

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: JANE AUSTEN AND THE READER: RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

IN NORTHANGER ABBEY, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, AND EMMA

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Austen employs a number of rhetorical techniques to shape the responses of the reader. In Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, and Emma, these techniques work through style, characterization, narrative method, and narrator-reader relationship to interest readers in the novels and to encourage readers to exercise their perception.

Two features of Austen's style shape the reader's response. Austen's consistent use of conceptual terms in describing behavior encourages readers to adopt the standards the terms imply and to use the terms to analyze behavior. In addition, Austen's use of ironic language often delights readers and it always encourages them to distinguish between appearance and reality.

Austen uses characterization in at least five ways to shape the reader's response. She encourages readers to see character as more important than appearance. She interests readers in realistic characters. She shapes readers' reactions to characters by the manner in which she presents their speech. She deepens readers' understanding of theme by having many characters exemplify some aspect of it. She exercises the perception, judgment, and sympathy of readers by allowing them to make their own decisions about some characters.

Austen's narrative method creates a double view for readers so that they must sort out their perceptions just as the fallible heroines must.

Austen also shapes the reader's responses through the creation of a narrator-reader relationship. The narrator creates this relationship by using irony and by adopting a moral stance.

Austen's varied rhetorical techniques entice readers to become involved in the process of distinguishing appearance from reality, and they prepare readers to perceive correctly.

JANE AUSTEN AND THE READER,
RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES IN NORTHANGER ABBEY,
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, AND EMMA

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PREFACE

Courses in English composition often touch on the rhetorical relationship that exists between the writer and the audience. A writer of expository or argumentative prose uses a variety of techniques to interest readers and to shape their responses. The combination of teaching English composition and reading Jane Austen's Emma stirred my interest in exploring the ways a writer of fiction works to shape the responses of readers. This study is the result of that interest.

Critics have produced many fine studies of Austen's work. Many critics explicate her novels; others deal with a specific subject, such as her place in the development of the novel. Relatively little has been written specifically about the rhetorical nature of her work. However, I have found helpful ideas in most of the criticism I have read. Those studies that deal with Austen's rhetorical practices generally focus on her management of narrative perspective rather than on the other areas of her art that also influence the way readers react to the novels. Wayne C. Booth's chapter on Emma in The Rhetoric of Fiction is an excellent study of Austen's rhetorical use of narrative perspective.

More than any other criticism I have read, Booth's work has shaped my thinking about Austen's handling of narrative perspective and about rhetoric in fiction.

All the faculty members of the ESU English Department that I have studied with as an undergraduate and graduate student have influenced this paper in one way or another. I appreciate the concern they show for good writing, the skill with which they interpret literature, and their efforts to help me improve in both areas. I especially wish to thank Dr. William Cogswell, who helped me to gain an understanding of Austen's eighteenth-century heritage, and Dr. June Underwood, who during her class in Victorian fiction led me to explore many areas of the narrative art. I appreciate the many helpful suggestions Dr. Cogswell and Dr. Underwood offered after reading the manuscript.

A special word of thanks must go to my parents, Alvina and Wayne Boles, without whose love, patience, encouragement, and rugged endurance this project could not have been completed.

C. G. B.

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INTRODUCTION

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

Eudora Welty¹

What is there is Jane Austen's work that helps the reader to become a traveller? What is there in her art that makes it approachable? In the Preface of The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne Booth points out that an author employs rhetorical techniques to help readers enter the fictional world. Booth, who devotes a chapter in his book to Austen's method of involving readers through narrative perspective, calls Austen "one of the unquestionable masters of the rhetoric of narration."² Austen's rhetorical skill extends beyond her use of narrative perspective, however. She employs a number of closely interwoven techniques to help readers enter her fictional world, to involve them in her stories. These techniques serve the additional purpose of leading readers to exercise their judgment and their

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

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

perception.

This study examines rhetorical techniques in three of Austen's six novels: Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, and Emma. These novels are generally seen as representing Austen's early, middle, and late work, respectively.

Although Northanger Abbey was published posthumously in 1818, it was originally composed about 1797 to 1798, sold to a publisher for ten pounds in 1803, and, when it remained unpublished, repurchased for the same amount in 1816.

Austen's correspondence suggests that she may have made some revisions in the work after 1816, but most critics feel that Northanger Abbey contains more early work than any of her other novels. Pride and Prejudice, Austen's best-known work, was published in 1813. Emma, Austen's most critically admired work, was published in 1816.³ These works show that Austen uses the same techniques throughout her career and that she shapes her techniques to meet the differing demands of her stories.

Rhetorical techniques, as Booth defines them, are any devices of the storyteller's art that help to shape or manipulate the way readers respond.⁴ This study looks at Austen's rhetorical techniques from four perspectives:

³ R. W. Chapman, Jane Austen: Facts and Problems, pp. 42, 44, 74-76, 154-55, 159.

⁴ Booth, Fiction, Preface.

style, characterization, narrative method, and narrator-reader relationship. Austen's methods of shaping reader response work together so closely that there is a certain degree of overlap in these categories. For example, some techniques of style affect characterization, some techniques of characterization affect narrative method, and irony affects all four of these categories. However, looking at some techniques more than once is useful because each category presents a slightly different view of a technique.

The four chapters of this study explore how Austen's rhetorical techniques work to shape the way readers respond. Although Austen uses a variety of techniques, they all have the same aims: to involve readers in the story and to engage them in exercising their perception.

The first chapter examines two features of Austen's style that have a decided influence on the way readers respond to her work. One important feature of her style is her use of a conceptual vocabulary. Austen consistently and precisely uses conceptual terms to describe behavior. This practice encourages readers to adopt the standard the terms imply and to use the terms to analyze behavior and evaluate actions. The second feature of Austen's style that has a major influence on readers is her use of ironic language. Austen uses ironic language frequently and in a great variety of forms. This practice often delights readers and

it also encourages them to look closely and perceptively at the characters and their actions.

The second chapter discusses five ways that Austen uses techniques of characterization to shape the response of readers. Through her techniques, Austen encourages readers to recognize that character is more important than appearance. She interests readers in realistic main characters. She shapes the readers' reaction to characters by the way she presents their speech--by what the characters say, by the words they use, and by the manner in which they converse with others. She deepens the readers' understanding of thematic concerns in the novels by having a majority of the characters exemplify some aspect of the theme. She also exercises the readers' perception, judgment, and sympathy by portraying some characters in such a way that readers seem encouraged to feel the opposite of what they should feel about these characters.

The third chapter looks at the way Austen's narrative method shapes the response of readers. The narrator's shifting perspective creates a double view for readers by deftly combining scenes of dialogue with the thoughts of the characters. This technique gives readers both objective and subjective material to synthesize and it encourages them to analyze and evaluate their perceptions. The narrator's use of a variety of techniques, including the ironic arrangement

of events and the use of direct and indirect apologies and criticisms, shapes readers' perceptions and helps readers to achieve a balanced view of the fallible heroines.

The fourth chapter explores Austen's use of the narrator-reader relationship to shape the way readers respond to her work. Although Austen's narrators are each just a bit different, each one uses the same techniques in establishing a relationship with the readers. The narrator creates a sense of community--a sense that she and the readers share tastes, values, and feelings--through the use of irony and of a moral stance. The narrator implies that she and the readers participate in a relationship of like understandings by the way she uses irony. She suggests that she and the readers share moral values by her use of a conceptual vocabulary, subtle moral evaluations (often confirmed by the judgments of a character within the story), and philosophical or witty generalizations and aphorisms. The personality the narrator projects as a wise and witty guide works to hold the relationship together, in part because it projects the role of discriminating and perceptive friend for readers to fill.

Austen's rhetorical techniques do more than interest the reader in a fictional world. They involve readers in a fictional world in which the ability to make judgments is important. As Howard Babb points out, "the underlying motif

in Jane Austen's fiction is . . . the disparity between appearance and reality."⁵ Just as Austen's heroines must learn that things are not always as they seem, so must the readers. Austen's techniques lead readers to sift, analyze, and evaluate what they see in the fictional world. Marilyn Butler suggests that Austen "thinks of goodness as an active, analytical process, not at all the same thing as passive good nature."⁶ Austen's rhetorical techniques demand that readers become involved in this process.

⁵ Howard S. Babb, Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue, p. 242.

⁶ Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, p. 271.

CHAPTER I

STYLE AND THE READER

Two features of Austen's style have a decided influence on shaping the response of readers to her work. Austen's use of general or conceptual terms is extensive; words such as "reason," "good sense," and "self-command" appear on every page. Austen's use of verbal irony is widespread and takes a variety of forms. Irony may appear in short phrases, such as the narrator's description of Isabella Thorpe's "laughing eye of utter despondency" in Northanger Abbey or Mrs. Bennet's "querulous serenity" in Pride and Prejudice or Mr. Woodhouse's "happy regrets" in Emma.⁷ Or irony may extend throughout longer passages, creating more complex effects. Both stylistic techniques--the consistent use of conceptual terms and of ironic language--encourage readers to exercise their perception and judgment.

⁷ Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey (New York: Signet Classic-New American Library, 1965), p. 56; Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 164; Jane Austen, Emma (New York: Signet Classic-New American Library, 1964), p. 82. All further references to these works appear in the text with the abbreviations NA, PP, or E, respectively.

i. CONCEPTUAL TERMS

Austen's use of conceptual terms suggests a relationship between her style and the style of Samuel Johnson and other eighteenth-century writers. Mary Lascelles comments,

To us Jane Austen appears like one who inherits a prosperous and well-ordered estate--the heritage of a prose style in which neither generalization nor abstraction need signify vagueness, because there was enough close agreement as to the scope and significance of such terms.⁸

However, Austen does not merely inherit a vocabulary of general and abstract terms. As Walton Litz notes, Austen uses "the abstract vocabulary of eighteenth-century morality and aesthetics with maximum precision."⁹ In fact, when she applies this conceptual vocabulary to characterization, she gives it added dimensions. Robert Scholes, who points out that Austen and Johnson share a fondness for such abstract terms as "elegance," "breeding," and "principle," feels that the "range, flexibility, and precision" with which Austen uses these terms for characterization is "clearly beyond anything she might have learned from Johnson." Scholes finds that Austen's special strength in this area comes from the way she consistently "combines and recombines the

⁸ Mary Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art, p. 107.

⁹ A. Walton Litz, Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development, p. 49.

elements of her more than ample discriminative vocabulary in delineating her characters' morals, manners, temperaments, and minds."¹⁰ Austen's consistent and precise use of conceptual terms arouses the readers' awareness of the terms, earns their acceptance of them, refines their understanding of them, and encourages their use of them in analyzing behavior and evaluating actions.

Austen makes readers aware of conceptual terms by using them repeatedly. David Lodge suggests that Austen, by her frequent use of general and abstract terms, is in effect "schooling" the reader.¹¹ Conceptual terms appear throughout the novels in the narrator's comments and in the characters' comments as well. Norman Page notes that these terms, which offer "a criteria of worth" for assessing her characters, are "the most striking feature" of Austen's vocabulary.¹² Page discusses a number of these keywords, both nouns and adjectives; some of the most frequently used terms include "manner," "address," "amiable," "civil," "easy," "courteous," "gallant," "polite," "openness," "reserve," "artless," "temper," "judgment," "benevolence,"

¹⁰ Robert Scholes, "Dr. Johnson and Jane Austen," Philological Quarterly, 54 (1975), 381.

¹¹ David Lodge, Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel, p. 99.

¹² Norman Page, The Language of Jane Austen, p. 55. Page discusses these keywords on pp. 67-76.

"candour," "respectable," "genteel," "clever," "knowledge," "understanding," "genius," "well-informed," "sensible," "rational," "prudent," "delicacy," "firmness," "integrity," "principle," "rectitude," "resolution," "self-command," and "steadiness." The mere repeated use of these and similar terms makes readers aware of them; however, it is Austen's technique of carefully applying them to the behavior of her characters that helps readers accept them as tools for analyzing character.

Here, for example, is the way the narrator uses conceptual terms to describe the characters of Bingley and Darcy.

