirty thousand pounds, were not quite so easily obtained as he had fancied, he would soon try for Miss Somebody else with twenty, or with ten.

But - that he should talk of encouragement, should consider her as aware of his views, accepting his attentions, meaning (in short), to marry him! - should suppose himself her equal in connection or mind! - Look down upon her friend, so well understanding the gradations of rank below him, and be so blind to what rose above, as to fancy himself shewing no presumption in addressing her! - It was most provoking.

Perhaps it was not fair to expect him to feel how very much he was her inferior in talent, and all the elegancies of mind. The very want of such equality might prevent his perception of it; but he must know that in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior. He must know that the Woodhouses had been settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family - and that the Eltons were nobody. The landed property of Hartfield certainly was inconsiderable, being but a sort of notch in the

Donwell Abbey estate, to which all the rest of Highbury belonged; but their fortune, from other sources, was such as to make them scarcely secondary to Donwell Abbey itself, in every other kind of consequence; and the Woodhouses had long held a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood which Mr Elton had first entered not two years ago, to make his way as he could, without any alliances but in trade, or any thing to recommend him to notice but his situation and his civility. - But he had fancied her in love with him; that evidently must have been his dependence; and after raving a little about the seeming incongruity of gentle manners and a conceited head, Emma was obliged on common honesty to stop and admit that her own behaviour to him had been so complaisant and obliging, so full of courtesy and attention, as (supposing her real motive unperceived) might warrant a man of ordinary observation and delicacy, like Mr Elton, in fancying himself a very decided favourite. If *she* had so misinterpreted his feelings, she had little right to wonder that *he*, with self-interest to blind him, should have mistaken her's. (pp. 135-36)

Emma reveals herself as accepting some blame for Mr Elton's failure to recognise that 'he was her inferior in talent': his inadequacies themselves would make him blind to her superiority, and she concedes that she should have anticipated this. However, she accepts none of the blame for not anticipating his further failure to recognise that 'in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior'. At first she can offer no mitigation of, can take none of the blame for, his obtuseness in this matter: she enlarges on his misjudgement at almost vulgar length, until the narrator reports her as being 'obliged on common honesty to stop' - to stop her 'raving'. She admits at last that she had been sufficiently 'complaisant and obliging', to entice an 'ordinary self-interested man' to make these errors. In this last stage of her move towards honest self-appraisal the narrator's voice and character's voice are in complete harmony. But what exactly was the author/narrator's voice saying about the substance of the earlier, lengthy attempts at justification? Was Emma 'raving'



because she was refusing to accept her own responsibility? Or was it because she held ridiculously over-inflated views about the importance of a 'fortune which was scarcely secondary to Donwell Abbey itself ... in consequence'? I suggest that we are allowed to accept, or to hold in ironic juxtaposition, two tones of voice which could justify either reading.

In Maria Edgeworth's later work Helen, there is evidence, as I have suggested (pp. 130-139, above) of the author's attempt to capture moral ambiguity in a main character (Cecilia) by treating the question of upbringing more obliquely and by avoiding in a large part of the novel, a single-voiced, unambiguous explanation or elucidation of events by either the narrator or a mentor character. But the process of revealing for the reader, rather than explaining to the reader, the implications of the narrative does not include the subtle uses of free indirect discourse noted in Jane Austen. For example, there is an episode in Helen where the heroine awakes 'with that indescribable feeling that something painful had happened - that something dreadful was to be this day' (II, 289). The rehearsal to herself of the dreadful situation in which she was shortly to find herself (saying farewell to Lady Davenant without betraying the deceit planned between herself and Lady Davenant's daughter Cecilia) is achieved by straight narration interspersed with direct speech monologue and with only the slightest flavour of free indirect discourse ('but she was no judge'):

She looked into the glass to see whether there was any alteration in her face; none that she could see, but she was no judge. 'How foolish to think so much about it all!' She dressed, and between times inquired from her maid if she had heard of any change in Lady Davenant's intentions of going.



Had any counter-orders about the carriage been given? None; it was ordered to be at the door by twelve ... 'That was well,' said Helen to herself. It would all soon be over. (II, xv, 289-90)

We may note the anomalous grammar of 'that was well': it matches the past tense of the free indirect construction of the unmarked - *it would all soon be over* -, despite that fact that the first sentence is punctuated as if these were the actual words spoken to herself about her present situation. But it cannot be said that such flexibility contributes to a sense of tracking the very consciousness of Helen such as we have with Anne Elliot in Persuasion.