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

This description occurs just after Bingley meets Jane Bennet and Darcy snubs Elizabeth Bennet at the Meryton assembly. Readers tend to accept the narrator's evaluations because her comments agree with the behavior of Bingley and Darcy at the assembly. The narrator describes the character of each

man from a variety of angles as the terms "temper," "disposition," "regard," "judgment," "understanding," and "manners" suggest. The description of Bingley's temper tells readers a good deal about both men. It suggests, for example, that Darcy likes an easy, leadable temper in a companion, perhaps because such a temper permits him to express his own very different disposition. Bingley values Darcy for his regard and his judgment. Although this fact presents Darcy's character in a rather favorable light, it is obvious that the men value each other for very different and perhaps mutually flattering reasons: one is leadable and the other likes to lead. The narrator partially defines the terms "understanding" and "clever" by the way she uses them. An individual may have understanding with or without cleverness; however, the added ingredient of cleverness makes an individual's understanding superior. The words "haughty," "reserved," and "fastidious" used to describe Darcy near the end of the paragraph contrast significantly with the words "easiness," "openness," and "ductility" used to describe Bingley at the beginning. The narrator tells the readers that Darcy's manners are "well bred" but "not inviting." Readers must accept the first half of this evaluation because they trust the narrator; however, readers accept the second half because it agrees so well with the behavior they have seen Darcy exhibit. Readers can easily understand after

this paragraph of character analysis why Bingley is well-liked wherever he goes and why Darcy tends to offend the sensibilities of strangers.

Austen repeatedly balances the actions and speech of characters with comment offered in conceptual terms. Litz notes that in this way Austen brings "both the universal and the local into focus."¹³ This practice suggests that individual actions can be rated on a general scale. Moreover, as Howard Babb states, this seems to point out "the general principles that underlie the individual variety."¹⁴ After having defined the terms by illustrating them with the behavior of the characters, the narrator can use them when introducing a character and make readers feel that the character has been measured according to a set standard of behavior. When the narrator comments that Colonel Fitzwilliam

was about thirty, not handsome, but in person and address most truly the gentleman. . . . [one who] entered into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred man (PP, 118)

the readers recognize that the Colonel measures up rather well. The Colonel has not been merely described, he has been favorably compared in several respects with all

¹³ Litz, p. 51.

¹⁴ Babb, p. 9.

gentlemen and well-bred people.

In fact, Babb notes that because of the precise and consistent way Austen uses conceptual terms, they seem to take on a "life of their own . . . as absolutes." The terms seem "to universalize whatever aspects of experience they name." As Babb suggests, "since the words thus appear markedly abstract, they have a special air of being fixed by reason alone and therefore of being eminently shareable with others." The terms seem especially persuasive. As absolutes fixed by reason, they "seem freed from the fluctuations of merely personal opinion" to the point that they "automatically command assent" from the readers.¹⁵ The standards implied by the terms appear to be taken for granted and readers tend to accept them.

Austen's use of conceptual terms refines the readers' understanding of them. When the narrator in Pride and Prejudice says that Mary Bennet has "neither genius nor taste," the context--both the situation and the phrases used to describe it--define for the readers exactly what a lack of genius and taste means. The narrator says that after Elizabeth played several songs on the pianoforte at a party at Sir William Lucas's,

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

¹⁵ Babb, p. 9.

one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

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

The fact that Mary "was always impatient for display" and had "a pedantic air and conceited manner" makes clear the ways in which she lacks taste. The idea that her hard work was motivated by vanity and a desire for accomplishments, not from any love of music, makes readers aware of just how far Mary is from having any touch of genius. This definition of Mary's lack of taste and genius is rounded out by the comparison of her playing with that of Elizabeth's, which was easy and unaffected and listened to with pleasure.

Austen may also expand the readers' concept of a term by using it in a variety of ways. Scholes notes that the term "elegance" is one of the more flexible words in her vocabulary. It may describe "manners, mind, language, air, and the physical appearance of people or things," and it suggests the proper balance between adequate and too much, "an optimum point just short of excess."¹⁶ As Page notes, the concept of elegance is important in Emma. Elegance is a "quality . . . that the heroine both admires in others and

¹⁶ Scholes, p. 382.

seeks to exemplify herself."¹⁷ When Emma first meets Harriet, she decides that Harriet lacks only "a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect" (E, 20). She further decides that she herself shall undertake to add what Harriet lacks by making her a friend, especially as Harriet's "inclination for good company and power of appreciating what was elegant and clever [that is, Emma herself] showed that there was no want of taste" (E, 22). Emma is honest enough with herself to admit that Jane Fairfax, whom she does not like,

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

The narrator comments that Jane enjoyed "the rational pleasures of an elegant society" while she lived with the Campbells (E, 130). When Frank Churchill's response to Emma's praise of Jane Fairfax as elegant is a quiet "Yes," Emma thinks that "there must be a very distinct sort of elegance for the fashionable world if Jane Fairfax could be thought only ordinarily gifted in it" (E, 154). Emma feels that Mrs. Elton, who is said to be "elegantly dressed," lacks true elegance. Emma "suspected that there was no

¹⁷ Page, p. 64.

elegance; ease, but no elegance. . . . Her person was rather good; her face not unpretty; but neither feature nor air nor voice nor manner were elegant" (E, 213). When Mrs. Elton says she was "astonished" to find Mrs. Weston "so very ladylike" because she had been Emma's governess, Emma springs to Mrs. Weston's defense, pointing out that the "propriety, simplicity, and elegance [of Mrs. Weston's manners] would make them the safest model for any young woman" (E, 220). Mrs. Elton misses the hint and her manners remain the same as they had been. Her elegance is only superficial, and she appears at a Hartfield dinner party merely "as elegant as lace and pearls could make her" (E, 231). She is a fit wife for Mr. Elton, whom Emma earlier judged as "a young man whom any woman not fastidious might like. He was reckoned very handsome, his person much admired in general, though not by [Emma], there being a want of elegance of feature which she could not dispense with" (E, 29). When Mr. Elton proposes to Emma, she is shocked at his "presumption in addressing her," especially as "he was her inferior in talent and all the elegancies of the mind" (E, 110). Emma thinks Frank lacks the proper amount of pride and reserve because he invites most of Highbury to a ball, even persons whom Emma feels are her social inferiors. She notes that "his indifference to a confusion of rank bordered too much on inelegance of mind" (E, 157). Elegance is a term important

for the standard of correctness, taste, and cultivation that it suggests. Emma's applications of it are important also. Although her evaluations are more often than not correct, her use of the term is generally warped just enough to reveal Emma's own shortcomings.

Austen may even refine the readers' understanding of a term by having a character within the story define it.

Mr. Knightley defines the meaning of the word "amiable" when he discusses Frank Churchill with Emma.

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

And Henry Tilney and his sister Eleanor both define the meaning of the word "nice" when Henry playfully teases Catherine for her use of the word.

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

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

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

The characters themselves share Austen's interest in the precise use of conceptual terms.

Austen encourages readers to use conceptual terms in

analyzing behavior and evaluating actions in several ways. First, Austen's use of conceptual terms to describe her people suggests to readers that character is more important than appearance. As Page points out, readers know Emma's mind and character better than she knows them herself; however, all that readers know about her physical appearance is that she is "handsome" (E, 5) and has "the true hazel eye" (E, 32).¹⁸ Even characters whose minds the readers do not come to know well are presented in terms that reveal much more about their character than their appearance. This technique is different from that of Charles Dickens, who generally presents a highly visual description of his characters' physical being. For example, in Bleak House the narrator describes Hortense in this fashion.

My Lady's maid is a Frenchwoman of two-and-thirty, from somewhere in the southern country about Avignon and Marseilles--a large-eyed brown woman with black hair; who would be handsome, but for a certain feline mouth, and general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager, and the skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her anatomy; and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head, which could be pleasantly dispensed with--especially when she is in an ill-humour and near knives. Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments, these objects so express themselves, that she seems to go about like a very neat She-Wolf imperfectly tamed.¹⁹

Hair, mouth, face, eyes--readers can have no doubts about

¹⁸ Page, p. 57.

¹⁹ Charles Dickens, Bleak House, p. 120.

the appearance of Dickens' character. They can see Hortense. The appearance of Hortense suggests unpleasant things about her disposition and character; however, readers are left to wonder about them.

Austen's technique contrasts sharply with that of Dickens. Here, for example, is the description that accompanies John Knightley's first appearance in Emma.

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

Character, manners, temper, mind--readers are told a great deal about John Knightley's character. However, they may wonder about his physical appearance. "Tall" and "gentlemanlike" do not present a definite picture. There is no hint about the color of his hair and eyes, although the expression of his face is suggested by the fact that "his temper was not his great perfection." As Page notes, Austen's technique indicates that she is more interested in "issues of conduct" than in appearance.²⁰ Her technique certainly

²⁰ Page, pp. 58-59.

demands that readers give more attention to the analysis of character and behavior than to physical appearance, dress, and scenery.

Austen also encourages readers to use conceptual terms in analyzing behavior by having the admirable characters use them for this purpose. Page points out that "those characters who command respect" also make "serious use of abstract language," while the foolish or simple characters are generally interested only in the concrete.²¹ Mr. Knightley, for example, consistently discusses character and conduct, especially Emma's. Mr. Woodhouse, however, talks about gruel, boiled eggs, a bit of apple tart, and the importance of changing one's stockings after being out in the rain. Emma, like Mr. Knightley, is concerned with character and conduct, even though she is often misled by her confidence in her ability to discern the motives of other people. By contrast, Harriet treasures a piece of court-plaster and a bit of old pencil that Mr. Elton once used. The interest of the admirable characters in the abstract rather than in the concrete encourages readers to share that interest.

Austen encourages readers to use conceptual terms in analyzing behavior in several additional ways. Readers tend

²¹ Page, p. 59.

to pick up the habit from observing Austen use the terms.

As Lodge suggests,

The subtle and untiring employment of this [conceptual] vocabulary, the exact fitting of value terms to events, the display of scrupulous and consistent discrimination, have a rhetorical effect which we cannot long resist. We pick up the habit of evaluation and resign, for the duration of the novel at least, the luxury of neutrality.

Lodge also notes that Austen's "vocabulary of discrimination" itself "asserts the prime importance . . . of exercising the faculty of judgment."²² The correct application of conceptual terms plays such an important role in the novels that readers see this as an important activity and the terms as important tools.

One of the more subtle, but also more important, ways that Austen's use of conceptual terms encourages readers to use them is by simply suggesting that it is possible to analyze behavior. Page states that behind the use of conceptual terms as Austen uses them "is the basic assumption that personality is susceptible to such dissection and to the corresponding 'naming of parts'; that 'character' is a meaningful and tolerably constant term." Austen's use of conceptual terms suggests "that language provides labels which correspond to realities that can be detected by observation and reflection."²³ Austen's practice instills

²² Lodge, p. 99.

²³ Page, p. 85.

in readers faith in the power of language to name and in the power of the mind to perceive. Naming behavior, attaching terms to it, makes it intelligible. It is something that can be considered and thought about. For readers, behavior becomes something that can be rationally evaluated.

At least for the length of the novel, readers tend to accept Austen's vocabulary of conceptual terms as an important way of analyzing character and behavior. Austen's consistent and precise use of the terms encourages readers to use the terms in judging and evaluating the characters.

ii. IRONIC LANGUAGE

Another feature of Austen's style that influences the response of readers is her use of ironic language. The essence of irony is a recognition of the disparity between appearance and reality. This disparity, as Howard Babb points out, is "the underlying motif in Jane Austen's fiction."²⁴ Irony is everywhere in Austen's work. It plays a role in style, characterization, narrative method, and narrator-reader relationship. W. A. Craik states that in Pride and Prejudice "irony is not merely an attitude, it is a method of presentation, organization, analysis, and

²⁴ Babb, p. 242.

judgment."²⁵ That comment applies equally well to the importance of irony in Northanger Abbey and Emma. Although irony appears in Austen's work in many ways, verbal irony is perhaps the first form readers notice. Austen's ironic language often delights readers and it always has the effect of making them look at things closely and perceptively.

Ironic language is an effective rhetorical tool because of the special appeal it has for readers. Pleasure is an important part of its appeal. G. G. Sedgewick states that the force of an ironic figure of speech springs "from one of the keenest and oldest and least transient pleasures of the reflective human mind--the pleasure of contrasting Appearance and Reality." He goes on to say that in verbal irony "the proper signification of the words constitutes the appearance; the designed meaning is the reality."²⁶ Verbal irony also appeals to the readers' qualitative interests mentioned by Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction. Once irony has been used to any extent, readers expect its use to continue.²⁷ Booth expands on this idea in his book A Rhetoric of Irony, stating that the frequent use of irony sparks readers' "interest and pleasure" and creates an

²⁵ W. C. Craik, Jane Austen: The Six Novels, p. 64.

²⁶ G. G. Sedgewick, Of Irony: Especially in Drama, pp. 5-6.

²⁷ Booth, Fiction, p. 128.

appetite in them for more. Readers also find verbal irony appealing because it leaves something for them to do. Irony is a very condensed form of communication, and if readers are to understand it they must make the required connections. When readers do make the connections, they feel a little burst of pleasure. As Booth notes, "perhaps no other form of human communication does so much with such speed and accuracy."²⁸

In general, irony has a distancing effect. Ironic twists in language help readers maintain enough emotional distance from the object of the irony so that they can judge impartially. When the narrator points out that "Miss Bingley's congratulations to her brother, on his approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere" (PP, 264), readers find themselves placed at just the proper distance to evaluate Miss Bingley's hypocrisy without anger. Irony may also create in readers feelings of amused sympathetic understanding. For example, when Darcy and Elizabeth meet unexpectedly at Pemberley, they are both extremely embarrassed, and they find conversation very difficult while they wait for her aunt and uncle to finish a tour of the grounds. The narrator's comment that to Elizabeth it seems that "time and her aunt moved slowly"

²⁸ Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony, pp. 176, 13.

(PP, 175) helps readers to enjoy the wry humor of her situation, at the same time that it leads them to appreciate her feelings of embarrassment. The use of irony to create sympathy is important in Austen's work. Although Austen uses irony to make readers aware of the shortcomings of her characters, she does not treat all shortcomings in the same manner. Serious deficiencies rate a stringent dose of irony, but harmless human foibles receive a sympathetic dash of ironic humor.

In Austen's work, verbal irony is widespread and takes a variety of forms. The pervasiveness and variety of ironic language plays a major role in the creation of what Graham Hough calls "the continual diversification of the surface, the sparking slightly effervescent quality . . . that gives Jane Austen's work its special flavour."²⁹ This "sparkling" quality interests readers in the work, and the sheer variety and pervasiveness of Austen's irony leads them to exercise their perception. The best way to appreciate the total effect of Austen's ironic language is to look at the various ways it shapes the responses of the reader in a number of individual instances, first in short phrases and then in longer passages.

Norman Page calls Austen's style "condensed" because

²⁹ Graham Hough, "Narrative and Dialogue in Jane Austen," Critical Quarterly, 12 (1970), 210.

"every word and phrase makes a calculated contribution to the total meaning." He points out that with this type of style Austen "often needs no more than an unexpected phrase, an unfamiliar word-order, or a single word out of key with its context, to signal her purpose."³⁰ Much of Austen's verbal irony is created with a twist of word or phrase.

One obvious form of verbal irony that is sure to catch the attention of readers is oxymoron, the bringing together of two contradictory terms. The narrator's comment about the "busy idleness" of Mrs. Allen's mornings in Bath helps readers understand the seriousness with which Mrs. Allen views her visits to the pump-room and the dressmaker's shop (NA, 56); the comment also helps readers to evaluate such activities. The statement that "Mrs. Bennet was restored to her usual querulous serenity" (PP, 164) is a delightful suggestion about the usual state of Mrs. Bennet's temper and it elicits the readers' ready agreement. When readers are told that "Mr. Woodhouse was enjoying a full flow of happy regrets and fearful affection with his daughter [Isabella]" (E, 82), they understand how much these two are alike in taking pleasure in fears and apprehensions. After Elizabeth receives Darcy's letter, "not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which she might indulge in all

³⁰ Page, p. 196.

the delight of unpleasant recollection" (PP, 146). This example of Austen's ironic amusement makes readers aware that Elizabeth's feelings are changing toward Darcy.

Booth points out that the use of a word or phrase belonging to a different stylistic level can be ironic.³¹ One especially memorable example of this technique is the first sentence of the last chapter in Pride and Prejudice: "Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters" (PP, 265). The phrase "got rid of" certainly conflicts stylistically with the rest of the sentence. It is ironic because it expresses so well Mrs. Bennet's purpose in life-- to dispose of her daughters in marriage to whomever she could in any way that she could. It also suggests her failure to appreciate properly Jane and Elizabeth who really are her "two most deserving daughters."

Wright notes that Austen uses a "slightly grand epithet for something much more ordinary [as] a characteristic method of achieving an ironic purpose."³² For example, the narrator at one point refers to Miss Bingley as Darcy's "faithful assistant" (PP, 26). The phrase suggests to readers Miss Bingley's scrambling efforts to become Mrs.

³¹ Booth, Irony, p. 69.

³² Andrew H. Wright, Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure, p. 42.

Darcy by always supporting Darcy's opinions and always sharing his activities, even to the point of reading the second volume of a book while he reads the first. Another example of the slightly grand epithet occurs in this passage on Mr. Bennet's relationship with his wife:

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

This phrase suggests several things to the readers: how Mr. Bennet may regard himself, and how far short such an attitude falls from attaining that of the true philosopher.

Austen occasionally juxtaposes an ironically exaggerated sentence with a sentence of good sense to increase the ironic effect on the reader. As Craik notes, this occurs frequently in Northanger Abbey when Austen is parodying the conventions of popular fiction.³³ For example, the narrator notes that Catherine Morland's trip to Bath with the Allens "was performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety. Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero" (NA, 14; emphasis added). The absurdity of popular fiction conventions is obvious to readers because of the juxta-

³³ Craik, p. 28.

position of the two sentences and because of the use of words like a "lucky overturn."

Austen uses clichés ironically. The following comment from a letter she wrote to her young niece Anna Austen, who was writing a novel, indicates Austen's objection to the serious use of a trite expression:

Devereux Forester's being ruined by his vanity is extremely good; but I wish you would not let him plunge into 'a vortex of dissipation.' I do not object to the thing, but I cannot bear the expression; it is such thorough novel slang, and so old that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened.³⁴

Instead, Austen preferred the use of "thorough novel slang" and clichés to offer readers an ironic insight into a character's weaknesses. The use of clichés may emphasize a character's overly dramatic attitude. Catherine Morland is very upset when John Thorpe tricks her into riding with him in his gig, causing her to break her promise to go walking with Henry Tilney and his sister. After recounting this episode, the narrator grandly states in the best sentimental novel fashion: "And now I may dismiss my heroine to the sleepless couch, which is the true heroine's portion; to a pillow strewed with thorns and wet with tears" (NA, 75). This dismissal serves the double function of parodying conventions of popular fiction and of suggesting Catherine's

³⁴ William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters, A Family Record, p. 359. The letter was written 28 September 1814.

excess reaction to the episode. When Catherine later meets Henry at a play, she apologizes. Then,

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

Readers must smile at the overstatement of "misery" and at the cliché that concludes the sentence, both of which suggest Catherine's youthful tendency to exaggerate.

Characters who use clichés in their speech unconsciously expose the shallowness of their feelings and their understanding. When Bingley leaves Netherfield, Mrs. Bennet expresses her disappointment by saying, "Well, my comfort is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart, and then he will be sorry for what he has done" (PP, 156-57). Readers recognize that this is certainly strange comfort. When Lydia runs off with Wickham, Mary Bennet says to Elizabeth, "This is a most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation" (PP, 198). Readers cannot wonder that Elizabeth's only reply is a stare. Mr. Collins, who is a clergyman, sends a letter to comfort Mr. Bennet upon "the greivous affliction" Lydia has caused, saying,

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

The narrator does not need to make any comment. These characters have ironically exposed their own shortcomings to the readers' view.

Austen may also use clichés to reveal a character's affectations. This is certainly the effect when Mrs. Elton comments that during courtship Mr. Elton was so impatient over delays in various arrangements "that he was sure at this rate it would be May before Hymen's saffron robe would be put on for us!" (E, 245). She sometimes uses clichés to make an ironic evaluation of a character's activities. For example, when the narrator comments that Harriet Smith's collection of riddles was the "only mental provision she was making for the evening of life" (E, 57), the triteness of the cliché emphasizes the shallowness of the mental provision that is being made, and at the same time it very compactly conveys the narrator's opinion to the readers.

Ironic overstatement is another device that alerts readers to the difference between the way things may seem and the way things really are. This technique is used frequently in Northanger Abbey to parody novel conventions. Anticipating what Mrs. Morland will say and do before Catherine makes her trip to Bath, the narrator makes these comments.

When the hour of departure drew near, the maternal anxiety of Mrs. Morland will be naturally supposed to be most severe. A thousand alarming presentiments of evil

to her beloved Catherine from this terrific separation must oppress her heart with sadness, and drown her in tears for the last day or two of their being together; and advice of the most important and applicable nature must of course flow from her wise lips in their parting conference in her closet. Cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farmhouse, must, at such a moment, relieve the fulness of her heart. Who would not think so? (NA, 13)

If the readers think so, they are mistaken. Mrs. Morland offers Catherine this advice:

"I beg, Catherine, you will always wrap yourself up very warm about the throat, when you come from the rooms at night; and I wish you would try to keep some account of the money you spend; I will give you this little book on purpose." (NA, 13-14)

The juxtaposition of overstatement and mundane common-sense advice points up the irony of the exaggeration. In Pride and Prejudice, Mr. Collin's pompous proposal to Elizabeth is a morass of overstatement, clichés, and fuzzy syntax. With each convoluted sentence, Mr. Collins betrays his lack of tact and of any real feelings. Perhaps the most ironic portion of the proposal occurs when Mr. Collins says, "and now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection" (PP, 75), and then supports his statement by saying that he will not hold it against Elizabeth that she will inherit only a thousand pounds when her mother dies. Austen may also effectively use hyperbole or overstatement on a much smaller scale. When Emma must ride in the carriage to an evening party at the Westons with her brother-in-law, who is quite

vocal in his dislike of getting out in bad weather, of leaving his children at home, and of going to parties in general, the narrator comments that Emma "could not be complying, she dreaded being quarrelsome; her heroism reached only to silence" (E, 93). Austen uses the ironic overstatement of "heroism" to help readers feel an amused sympathy for Emma.

Understatement is another ironic device Austen uses. One example is this circuitous statement of Catherine Morland's opinion of John Thorpe.

Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable. (NA, 55)

This is a stronger condemnation of Thorpe than a direct statement of his boorishness could create. It is also a good indication of Catherine's social inexperience but basically sound instincts.

Wright calls attention to Austen's use of the ironic device called antiphrasis, the "use of words in a sense opposite to their proper meaning." Wright points out that "by forcing the words to stand self-contradicted," Austen makes readers notice "a passage which might otherwise be skipped over as conventional description."³⁵ For example,

³⁵ Wright, pp. 185-86.

in Northanger Abbey the narrator comments that

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

Isabella's feelings, of course, are not at all "pure and uncoquettish," but attaching those terms to them makes sure that readers notice the exact nature of Isabella's actions.

Lascelles notes a device she calls the "counterfeit connexion" in which there is "the deliciously bland appearance of logical connexion" that does not exist.³⁶ For an example, she cites Mr. Woodhouse's comment to Emma after he meets Mrs. Elton for the first time: "Well, my dear, considering we never saw her before, she weems a very pretty sort of young lady" (E, 221). The first part of his comment has nothing to do with the last part, and readers see it as a very fitting utterance for Mr. Woodhouse to make.

Wright identifies syntactical anti-climax as another ironic device that Austen uses.³⁷ When Isabella Thorpe writes to Catherine asking her to intercede with her brother on her behalf, even Catherine is aware of the insincerity betrayed by this passage of the letter:

I am quite uneasy about your dear brother, not having

³⁶ Lascelles, pp. 144-45.