Mary, very much gratified by this attention, was delighted to receive him; while a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles's preparation, the others appeared; they were in the drawing-room. Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's; a bow, a curtesy passed; she heard his voice - he talked to Mary, said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing; the room seemed full - full of persons and voices - but a few minutes ended it. Charles shewed himself at the window, all was ready, their visitor had bowed and was gone; ... the room was cleared, and Anne might finish her breakfast as she could. 'It is over! It is over!' she repeated to herself again and again in nervous gratitude. 'The worst is over!' (pp. 59-60)

On the face of it, this is also a passage of narration leading to several short sentences of directly reported speech (with orthodox tense forms and punctuation). But the narration is not given in a detached narrator voice: the consciousness of Anne is foregrounded very much more than that of Helen: compare,

She looked into the glass to see whether there was any alteration in her face; none that she could see, but she was no judge. (Helen, II, 289)

she heard the voice - he talked to Mary, said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing: the room seemed full - full of persons and voices - ... (P, p. 59)

In the latter, Anne's situation is being described but at the same time her own state of mind, her mixed perceptions and confusions (the room was too full of voices for her to register what was said, yet she still registered that Wentworth was on 'an easy footing' with the Miss Musgroves) are revealed through the nervous rhythms of the prose. More information is given, more implications are made, than could have been provided by a clearer separation of the voices of the narrator and the character.

There is in Jane Austen's works a consistent trust in the power of the genre which can be seen to flag in Maria Edgeworth's work. In both Belinda and Helen the narrative voice falters: in the former case escaping into metafictional parody; in the latter, failing to endorse the subtler criticisms (expressed in the earlier chapters) about her characters' upbringing and convictions. With Jane Austen, the authorial voice works through indirection but does not falter. It allows itself to make ironical comments on the previous action and on the expectations of some readers; but these comments are different in content and tone from the subversion of the ending of Belinda. Jane Austen does not, like Maria Edgeworth, like Charlotte Bronte in the ending of Villette, or like Chaucer in the closing stanzas of Troilus and Criseyde, feel the need to subvert, justify, or apologise for, all that has gone before. Yet she is confident enough in the relationships she has established with her ideal readers to express with one voice aspects of contingency which

could have undermined the happy endings she delivers in another.

As one critic has pointed out,

the ending [of Persuasion] does not result from the reasoned and well-intentioned choices of the characters; yet, by the end of the novel, everyone is appropriately 'rewarded', ...'

There are many ways of reading the 'fortuitous circumstances' in Persuasion: the least plausible reading is that they were devised purely to ensure that the hero and heroine lived happily ever after. Not least of the objections to this reading is that Jane Austen fails to put a closure on contingency: 'the dread of a future war [was] all that could dim her sunshine' (p. 252). Wentworth's phenomenal luck could run out. But, in any case, there had been throughout the novel a constant play on the theme that contingency plays a vital part in our lives and that a commitment to a moral and spiritual order has to take that into account. The central question of Lady Russell's original persuasion of Anne is to be read in that light: 'It was perhaps one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides'. Ostensibly this is Anne speaking, but we have been schooled to respond to the mingling of voices in some passages of virtual direct speech as well as in character-indexed narrative. We can hear in this passage the voice of the author described by Wayne Booth<sup>2</sup> as, 'the immensely mature human being

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1. Paul N. Zietlow, 'Luck and Fortuitous Circumstances in Persuasion: Two Interpretations', English Literary History, No. 32, (1965), p. 179.

2. '"Emma", Emma and the Question of Feminism', Persuasion, 5, (December 1983), 29-40.



who underwrites every act of imagination she takes us through'.