³⁷ Wright, p. 188.

heard from him since he went to Oxford; and am fearful of some misunderstanding. Your kind offices will set all right;--he is the only man I ever did or could love, and I trust you will convince him of it. The spring fashions are partly down; and the hats the most frightful you can imagine. (NA, 180)

And the letter goes on and on. A more subtle example of the technique of syntactical anti-climax appears in Emma.

Mrs. Churchill is a thoroughly unpleasant person whom no one in Highbury, other than Mr. Weston, has ever met. When she conveniently dies, the narrator reports the effect of the news upon Highbury in this manner:

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

The curiosity that crops up at the end of the passage is quite a change from the sympathy suggested by the beginning. Because Mrs. Churchill was so deservedly disliked, readers sense that the last reaction is probably the most sincere.

Another device Austen occasionally uses is the ironic paraphrase of a character's conversation. When all the intervening material is removed by the narrator, the character stands condemned by his or her own words. A prime example of this occurs when Mrs. Elton "in all her apparatus of happiness"--a large bonnet and basket--is picking strawberries in Mr. Knightley's strawberry beds.

"The best fruit in England--everybody's favourite--always wholesome. These the finest beds and the finest

sorts. Delightful to gather for oneself--the only way of really enjoying them. Morning decidedly the best time--never tired--every sort good--hautboy infinitely superior--no comparison--the others hardly eatable--hautboys very scarce--Chile preferred--white-wood finest flavour of all . . . delicious fruit--only too rich to be eaten much of--inferior to cherries--currants more refreshing--only objection to gathering strawberries the stooping--glaring sun--tired to death--could bear it no longer--must go and sit in the shade." (E, 284-85)

The narrator begins the next paragraph by saying, "Such, for half an hour, was the conversation." In that short time Mrs. Elton manages to contradict almost every opinion she states. In this passage her own words condemn her as inconsistent. In fact, if Mrs. Elton read this paraphrase, even she would have to recognize her inconsistencies.

The above examples illustrate the most prominent types of verbal irony readers encounter in Austen's work. No doubt additional types can be identified. Even those pointed out are used in more ways than have been mentioned. The sheer variety has an impact on readers. They must read carefully or they might miss something; their perception is exercised on each page. Use of these many types of irony is not only a way of making readers look closely at the page, but also a way of making them look closely at the behavior of the characters--at Mr. Woodhouse's illogical way of thinking, at Mr. Collins's pasteboard emotions, at Catherine Morland's rather charming youthful exaggerations.

Austen's verbal irony may be found as a brief word or phrase in a rather bland passage, as exemplified above, or

it may shape an entire passage. This example from Northanger Abbey suggests the ways this more sustained irony can form the readers' responses. Catherine Morland, her brother James, Isabella Thorpe, and her brother John have just returned from a walk.

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

This passage is like a paraphrase of Isabella's conversation and it illustrates many of her traits. Isabella's extreme affectations are so strongly presented here that they can grate on the reader's nerves. The first section of the paragraph emphasizes her determined efforts to attach James Morland; no one's watch but James's will convince her of the time. The repetition of the words "inconceivable, incredible,

impossible" underscores her use of hyperbole and her exaggerated behavior. Readers encounter Catherine in the middle of the paragraph and the meeting is a distinct relief. Plain, unaffected Catherine, who may be dazzled by Isabella, but who would not tell a lie for her, is a welcome change. Isabella's affected exaggerations continue through the rest of the paragraph: "ages," "thousands of things to say," "never to be together again." And finally, to conclude the paragraph in grand style and lend the finishing touch to Isabella's insincerity are two oxymorons: "smiles of exquisite misery," and "the laughing eye of utter despondency." Readers are left with no doubt about the nature of Isabella's character, nor that of Catherine's in contrast.

Another example of a heavily ironic passage is this one from Pride and Prejudice. After Mr. Collins has been rejected by Elizabeth, he receives a friendly reception from Charlotte Lucas. Mr. Collins slips out of the Bennets' home "with admirable slyness" and hastens

to Lucas Lodge to throw himself at [Charlotte's] feet. . . . His reception . . . was of the most flattering kind. Miss Lucas perceived him from an upper window as he walked towards the house, and instantly set out to meet him accidentally in the lane. But little had she dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited her there.

In as short a time as Mr. Collins's long speeches would allow, every thing was settled between them to the satisfaction of both; and as they entered the house, he earnestly entreated her to name the day that was to make

him the happiest of men; and though such a solicitation must be waved for the present, the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained. (PP, 85)

The clichés that litter this passage echo Mr. Collins' speech and suggest to readers that he uses phrases such as "throw himself at her feet," "earnestly entreated her," and "name the day that was to make him the happiest of men" in talking with Charlotte. Short twists of irony enliven the passage. The phrases "[Charlotte] instantly set out to meet him accidentally in the lane" and "in as short a time as Mr. Collins's long speeches would allow" are especially nice touches. Although the phrase "the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness" seems straightforward, the next sentence alters the readers' perspective of it. The final sentence is the most heavily ironic of the passage. Clearly Charlotte is making this bargain with her eyes open. She wants a home of her own, even if Mr. Collins comes with it. Her desire for Mr. Collins' person is "pure and disinterested." It is his house she covets. Mr. Collins, on the other hand, wants a wife--and any woman will do. Miss Lucas is the third woman whose hand he has sought within a week. In this passage, irony distances readers from the characters and helps them recognize the heartlessness with

which both characters are going through the forms to obtain what they want.

Continually, throughout all of Austen's work, verbal irony--whether in short phrases or longer passages--helps to shape the response of readers. Austen uses ironic language to expose falseness and shortcomings in the speech and behavior of her characters. The readers' perception of this irony draws them into the process of evaluating and judging, of measuring the characters according to the standards Austen's use of conceptual terms leads them to use as a value scale. This is the serious side of Austen's use of verbal irony.

However, there is another side, just as important to the readers' involvement. Graham Hough, in discussing "the subtlety and range" of Austen's use of ironic language, comments that

However serious her purpose, there is an element of sheer playfulness in Jane Austen's narrative method. By playfulness I do not imply triviality, rather the sense in which Schiller thinks of all art as play--an unself-conscious delight in virtuosity, in exercising a skill with the utmost delicacy and variety of which it is capable.³⁸

This sense of playfulness appears in the great variety of forms Austen's irony assumes, in the frequency with which it is used, and in its use to create sympathy as well as to

³⁸ Hough, p. 211.

expose hyprocrisy. This element of playfulness is attractive. It adds to the readers' pleasure. It promotes their response of willingly doing what the language asks of them--probing beneath the surface of behavior to distinguish between appearance and reality.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERIZATION AND THE READER

Austen's portrayal of characters advances the involvement of readers in the novels. In at least five ways characterization techniques help to shape the readers' responses. Austen's techniques encourage readers to recognize that character is more important than appearance. They interest readers in realistic rather than ideal main characters. They shape the readers' reaction to characters by the way in which their speech is presented--by what the characters say, by the words they use, and by the manner in which they converse with others. They deepen the readers' understanding of the thematic concerns of the novels by having a majority of the characters exemplify some aspect of the theme. And they exercise the readers' perception, judgment, and sympathy by portraying some characters in such a way that readers seem encouraged to feel the opposite of what they should feel about these characters.

As indicated earlier, Austen encourages readers to consider the character of her people rather than their appearance by emphasizing behavior and minimizing appearance.

Near the end of Northanger Abbey, the narrator recounts with a grand flourish the marriage of the deserving Eleanor Tilney to a young man whom readers have not met before. In fact, the only knowledge readers have of the young man up to this point in the story comes by way of his laundry list that Catherine discovered in a "mysterious" cabinet during her Gothic phase and at first mistook for the last manuscript of some tortured being. At the time of the marriage, the narrator describes Eleanor's nameless husband in this way.

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

Obviously, the narrator is spoofing the conventions of popular fiction that allow unbelievably suitable mates for young ladies to appear miraculously at just the right moment. But even though this introduction of a character is intended as a spoof, it is consistent in two ways with Austen's methods of character portrayal. First, readers are told about the young man's merits, that he deserves Eleanor--certainly high praise--and that he is charming. Second, readers are not given a hint about his physical appearance, other than what might be implied by the word "charming."

Austen does not describe in detail the physical appearance of her characters, even that of heroines, whose appearance customarily receives a great deal of attention

from writers. Readers are told that Catherine Morland "had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without much colour, dark lank hair, and strong features--so much for her person . . ." (NA, 9). Although the Catherine thus described is only ten years old, the narrator is mocking the lengthy and angelic descriptions heroines receive in popular fiction. This reversal of the readers' conventional expectations stimulates reader interest.³⁹ By the time Catherine reaches the age of fifteen, readers are told, her "appearances were mending . . . her complexion improved, her features were softened by plumpness and colour, her eyes gained more animation, and her figure more consequence" (NA, 10). And when Catherine hears her father say that "she is almost pretty," she is very happy indeed. In contrast to these rather vague descriptions of a less than ideal physical appearance are several pages describing Catherine's character--her heart, disposition, manners, and mind. The rest of the novel concentrates on the development of Catherine's character, and the only additional physical descriptions are a few references to her eyes sparkling when she is talking with Henry Tilney.

The physical appearance of Austen's other heroines receives similar treatment. The first time Darcy sees

³⁹ Booth, Fiction, p. 127.

Elizabeth Bennet he describes her as "tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me" (PP, 7). Readers are told that

when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression in her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing. (PP, 15)

And before long he finds himself "meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (PP, 18). By the time Darcy and Elizabeth accidentally meet at Pemberley, Darcy says that he considers "her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance" (PP, 185). Although none of Darcy's comments create a very precise picture of Elizabeth, they are the major source of information about her appearance. This method of description is especially appropriate because Darcy's changing opinion of her appearance parallels the growth of his love for Elizabeth. Thus his comments serve the double purpose of suggesting Elizabeth's appearance and of suggesting Darcy's change of mind and heart.

In Emma the narrator says in the first sentence that Emma is "handsome," but that is her only comment on the heroine's appearance. The readers' concept of Emma's appearance is created by the comments of Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley in the fifth chapter. After a lengthy discussion

about Emma's character, Mrs. Weston, trying to change the subject, comments, "How well she looked last night!" To this Mr. Knightley replies, "Oh! you would rather talk about her person than her mind, would you?" From Mrs. Weston's enthusiastic comments, readers learn that Emma has "the true hazel eye--and so brilliant!" and the "bloom of full health and such a pretty height and size." Mr. Knightley says,

"I have not a fault to find with her person. . . . I think her all you describe. I love to look at her; and I will add this praise, that I do not think she is personally vain. Considering how handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it." (E, 32-33)

Then he once again discusses the flaws he sees in her character and her actions. Knightley is portrayed as an admirable character in the novel. His concern with behavior and character rather than with appearance encourages readers to rate character as more important than appearance.

These descriptions of three of Austen's heroines demonstrate several facets of her technique of character portrayal. The descriptions of appearances are very general, allowing readers to fill in the details with their imagination, just as the narrator suggested they do in the description of Eleanor's husband. This allows readers to see the characters as they would like to see them. Another point is that heroines are not necessarily beautiful. Catherine is not. Elizabeth is to the man who loves her. Emma is on the evidence of the narrator's comment that she

is handsome and the few references made to her appearance by those people who care for her a great deal. Readers are not given descriptions of the heroines' faces, hair styles, and dresses. Instead, they are furnished with descriptions of their manners, minds, and hearts. And these descriptions, made in conceptual terms, are supported by the actions of the heroines. Austen thus leads readers to regard character as more important than appearance. She describes character in conceptual terms, as discussed in the first chapter of this study. And she does not describe appearance in any detail. When she does mention appearance, she makes it serve an additional purpose, such as extending a parody or informing readers of one character's feelings toward another character.

Although Austen's characters lack the glamour of ideally perfect Heroes and Heroines, they interest readers because they seem realistically human. As Margaret Shenfield points out in discussing Austen's method of characterization,

Perhaps, in the end, no other side of reality is so satisfying to the reader; after all, society changes; classes, environments, cities, and even countrysides vary; but the human personality is always of interest to the human reader.⁴⁰

Austen lends an air of humanness to her characters in two

⁴⁰ Margaret Shenfield, "Jane Austen's Point of View," Quarterly Review, 296 (1958), 306.

ways. She allows her characters to display a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, and she portrays even her main characters with irony. Both techniques make characters seem specific and concrete. The characters seem like people readers encounter in the real world.