It is much more plausible to read the significant examples of contingency in Jane Austen's novels ('significant' in the sense of being more than the *predictably abnormal* events - the 'given' - which we accept in novels as in experienced life) as planned elements of her creative irony. The irony is that her heroines are not fully justified by the mandatory happy endings. These endings are aesthetically, not morally, justified. The moral justification derives from their self-knowledge and their development of Christian virtues such as forbearance, charity and steadfastness. This is the irony which Persuasion deals in. Paul N. Zietlow expresses the positive feelings which readers experience despite the constant reminders of the contingent nature of the universe:

Persuasion is not a work either of triumphant affirmation or of dark questioning; it is both. It gives us long, fearful looks at the possible ill consequences of human pride and folly - nay, of even the best-intentioned, clearest-sighted human judgments - ... for we know that these 'possibilities' are what in real life would be probabilities - such probabilities as only good fortune or Providence could prevent. And on the other hand, it helps us to know that no matter how fearfully complex and precarious our world can be, evil is evil, and good is good; that Anne deserves her Wentworth and Wentworth deserves his Anne despite the slim likelihood that in reality they would ever get one another. In itself, this knowledge is affirmation. (p. 195)

This thesis has been concerned with the problems which arise for Jane Austen and other novelists of her time when powerful ideas are developed in the context of what had become a powerful artistic vehicle - the novel of manners. In particular it has been concerned with exploring the problems which must arise when proposed influences of hereditary endowments and upbringing - in

the latter term we have included the influences of social codes as expressed in advice books - are balanced one against the other, and both against the concepts of free-will, blameworthiness and corrigibility. As we have seen, it is impossible in this genre to avoid these problems, since some kind of consequentialist resolution is expected.

Jane Austen confronts these problems, not with the didacticism of an author-narrator standing apart from the general discourse, nor, as M. A. Doody suggests of Fanny Burney in Camilla, by a move into 'magic realism' and suggestive symbolism, but by attempting in each of her novels to establish a balance between necessary truth and inescapable contingency - an ironical balance it can be called. In Mansfield Park the irony may be at times insufficiently all-embracing so that we can be left wondering about the 'justice' of the resolution. In the other novels we may accept more readily, without the same moral discomfort, - we have to some extent been 'schooled' to accept by the techniques discussed in this chapter - that, for example, Lydia will always be the amoral, unashamed Lydia, since she 'takes after' her mother; or that Elinor has inherited from her father the stability which immunises her from the influence of her mother, while Marianne's only hope rests on the dubious possibility that Colonel Brandon's late contribution to her upbringing will lessen her self-destructive tendencies. For held in ironical equilibrium with this awareness of the contingencies of both hereditary endowments and education is the certainty that, within their own probable contexts, the protagonists are responsible human beings. The irony, as opposed to the flat contradiction, resides in the

powerful overall impression given by Jane Austen's work that people can be seen to act responsibly towards themselves and others, that the mystery to be explored encompasses this observable fact as well as the fact that the contingencies which shape our world produce seriously flawed and often unattractive sinners. Whatever the contingent forces, the results are not inevitable: Fanny might have married Henry Crawford, but she had the power to make a more fitting match; Anne might never have been in a position to marry Wentworth but she could still choose not to marry Mr Elliot, just as Charlotte Lucas need not have married Collins, despite the economic pressures to do so. In Jane Austen's contingent world, the question of upbringing is an interesting subject to explore not an explanation or a justification for what happens.

It has often been noted that Jane Austen conveys a strong sense of moral commitment - a consistent defence of what has been called her 'moral keep' - without overt moralising. I have proposed here, in comparing Jane Austen with two notable contemporaries, that her achievement is one of novel-writing artistry: there is no evidence that she was a subtler moralist than Maria Edgeworth or that she was more emotionally committed to defending her 'moral keep' than Fanny Burney was of hers. It is in the development of multivoicedness in her novels that the explanation is to be found.

Multivoicedness in Jane Austen's novels, particularly those that include identifiable thought idiolects as well as identifiable dialogue idiolects, is used to mirror the changing relationships between characters and the moral context in which those changes occur. A moral context may be more powerfully conveyed by



discourse between characters rather than by the pronouncements of a detached narrator. As a contemporary philosopher puts it:

Morality is rooted ... deeply in us ... *because its imperatives spring from ... types of relationship into which individual human beings must enter with one another,* because such relationships provide an essential framework around which personalities and goals of individuals organize themselves.' (my italics)

That morality is 'rooted deeply in us' through such 'imperatives' indicates why Jane Austen's concern with her art was as much a moral commitment as were the concerns of more didactic writers to use their novels as vehicles for ideas.

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1. Bernard Harrison, 'Moral Judgement, Action and Emotion', Philosophy, vol. 59, no. 229 (July 1984), 295-321, p. 314.

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