Austen's characters are never perfect. They are not all good or all bad. The fact that human beings have mixed characters is one of the most important things Catherine Morland must learn. After she awakens from her Gothic delusions of fancying that General Tilney had murdered his wife, or at best had kept her a secret prisoner in her room for years, Catherine comes to this conclusion.

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the Midland counties of England, was to be looked for. . . . Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. Upon this conviction, she would not be surprised if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney, some slight imperfection might hereafter appear; and upon this conviction she need not fear to acknowledge some actual specks in the character of their father, who, though cleared from the grossly injurious suspicions which she must ever blush to have entertained, she did believe, upon serious consideration, to be not perfectly amiable. (NA, 166-67)

Commenting on the mixed characters of Austen's people, Gilbert Ryle suggests that her characters are fashioned after the "Aristotelian pattern of ethical ideas" rather

expose hypocrisy. This element of playfulness is attractive. It adds to the readers' pleasure. It promotes their response of willingly doing what the language asks of them--probing beneath the surface of behavior to distinguish between appearance and reality.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERIZATION AND THE READER

Austen's portrayal of characters advances the involvement of readers in the novels. In at least five ways characterization techniques help to shape the readers' responses. Austen's techniques encourage readers to recognize that character is more important than appearance. They interest readers in realistic rather than ideal main characters. They shape the readers' reaction to characters by the way in which their speech is presented--by what the characters say, by the words they use, and by the manner in which they converse with others. They deepen the readers' understanding of the thematic concerns of the novels by having a majority of the characters exemplify some aspect of the theme. And they exercise the readers' perception, judgment, and sympathy by portraying some characters in such a way that readers seem encouraged to feel the opposite of what they should feel about these characters.

As indicated earlier, Austen encourages readers to consider the character of her people rather than their appearance by emphasizing behavior and minimizing appearance.

Near the end of Northanger Abbey, the narrator recounts with a grand flourish the marriage of the deserving Eleanor Tilney to a young man whom readers have not met before. In fact, the only knowledge readers have of the young man up to this point in the story comes by way of his laundry list that Catherine discovered in a "mysterious" cabinet during her Gothic phase and at first mistook for the last manuscript of some tortured being. At the time of the marriage, the narrator describes Eleanor's nameless husband in this way.

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

Obviously, the narrator is spoofing the conventions of popular fiction that allow unbelievably suitable mates for young ladies to appear miraculously at just the right moment. But even though this introduction of a character is intended as a spoof, it is consistent in two ways with Austen's methods of character portrayal. First, readers are told about the young man's merits, that he deserves Eleanor--certainly high praise--and that he is charming. Second, readers are not given a hint about his physical appearance, other than what might be implied by the word "charming."

Austen does not describe in detail the physical appearance of her characters, even that of heroines, whose appearance customarily receives a great deal of attention

from writers. Readers are told that Catherine Morland "had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without much colour, dark lank hair, and strong features--so much for her person . . ." (NA, 9). Although the Catherine thus described is only ten years old, the narrator is mocking the lengthy and angelic descriptions heroines receive in popular fiction. This reversal of the readers' conventional expectations stimulates reader interest.³⁹ By the time Catherine reaches the age of fifteen, readers are told, her "appearances were mending . . . her complexion improved, her features were softened by plumpness and colour, her eyes gained more animation, and her figure more consequence" (NA, 10). And when Catherine hears her father say that "she is almost pretty," she is very happy indeed. In contrast to these rather vague descriptions of a less than ideal physical appearance are several pages describing Catherine's character--her heart, disposition, manners, and mind. The rest of the novel concentrates on the development of Catherine's character, and the only additional physical descriptions are a few references to her eyes sparkling when she is talking with Henry Tilney.

The physical appearance of Austen's other heroines receives similar treatment. The first time Darcy sees

³⁹ Booth, Fiction, p. 127.

Elizabeth Bennet he describes her as "tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me" (PP, 7). Readers are told that

when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression in her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing. (PP, 15)

And before long he finds himself "meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (PP, 18). By the time Darcy and Elizabeth accidentally meet at Pemberley, Darcy says that he considers "her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance" (PP, 185). Although none of Darcy's comments create a very precise picture of Elizabeth, they are the major source of information about her appearance. This method of description is especially appropriate because Darcy's changing opinion of her appearance parallels the growth of his love for Elizabeth. Thus his comments serve the double purpose of suggesting Elizabeth's appearance and of suggesting Darcy's change of mind and heart.

In Emma the narrator says in the first sentence that Emma is "handsome," but that is her only comment on the heroine's appearance. The readers' concept of Emma's appearance is created by the comments of Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley in the fifth chapter. After a lengthy discussion

about Emma's character, Mrs. Weston, trying to change the subject, comments, "How well she looked last night!" To this Mr. Knightley replies, "Oh! you would rather talk about her person than her mind, would you?" From Mrs. Weston's enthusiastic comments, readers learn that Emma has "the true hazel eye--and so brilliant!" and the "bloom of full health and such a pretty height and size." Mr. Knightley says,

"I have not a fault to find with her person. . . . I think her all you describe. I love to look at her; and I will add this praise, that I do not think she is personally vain. Considering how handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it." (E, 32-33)

Then he once again discusses the flaws he sees in her character and her actions. Knightley is portrayed as an admirable character in the novel. His concern with behavior and character rather than with appearance encourages readers to rate character as more important than appearance.

These descriptions of three of Austen's heroines demonstrate several facets of her technique of character portrayal. The descriptions of appearances are very general, allowing readers to fill in the details with their imagination, just as the narrator suggested they do in the description of Eleanor's husband. This allows readers to see the characters as they would like to see them. Another point is that heroines are not necessarily beautiful. Catherine is not. Elizabeth is to the man who loves her. Emma is on the evidence of the narrator's comment that she

is handsome and the few references made to her appearance by those people who care for her a great deal. Readers are not given descriptions of the heroines' faces, hair styles, and dresses. Instead, they are furnished with descriptions of their manners, minds, and hearts. And these descriptions, made in conceptual terms, are supported by the actions of the heroines. Austen thus leads readers to regard character as more important than appearance. She describes character in conceptual terms, as discussed in the first chapter of this study. And she does not describe appearance in any detail. When she does mention appearance, she makes it serve an additional purpose, such as extending a parody or informing readers of one character's feelings toward another character.

Although Austen's characters lack the glamour of ideally perfect Heroes and Heroines, they interest readers because they seem realistically human. As Margaret Shenfield points out in discussing Austen's method of characterization,

Perhaps, in the end, no other side of reality is so satisfying to the reader; after all, society changes; classes, environments, cities, and even countrysides vary; but the human personality is always of interest to the human reader.⁴⁰

Austen lends an air of humanness to her characters in two

⁴⁰ Margaret Shenfield, "Jane Austen's Point of View," Quarterly Review, 296 (1958), 306.

ways. She allows her characters to display a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, and she portrays even her main characters with irony. Both techniques make characters seem specific and concrete. The characters seem like people readers encounter in the real world.

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Commenting on the mixed characters of Austen's people, Gilbert Ryle suggests that her characters are fashioned after the "Aristotelian pattern of ethical ideas" rather

than the Calvinist pattern because they differ "from one another in degree and not in kind." According to Ryle, the Calvinist pattern groups people "as either Saved or Damned, . . . either White or Black, either Innocent or Guilty, either Saints or Sinners." However, Ryle notes that according to the Aristotelian pattern

A person is not black or white, but iridescent with all the colours of the rainbow; and he is not a flat plane, but a highly irregular solid. . . . he is better than most in one respect, about level with the average in another respect, and a bit, perhaps a big bit, deficient in a third respect.

As Ryle points out, Austen's characters seem "alive all over" because they display "admirably or amusingly or deplorably porportioned mixtures of all the colours there are, save pure White and pure Black." For this reason, her characters are "like the people we really know," full of human contradictions and inconsistencies.⁴¹

Not only are Austen's characters mixtures of good, bad, and everything in between, the characters of one sex are no more unmixed than those of the other. When Henry Tilney is talking with Catherine, he comments,

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

⁴¹ Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists," in Critical Essays on Jane Austen, ed. B. C. Southam, pp. 114-15.

Just as taste, or its lack, is equally divided between Austen's men and women, so are the other virtues and weaknesses of the mind, heart, and moral sense. Mr. Collins' mind is hardly any stronger than Mrs. Bennet's. Goodhearted Mrs. Allen's interest in finery is not very different from kindly Mr. Woodhouse's interest in health. And Lydia's sense of guilt and remorse is every bit as absent as Wickham's. No virtues or vices are seen as the sole province of one sex or the other. And, as Carolyn Heilbrun points out, Austen portrays men and women as "equally responsible, both morally and socially, for their actions."⁴² Because virtue, vice, and accountability are equally divided between Austen's men and women, her characters seem like realistic people.

The members of one social class are no more unmixed in character than are the members of other social classes. Although Austen does not portray all social classes, she does present a small variety of classes whose members are often very conscious of social rank. However, admirable qualities, or their opposites, have no connection with social rank in Austen's novels. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, with her impertinent questions and managing propensities, is as crass and unpleasant in her way as Mrs. Elton, the former

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

Miss Hawkins from a Bristol manufacturing family, is in hers. Darcy may feel at first that Elizabeth's relatives in business in London are a severe drawback to her desirability, but after he meets the Gardiners, he recognizes their worth and truly values them. Although Emma is put off by Robert Martin's appearance, Mr. Knightley recognizes the young farmer's soundness of character and he values him because his "manners have sense, sincerity, and good humour to recommend them; and his mind has . . . true gentility . . ." (E, 54). Austen's people appeal to readers because they display that mixture of strengths and weaknesses that are encountered in people in the real world who are what they are regardless of their sex or social position.

Austen also makes her characters seem real by portraying them with a bit of irony. Ronald Paulson notes that the use of irony in character portrayal creates "a kind of verisimilitude," a kind of psychological reality.⁴³ Shenfield points out that Austen's method of presenting "the reality of the human personality" is "wholly composed of irony" and consists of "showing the individual's picture of himself (which is always quite false) and, at the same time, hinting at the true character of the individual."⁴⁴ Readers

⁴³ Ronald Paulson, Introduction, Fielding: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Shenfield, p. 298.

see Catherine, Elizabeth, and Emma as they are, and at the same time readers know that Catherine sees herself as a heroine in a Gothic tale, that Elizabeth sees herself as an astute judge of character, and that Emma sees herself as a matchmaker who perceives the true state of everyone's heart.

Austen's use of irony to make her characters seem real extends beyond their visions of themselves to include what happens to them. Most of the events that occur in Austen's novels are ordinary, non-glamorous events that readers find in their own lives. Even the romances of the main characters are not without their ironic touches. When Henry Tilney asks Catherine to marry him, the narrator says that

[Catherine] was assured of his affection; and that heart in return was solicited, which, perhaps, they pretty equally knew was already entirely his own; for, though Henry was now sincerely attached to her, though he felt and delighted in all the excellencies of her character and truly loved her society, I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own. (NA, 204)

Henry and Catherine's romance hardly receives ideal treatment. Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy are not the material ideal romance either. Instead of love at first sight, Elizabeth and Darcy at first dislike each other and only gradually come to love each other. The narrator says,

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a 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 somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill-success might perhaps authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. (PP, 190-91.)

Emma Woodhouse's romance, like Elizabeth's, is not idealistically treated. Emma falls in love, not with the dashing young Frank Churchill, whom she rather expects to fall in love with, but with Mr. Knightley, sixteen or seventeen years her senior, who has scolded her and lectured her all her life and who still recognizes her faults in spite of his love for her. Such a clear-sighted love that can acknowledge faults in its object and still love is far more practical and realistic than the ideal variety that sees its object through rose-colored glasses. Emma certainly requires this practical kind of love, for as John Hagan notes, although her character does improve, the change is not "total, unshaded, or unqualified." Nor could readers like her as well as they are meant to if she emerged from her reformation "as a mere prig." Hagan points out that "altruism and self-interest are intimately blended" in Emma's actions of hiding Harriet's infatuation from Mr. Knightley and of sending her off to visit in London. Nor has Emma entirely reformed in

her matchmaking tendencies.⁴⁵ When Mrs. Weston has a little girl, Emma is very pleased. The narrator comments that Emma "would not acknowledge that [her pleasure in the event was connected] with any view of making a match for her, hereafter, with either of Isabella's sons," suggesting that the thought is certainly at the back of Emma's mind. No, Emma's changes are not total--they are realistic.

Even the wise Mr. Knightley is not perfect. His evaluation of Frank Churchill is clouded by jealousy, and it changes a good deal when he finds he has no reason to be jealous. The narrator ironically comments,

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

Even the very good and very wise Mr. Knightley is subjected to a touch of sympathetic irony and is made to seem real to readers thereby. As Lascelles notes, Austen makes no totally "sympathetic character without mixing a little absurdity" in to leaven all his or her admirable qualities.⁴⁶ Austen controls the readers' sympathetic involvement with the characters by using irony to point out the mixed state of

⁴⁵ John Hagan, "The Closure of Emma," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 15 (1975), 553.

⁴⁶ Lascelles, p. 216.

even the best of her people. If readers were encouraged to see the characters as ideal reflections of themselves, their involvement might slide into a sort of self-pity or self-love. Austen, however, creates characters whose personalities are specific and concrete, not vaguely ideal. Readers are encouraged to see the characters as realistically human. Readers may well find themselves, like Mr. Knightley, "doating on [them], faults and all" (E, 368), but they are always aware of the characters' faults and foibles.

Speech habits play an important role in Austen's character portrayals. Austen shapes much of the readers' reaction to the characters by the way she presents their speech--by what the characters say, the words they use, and the manner in which they converse with others. Martin Steinmann, Jr., points out that block characterization--"a complete description of a character upon his first appearance"--is a convention in novels with omniscient narrators. However, no writer "relies exclusively upon block characterization": "the actions and the speeches exemplify--test the truth of--the block characterization."⁴⁷ The speeches of the characters work with Austen's use of block characterization in three ways. Austen may allow characters to speak

⁴⁷ Martin Steinmann, Jr., "The Old Novel and the New," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, pp. 293-94.

at length before offering a block characterization, as she does with Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in the first chapter of Pride and Prejudice. Readers accept the narrator's evaluation in the final paragraph of the chapter because it coincides so well with the opinions they have formed while listening to the Bennets' conversation. In fact, what the Bennets say tells readers much more about their characters than the narrator's comments do. Her comments serve the purpose of putting what readers heard in perspective and of establishing a rapport between narrator and reader.

When Austen does present a description of the character first, she immediately allows the character to speak for himself and thereby exhibit the traits she has just mentioned. For example, the narrator introduces Mr. Woodhouse by saying that on the evening of Miss Taylor's wedding, he

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

The evil of the actual disparity in their ages (and Mr. Woodhouse had not married early) was much increased by his constitution and habits; for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time.

. . . [Emma was melancholy] till her father awoke and made it necessary to be cheerful. His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of everybody that he was used to and hating to part with

them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable. . . . and from his habits of gentle selfishness and of being never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself, he was very much disposed to think Miss Taylor had done as sad a thing for herself as for them. . . . Emma smiled and chatted as cheerfully as she could to keep him from such thoughts; but when tea came, it was impossible for him not to say exactly as he had said at dinner: "Poor Miss Taylor! I wish she were here again. What a pity it is that Mr. Weston ever thought of her!" (E, 6-7)

Throughout the following scene Mr. Woodhouse's speech exhibits the traits of character that the narrator has just mentioned. As Norman Page notes, Mr. Woodhouse's speeches are largely a collection of "idle wishes and imaginary difficulties" and are often phrased in the negative form.⁴⁸ At the same time that readers listen to Mr. Woodhouse confirm the narrator's comments, their reactions to Emma are being shaped as they see her patience with Mr. Woodhouse and her sincere efforts to raise her father's spirits.

Austen not only uses characters' speeches to "test the truth of" block characterizations, she may use them to create the greater part of a character's portrait. For example, the initial description of Mr. Knightley only tells readers that

Mr. Knightley, a sensible man about seven- or eight-and-thirty, was not only a very old and intimate friend of the [Woodhouse] family, but particularly connected with it as the elder brother of Isabella's husband. He lived about a mile from Highbury, was a frequent visitor,

⁴⁸ Page, p. 142.

and always welcome. . . . Mr. Knightley had a cheerful manner which always did [Mr. Woodhouse] good. (E, 9)

The narrator adds to this sketchy portrait now and then with a brief comment, saying, for example, that Mr. Knightley "was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (E, 10). However, the readers' main impression of Mr. Knightley comes from his speech, which consistently shows him to be interested in those matters of character and behavior that the narrator urges readers to regard as highly important.

What a character says obviously influences the reactions of readers. The words a character selects subtly affect the readers' responses. As Page points out, the words a character uses "may reveal lack of taste or discretion, a brash modishness, or a more serious indifference to right conduct and sound principles."⁴⁹ The word choice of Isabella Thorpe and her brother John supports their characterizations as artificial, thoughtless people. Isabella's conversation consists of one hyperbole after another. Everything is "dearest," "sweetest," "prettiest," "amazingly," "excessively," and "horrid." She says she has been waiting "these ten ages at least" when she has been waiting five minutes. And she describes "a particular friend" of hers as "one of the sweetest creatures in the

⁴⁹ Page, p. 150.

world . . . [and] as beautiful as an angel"; however, this friend is not admired by men, nor Isabella, because there is "something amazingly insipid about her" (NA, 30-32). Page notes that John Thorpe shows "a fondness for the cant terms of the man of fashion, the dandy or blood."⁵⁰ Thorpe's speech is liberally sprinkled with oaths and with colloquial words such as "tittuppy" (NA, 54) for unsteady. He also shows poor taste in the way he refers to older people. He says his mother's "quiz of a hat" makes her "look like an old witch" (NA, 40), and while speaking of Mr. Allen, he says, "Old Allen is as rich as a Jew--is he not?" (NA, 52). He even says of Catherine, "She is as obstinate as--" leaving the narrator to comment that "Thorpe never finished the simile, for it could hardly have been a proper one" (NA, 85). Every time the Thorpes speak, the readers' opinion of them as vain, silly, shallow people is strengthened. Their speech seems especially indecorous in comparison with that of Henry and Eleanor Tilney, and even that of Catherine. Although Catherine may occasionally indulge in a hyperbolic cliché, its rarity lends her speech an air of youthful immaturity rather than affectation.

In Pride and Prejudice, Mr. Collins' pompous speech strengthens the readers' conception of his character. His

⁵⁰ Page, p. 153.

sentences are long, involved conglomerations of threadbare and insincere phrases. Mary Bennet's pedantic utterances are little better. Lydia's slangy phrases--"A little sea-bathing would set me up for ever" (PP, 185)--suggest a lack of proper restraint; readers find this suggestion confirmed in her behavior even before she runs off with Wickham. Opposed to their speech is that of Darcy, which is rather formal but sincere and not cliché ridden, and of Elizaneth, which is lively and witty. Elizabeth may quote a proverb in an effort to puncture Darcy's starched manner: "There is a fine old saying, which every body here is of course familiar with--'Keep your breath to cool your porridge,'--and I shall keep mine to swell my song" (PP, 16). Or she may use language wittily to keep things in perspective, as she does when she discovers it is the arrival of Lady Catherine's carriage at Mr. Collins' parsonage that has thrown the household into an uproar: "And is that all?" cried Elizabeth. "I expected at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lady Catherine and her daughter!" (PP, 110). The naturalness of her speech achieves a happy medium between the pedantry of Mr. Collins and Mary and the slanginess of Lydia.

In Emma, a character's diction also supports and strengthens the reader's opinion of him. Page points out that Mr. Woodhouse's use of "inflated language," such as "a

vast deal of rain," or "it rained dreadfully hard" (E, 9), emphasizes his "limited universe [where] trivialities assume alarming proportions."⁵¹ Mrs. Elton's speech marks her as ill-bred and pretentious. She calls her husband "Mr. E." and when she calls Mr. Knightley "Knightley," Emma is shocked at her presumption: "Knightley! I could not have believed it. Knightley! Never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley!" (E, 220). Page notes that

forms of address, which are still not without social potency in the twentieth century, were regarded in this period as very important and very revealing: the code determining which forms might and might not be used in the context of different relationship was, in well-bred society, a strict one.⁵²

Mrs. Elton's transgression is obvious to readers, even if they were not aware of any code of address in their age or society, because her practice differs so much in this respect from that of everyone else in the novel. In addition to her use of improper forms of address, Mrs. Elton's pretensions are suggested by her use of foreign terms such as "caro sposo" (E, 220) and "carte-blanche" (E, 281), and by the rapturous terms in which she describes Maple Grove, the seat of her brother-in-law Mr. Suckling, a subject which seems to make its way into every conversation. In contrast to these affectations is the "plain, unaffected, gentleman-

⁵¹ Page, p. 143.

⁵² Page, p. 152.

like English" of Mr. Knightley (E, 356). As Page notes, Mr. Knightley's speech avoids the vulgar, "the hackneyed and the merely fashionable . . . and does not succumb to the temptation to call little things by big names."⁵³

Page points out that Austen does not exploit the idiosyncrasies of a character's speech "for their own sake, but to enlist speech in the cause of more refined character-portrayal." For the most part, Austen builds characterization through speech "by hints rather than by emphatic strokes; and the scale of variation is so finely adjusted that even slight departures from the norm" can influence the readers' reaction to a character.⁵⁴ Austen makes dialogue an important tool in characterization.

The readers' response to the characters is shaped not only by what they say and by the words they use; their response is also influenced by the way the characters converse with each other. D. W. Harding points out that the speeches of the less admirable characters are not generally "part of a true conversational interchange."⁵⁵ Mrs. Allen, for example, seldom has a real conversation with anyone; as the narrator comments, Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe were

⁵³ Page, p. 158.

⁵⁴ Page, p. 140.

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

engaged

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

Mr. Collins' speeches also have this trait of not really meshing in the conversational fabric, especially when he is talking at (he never talks with) the sensible characters. When he proposes to Elizabeth, he has no sense of the person to whom he is proposing. Because he is not trying to engage in any form of two-way communication, he does not believe her refusals. When Elizabeth pleads to be listened to "as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart" (PP, 76), he continues to think she is being coquettish. Finally, readers are told, that "to such perseverence in wilful self-deception Elizabeth would make no reply, and immediately and in silence withdrew . . ." (PP, 76). Much the same situation develops when Mr. Collins learns that Mr. Darcy is Lady Catherine's nephew and feels that he must pay his respects to him. While Elizabeth watches, Mr. Collins

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

When Mr. Collins returns to Elizabeth, he says, "Mr. Darcy seemed much pleased with the attention. He answered me with

the utmost civility . . ." (PP, 69). As a man wholly concerned with appearance and form, Mr. Collins' grasp of the reality of other people and their response to him is hardly strong. Mrs. Elton also has a great desire to talk. She is so full of her own importance that she does not require any real exchange of thought in a conversation. When she first visits Hartfield, she rapturously compares it to Maple Grove, her brother-in-law's home, staircase by staircase, room by room, tree by tree. After her lengthy comparison, readers are told that "Emma made as slight a reply as she could; but it was fully sufficient for Mrs. Elton, who only wanted to be talking herself" (E, 215). This sort of insensitivity confirms the reader's opinion of those characters whose comments and diction seem to be substandard. Speech is one of Austen's major and most versatile ways of portraying character and of shaping the reader's response.

Most of the characters in an Austen novel exemplify some aspect of a major theme. This technique helps to deepen the readers' understanding of a theme by allowing them to look at it from a variety of angles. All of Austen's novels are concerned with the proper perception of reality. In Northanger Abbey, perception is often clouded by fictions. Many characters, knowingly or unknowingly, create fictions for themselves or are imposed upon by the fictions of others.

Catherine Morland's problem with fictions is twofold: she must learn to distinguish fiction from real life, and, as Luann Beach notes, she must learn "to distinguish real-life fictions," that is, she must learn to understand people.⁵⁶ Catherine is thoroughly entranced by Gothic fiction, and the opportunity to be the house guest of the Tilneys at Northanger Abbey causes her imagination to run wild. Only by being severely embarrassed three times does she learn to separate Gothic illusions from everyday reality. This distinction helps her become aware of "real-life fictions" also by making her realize that humans, unlike the characters in Gothic tales, have mixed characters. Henry Tilney fictionalizes, but consciously, and always for the fun of it. When he first meets Catherine, he pretends to offer her "the proper attentions of a partner" by asking her all the standard questions about her stay in Bath and by giving the standard affected replies, and he then says, "Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again" (NA, 19-20). The other characters also fictionalize, but, as Beach points out, "unlike Henry, they are either unaware of [fictionalizing] or unwilling to admit doing so."⁵⁷ Isabella Thorpe sees herself as a fictional heroine and she manages to

⁵⁶ Luann Beach, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Jane Austen's Novels," Unpublished Dissertation, Stanford, 1971, p. 204.

⁵⁷ Beach, p. 199.

convey that image to Catherine. At one point Isabella says,

"Had I the command of millions, were I mistress of the whole world, your brother would be my only choice."

This charming sentiment, recommended as much by sense as novelty, gave Catherine a most pleasing remembrance of all the heroines of her acquaintance. . . . (NA, 101)

John Thorpe, who fancies himself a rake, is described by the narrator as

a stout young man of middling height, who, with a plain face and ungraceful form, seemed fearful of being too handsome unless he wore the dress of a groom, and too much like a gentleman unless he were easy where he ought to be civil, and impudent where he might be allowed to be easy. (NA, 36)

While he is not very successful in projecting his fictional self image, he is quite adept at creating lies. His fictions about the wealth and importance of Catherine's family persuade General Tilney to promote a match between Catherine and Henry. And his later fictions about Catherine's family being poor and disreputable lead the General to cast Catherine out of Northanger Abbey in the best Gothic fashion. James Morland is taken in by Isabella's fictional projection of herself as romantic heroine until the romantic fiction Frederick Tilney creates with Isabella leads her to break her engagement with James. In addition, readers are informed of most of the characters' reading tastes. This technique helps to illustrate their characters and to suggest how they view fictions. Thorpe, for example, finds The Monk "a tolerably decent" novel. He also says that Mrs. Radcliffe's novels "are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and

nature in them" (NA, 39). However, he does not recognize the title of her most famous book, The Mysteries of Udolpho. Obviously, Thorpe is as deficient in literary taste and knowledge as he is in truthfulness. Henry and Eleanor Tilney have read and enjoyed Uldolpho. They enjoyed it for what it is, however. They see it as an entertaining fiction and do not confuse its story with life, as Catherine does, or with "nature," as Thorpe seems to do. The characters of Northanger Abbey allow readers to look at the variety of problems created by the confusion of fictions with reality.

In Pride and Prejudice, perception is clouded by improper pride or by a lack of pride. Elizabeth and Darcy each exhibit pride in its best sense--a proper self-respect combined with a sense of responsibility. However, both must first overcome improper pride. Darcy's natural reserve and haughtiness lead him to insult Elizabeth at the Meryton assembly. This slight blinds Elizabeth to his real worth, and her pride in her discernment of character makes her persist in her error. Although Darcy's love for Elizabeth enables him to overcome the objections his pride has to her inferior connections, his pride is still strong enough to make him confident of success when he first proposes to her, and he states his case so badly that she is stung into calling him ungentlemanly. This response crushes Darcy's improper pride. His letter to Elizabeth revealing Wickham's

real nature opens her eyes and destroys her pride in her discernment. The pride each retains is rooted in reasonable self-respect, and Elizabeth can tell her father in all truth that Darcy "has no improper pride" (PP, 260).

Secondary characters in Pride and Prejudice help readers understand the theme by displaying many types of improper pride. Lady Catherine is so full of aristocratic pride that she blunders into one piece of arrogant foolishness after another. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are so proud of their social position that they have conveniently forgotten their family's connection with trade. These three characters parody Darcy's pride of rank. Mr. Collins exhibits the effects of pride on a weak mind. He takes great pride in his gross servility toward Lady Catherine, while his pomposity makes his speech a muddle and his colossal self-esteem keeps him from having any consideration for the feelings of others. Sir William Lucas has been knighted and thereby gained excessive self-esteem. Being knighted gave him a distaste for his business and an inflated idea of his own importance, but it did not make him haughty. Quite the reverse is true. He now takes great pride in being civil to everyone. Mary Bennet, who takes pride in speaking learnedly on all subjects (even pride), suffers from an inflated idea of her talents and therefore manages to make herself look ridiculous. Even modest and amiable Mr. Bingley is not free

from a trace of distorted pride. As Darcy points out to him, he is proud of his faults. Georgiana Darcy, who is not proud at all, is so shy and inexperienced in company that her manner might be misinterpreted as prideful.

Absence of pride, that is, a lack of self-respect, leads to problems too. A lack of self-respect permits Charlotte Lucas to sacrifice "every better feeling to worldly advantage" (PP, 88) and marry Mr. Collins when she has no affection or respect for him. Without the dignity of self-respect, Lydia brings humiliation to her family by running off with Wickham. The fact that Mrs. Bennet can take pride in Lydia's eventual marriage says a great deal about the state of her pride. Wickham lacks enough pride to deal honorably with anyone. Mr. Bennet's lack of pride shows in his irresponsible attitude toward his family. Instead of making an effort to keep the weaker headed members of his family from exposing themselves to public ridicule, Mr. Bennet seems to relish their performances.

In Jane and the Gardiners, however, pride takes the form of a reasonable, balanced self-respect. Readers find their concept of pride shaped by the attitudes exhibited by all the characters in the novel, not just by the attitudes of the main characters.

In Emma, perception is clouded by the imagination. At one point in the novel, Mr. Knightley recalls a line by

Cowper--"Myself creating what I saw" (E, 273)--that could be applied to the state of most of the characters' perception. Emma's problem is the central one. She thinks she is very perceptive; however, her imagination distorts everything she sees. She imagines that Mr. Elton is in love with Harriet, while he imagines that Emma is encouraging him to propose to Emma herself. She then imagines that Jane Fairfax is in love with Mr. Dixon, the husband of Jane's best friend, while Jane is really in love with Frank Churchill but imagines that he is beginning to regret their secret engagement. Emma imagines that Frank is in love with her and that perhaps she is just a bit in love with him. Frank, however, is in love with Jane and imagines that Emma understands that he is only paying attention to her to hide a secret engagement. Emma eventually imagines that Frank has transferred his affections to Harriet, and she therefore encourages Harriet to love Frank. However, Harriet imagines she means Mr. Knightley and develops an infatuation for him. Mr. and Mrs. Weston imagine that Emma loves Frank, as does Mr. Knightley, and Mrs. Weston imagines that Mr. Knightley loves Jane. When Emma finally imagines that Mr. Knightley is in love with Harriet, the shock she feels makes her realize that she loves Mr. Knightley herself. Mrs. Elton imagines that everyone is impressed with her talk of Maple Grove and shares her opinion of herself as the center of the Highbury

social world.

All of the characters have active imaginations. Emma's, however, is the most lively and the one that creates the most problems for its possessor and for other people as well. Although most of these characters are misled by appearances, Emma, as Beach points out, "is misled by her willful imagination as much as by deceptive appearances."⁵⁸ Mr. Woodhouse's imagination is just as willful as Emma's, but in a different way. Emma's imagination insists on seeing things that are not there; his insists on not seeing things that are there. As the narrator comments, Mr. Woodhouse is "never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself" (E, 7). Between Emma's willfully creating imagination and Mr. Woodhouse's willfully denying imagination is that of Mr. Knightley. His, perhaps, colors his perception least of all, even though it does mislead him about Emma's feelings for Frank. Unlike Emma and Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley tests his perceptions to see if they have been colored by his imagination. The characters of Emma allow readers to look at the variety of problems imagination creates when it sees only what it wants to see, when it shapes perception instead of being shaped by or at least tempered with perception.

⁵⁸ Beach, p. 130.

Austen's technique of using many of the characters in a novel to exemplify various aspects of a theme affects readers in several ways. The technique helps readers to appreciate the complexity of the central problem. In Pride and Prejudice, for example, readers are given the opportunity to look at the problem of pride and perception from many angles. The technique also helps to shape the attitude of readers toward the main characters. Catherine, Elizabeth, and Emma all have problems of perception. These problems take on reality and importance for readers when they see that so many other characters have variations of the same problems. Because the main characters are surrounded with secondary characters who are ineffectual in dealing with problems of perception, the heroines' abilities to overcome their problems take on significance for readers.

Austen exercises the readers' perception, judgment, and sympathy by portraying some characters so that readers seem encouraged to feel the opposite of what they should feel about them. John Thorpe, Wickham, Darcy, Mr. Bennet, and Miss Bates test the readers' powers of discernment. In Northanger Abbey, John Thorpe may think of himself as quite the rake, but, as Carole Berger notes, he "imposes little on even the inexperienced heroine and not at all on the reader." Catherine, in spite of her youthfulness and diffidence, finds

that she does not like his manners during their first meeting.⁵⁹ By their third meeting,

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

Both Catherine and the reader mark Thorpe off as a foolish boor who is not above lying, but harmless, nonetheless. However, the revelation that Thorpe's lies to General Tilney are behind the General's erratic treatment of Catherine makes readers aware that they have failed to evaluate Thorpe's character correctly. He may be a boor, but he is also a petty villain. Because readers feel that Thorpe is innocuous, they tend to miss suggestions that point to him as the instigator of the General's behavior toward Catherine. However, the hints are there. The Thorpe family obviously has an inflated opinion of the Morland family's wealth, hence Isabella's interest in James Morland and John's interest in Catherine. Thorpe, who thinks he is making a conquest of Catherine, consistently lies, and always to make himself seem important. While Catherine is at a play, she sees Thorpe talking with General Tilney apparently about her. Immediately afterwards, the General becomes exceedingly

⁵⁹ Carole Berger, "The Rake and the Reader in Jane Austen's Novels," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 15 (1975), 531.

desirous that his children spend time with Catherine and even invites her to Northanger Abbey. General Tilney's ostentation and concern with the monetary value of everything is apparent. Henry and Eleanor realize that their father would never approve a match between their brother and Isabella because her family is not wealthy. Nevertheless, the General is obviously trying to promote a match between Henry and Catherine. Also, James's letter announcing his broken engagement informs Catherine that Thorpe is in London about the time the General goes there on business. Thus everything is prepared for, but because readers think they have the measure of Thorpe's character, they are taken unaware. As Berger points out, Thorpe's change from inept rake to petty villain "is one of several ironic reminders" in the novel "that works of fiction may educate their readers as well as their heroines."⁶⁰

The portrayals of Wickham and Darcy offer a more subtle test for the readers' discernment. Wickham seems charming and sociable, and evidently has the good taste to like Elizabeth. Darcy, however, seems cool and reserved, and insults Elizabeth the first time he sees her. The contrast is one the reader, as well as Elizabeth, feels strongly. And, as James Sherry points out, because Wickham

⁶⁰ Berger, p. 532.

arrives on the scene shortly after the stuffy and pompous Mr. Collins, he "seems to confirm the fact that in this novel only characters without inflated notions of wealth and rank can be rational, unprejudiced, and attractive." In addition, Wickham admits "a dislike for Darcy," winning him "an almost certain passport to Elizabeth's and the reader's affections."⁶¹

When Wickham tells his tale of unjust treatment at Darcy's hands, the reader tends to accept it as true. As Berger suggests, "Elizabeth's questions and Wickham's replies deftly disarm the reader of any likely objections to Wickham's story (except, of course, the central objection of his telling it at all)." When Elizabeth concludes that "he had given a very rational account of it" (PP, 59), the reader tends to agree. The reader's opinion of Wickham is further strengthened, Berger notes, when Jane, "whose naivete has already been established," defends Darcy, and when Miss Bingley, whose pettiness and snobbery the reader has witnessed many times, attacks Wickham. Moreover, Miss Bingley begins her attack "with an obvious falsehood," saying to Elizabeth, "I find that the young man forgot to tell you, among his other communications, that he was the son of

⁶¹ James Sherry, "Pride and Prejudice: The Limits of Society," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 19 (1975), 615.

old Wickham, the late Mr. Darcy's steward" (PP, 66). Berger states that "after this display of malice . . . we feel free to discount anything further she has to say."⁶² Miss Bingley is also partly responsible for the way the reader feels about Darcy. As Sherry suggests, Darcy's companionship with Miss Bingley and her equally snobbish sister leads the reader to condemn Darcy through "a form of guilt by association."⁶³

Only when Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter does she realize that Wickham's conduct has been faulty.

She was now struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct. She remembered that he had boasted of having no fear of seeing Mr. Darcy . . . yet he avoided the Netherfield ball the very next week. She remembered also, that till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, he had told his story to no one but herself; but that after their removal, it had been every where discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr. Darcy's character, though he had assured her that respect for the father, would always prevent his exposing the son. (PP, 142-43)

Berger notes that "at this point, the reader may discover that these improprieties and inconsistencies have also escaped his notice, even though they were available for detection." Austen has, in effect, created an experience for the reader similar to Elizabeth's, and the reader may "find himself in the same position as the heroine who,

⁶² Berger, pp. 537-38.

⁶³ Sherry, pp. 613-14.

having prided herself on her discernment, finds that it has not withstood the influence of prejudice."⁶⁴

Mr. Bennet also presents readers with a problem in judgment. Until late in the story, readers form their opinion of Mr. Bennet without much guidance from the narrator or other characters. Readers seem encouraged to like him for several reasons. Mr. Bennet has the good sense to value Elizabeth and to see Mrs. Bennet for what she is. His style of wit seems like that of Elizabeth and the narrator. He seems aware and perceptive, a person having the kind of traits the novel favors. However, when Elizabeth acknowledges the justness of Darcy's comments about her family's behavior and recognizes her father's irresponsibility, readers begin to reconsider their opinion of Mr. Bennet. After Elizabeth tries to persuade her father to prevent Lydia's trip to Brighton, and fails, the narrator comments that Elizabeth

had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising

⁶⁴ Berger, pp. 537, 539.

from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife. (PP, 163)

These are strong words. But the real seriousness of Mr. Bennet's abdication of his parental responsibility strikes readers fully when Lydia runs off with Wickham. Mr. Bennet himself realizes his error, saying,

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

And of course the impression does pass away. The narrator comments, "When the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in seeking [Lydia] were over, he naturally returned to all his former indolence" (PP, 212). This behavior is in keeping with his character. After the Lydia episode, however, readers are more aware of Mr. Bennet's failings as a father and the irresponsibility of his style of wit and irony. Mary Burgan notes that Austen seems to invite readers to enjoy Mr. Bennet's brand of irony "even while she undermines it dramatically by widening the social context of his actions and by rendering their effects upon those to whom he owes paternal affection."⁶⁵ Austen's portrayal of Mr. Bennet exercises the readers' perception and

⁶⁵ Mary A. Burgan, "Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 74 (1975), 542.

judgment.

Austen also uses character portrayal to test the ability of readers to have the proper feelings of sympathy for a character. Miss Bates provides a moral test for readers as well as for Emma. The rattling, rambling conversation of this kindhearted lady may cause readers to see her as only a humorous caricature. Harding points out, however, that in the portrayal of Miss Bates, Austen uses "the technique of going behind the ridiculous features of the caricature" to reveal a character who deserves a sympathetic reaction from readers. Several times Austen "unexpectedly [gives] Miss Bates the moral advantage in a social situation with the effect of taking down a peg those--including us--who have felt comfortably superior to her."⁶⁶ One instance occurs when Miss Bates takes the blame for Frank Churchill's knowing that Mr. Perry intends to set up his own carriage. Frank knows because Jane Fairfax mentioned in it their secret correspondence and therefore cannot reveal the source of his knowledge. Miss Bates admits that she herself knew about the plans, but because Mrs. Perry had mentioned it in confidence, she tried to keep it a secret. She says,

"I never mentioned it to a soul that I know of. At the same time, I will not positively answer for my having never dropped a hint, because I know I do sometimes pop out a thing before I am aware. I am a talker, you know:

⁶⁶ Harding, pp. 102-103.

I am rather a talker; and now and then I have let a thing escape me which I should not. I am not like Jane; I wish I were. I will answer for it, she never betrayed the least thing in the world." (E, 274-75)

Jane should have felt rather small to hear her aunt so openly acknowledge a fault that in this case was not responsible for the slip. Miss Bates's fairness and honesty here can make readers see her in a different light. She is not just a foolish character; she has a truthfulness that requires her to admit her fault and accept responsibility for it. At the excursion to Box Hill, Emma's lively wit lures her into making fun of Miss Bates. Harding notes that, like the readers, Emma "has let herself be trapped into regarding Miss Bates simply as a figure of fun." However, Miss Bates's feelings are capable of being hurt, a fact reminding Emma and the readers "that Miss Bates is after all a person."⁶⁷ Mr. Knightley acknowledges the truth of Emma's statement that "what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended" in Miss Bates, but he tells Emma,

"Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance; I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation--but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to, and if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed! You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour--to have you now, in thoughtless spirits and the pride of the moment,

⁶⁷ Harding, p. 103.

laugh at her, humble her--before her niece, too--and before others, many of whom (certainly some) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her." (E, 298)

Harding points out that readers sense the reality of Miss Bates's hurt because of the strength of its effect on Mr. Knightley, whom readers see as an important and worthy character. His stinging rebuke brings tears to Emma's eyes. Emma feels she has lost his respect and her own heart accuses her of her transgression. The reactions of these two people reinforce the readers' awareness that Miss Bates is more than a mere figure of fun. Miss Bates also has the moral advantage when Emma comes to visit her and her niece the next day. Jane, who is ill with a cold, but suffering more with jealousy because of Frank Churchill's attentions to Emma, wishes to avoid her. Just as Emma arrives, Jane rushes off to her room. Emma hears Miss Bates tell her, "Well, my dear, I shall say you are laid down upon the bed, and I am sure you are ill enough." After this comment, as Harding suggests, readers rather expect "to hear Miss Bates's white lie when she returns and to see Emma in the superior position of knowing that it is a lie."⁶⁸ However, when Miss Bates replies to Emma's inquiry about Jane, she says,

"You will excuse her not coming to you; she is not able, she is gone into her own room. I want her to lie down upon the bed. 'My dear,' said I, 'I shall say you are laid down upon the bed'; but, however, she is not; she

⁶⁸ Harding, p. 103.

is walking about the room." (E, 301)

Miss Bates tells the truth. Once again readers must find her good in spite of her foolishness.

Austen exercises the perception, judgment, and sympathy of readers by her portrayals of characters like John Thorpe, Wickham, Darcy, Mr. Bennet, and Miss Bates. These portrayals seem designed to encourage readers to feel otherwise than they should about the characters. The portrayals may well make readers aware that they, like the heroines of the novels, are susceptible to errors of faulty perception.

Austen uses characterization in a variety of ways to shape and direct the responses of readers. She encourages readers to consider the reality of the personality behind external appearance of her characters by describing their appearance only vaguely and only when the description serves an additional purpose in the story. She appeals to the readers' interest in the human personality by making her characters realistic mixtures of strong and weak qualities and by portraying them with irony. She uses the speech of her characters to create and add to the readers' conception of them. What a character says, the words he selects, and the way he converses with others influence the responses of readers to a character. Most of the characters in a novel exemplify some aspect of a major theme. In this way Austen shapes the readers' awareness of the theme and helps readers

to see the actions of the main characters as significant. And, finally, Austen portrays some characters in such a way that readers must exercise their perception, judgment, and sympathy.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE METHOD AND THE READER

Austen's narrative method involves readers in analyzing and evaluating their perceptions. The narrator's shifting perspective creates a double view for readers by deftly combining scenes of dialogue with the thoughts of the characters, giving readers both objective and subjective information to synthesize. The shifting narrative perspective helps readers view the fallible heroines with balanced proportions of sympathy and judgment. The narrator helps readers maintain this balanced view by using a variety of techniques, including the ironic arrangement of events and the use of direct and indirect apologies and criticisms.

Ian Watt notes that the shifting perspective of Austen's narrator blends the narrative perspectives of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding.⁶⁹ Although Austen's narrator is not a participating narrator in the manner of Richardson's letterwriter, Austen does create a sense of

⁶⁹ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, p. 296.

"psychological immediacy" similar to Richardson's by means of "shifts in point of view and extended inside views" of the main character.⁷⁰ In addition, Austen's narrator maintains an attitude of detachment, somewhat in the manner of Fielding's commenting narrator, and can therefore provide objective evaluation of the characters and their actions. Rhetorically, the narrator's shifting perspective is very effective because it involves readers in the story on three levels. In general, the extended inside views of the heroine's thoughts and emotions create in readers a feeling of sympathy for the heroine, while the external views of the actions of all the characters allow readers to exercise their own perceptions and to evaluate the soundness of the heroine's perceptions. Because readers are presented with a dual perspective, they must construct a third view for themselves to reconcile the material they have been given. In each novel, the heroine must undergo a process of learning to distinguish between appearance and reality; the narrator's shifting perspective draws readers into this process. Important to an understanding of how Austen's creation of a dual view involves readers in sorting out their perceptions is an awareness of the techniques that support the narrator's flexible perspective and how they influence the response of

⁷⁰ Beach, p. 3.

the reader.

Austen makes the heroine of the novel the center of the narrative focus by allowing readers to see much of the story from the heroine's point of view. Although readers are occasionally permitted to glimpse the thoughts of other characters, they are frequently allowed to look into the mind of the heroine. At times Austen reveals a character's feelings in such a manner that readers do not feel as though the narrator were explaining the character's emotional state for them. The technique of presenting an inner view of a character so that readers have the feeling of being able to see directly into the character's thoughts is called narrated monologue or erlebte Rede. A number of critics, including Dorrit Cohn, point out that Austen was the first novelist to make extended use of this technique.⁷¹ Helen Dry notes that narrated monologue blends direct and indirect discourse. It may contain exclamations, interjections, and questions, like direct discourse. It also "refers to the experiencing consciousness in the third person," as does indirect discourse.⁷² As Cohn notes, narrated monologue occurs most often in depicting the heroine's "moments of

⁷¹ Dorrit Cohn, "Narrated Monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style," Comparative Literature, 18 (1966), 107.

⁷² Helen Dry, "Syntax and Point of View in Jane Austen's Emma," Studies in Romanticism, 16 (1977), 89.

inner crisis."⁷³ This technique occurs in all of Austen's novels.

One example occurs in Northanger Abbey at the time General Tilney suddenly and without explanation orders Catherine from his home. The narrator's comments lead into and out of material that seems to state Catherine's actual thoughts.

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

If everything between the first two sentences and the final sentence of this quotation were replaced with the narrator's comment that Catherine missed Henry and thought about their last breakfast together, the passage would not have the same effect. It would not make as strong a demand on the reader's sympathy, nor would it give the reader the same opportunity to understand that leaving Henry is more terrible to

⁷³ Cohn, p. 107.

Catherine than being sent away as she is.

The technique of narrated monologue also gives readers access to Elizabeth's thoughts when she unexpectedly meets Darcy at Pemberley. She and Darcy have a brief conversation. When he leaves, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner make several favorable comments about him,

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

This passage gives readers a sense of Elizabeth's embarrassment. The sentence "She was overpowered by shame and vexation" is supported by the following sentences that seem to be the thoughts running through her mind. In the sentence "She blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting," the narrator seems to pull readers back a moment so they can glimpse Elizabeth's flushed face and then returns them to Elizabeth's thoughts. At the end of the passage, the narrator summarizes Elizabeth's reactions to the meeting and then returns to the usual narrative commentary. The passage

gives readers the opportunity to appreciate the fluctuations of Elizabeth's feelings as she moves from embarrassment to regret to wonder. Through this technique Austen invites readers to sympathize with Elizabeth and to understand that her wonder suggests her change of heart toward Darcy.

In Emma, readers see into the heroine's thoughts more often than in the other two novels. Emma is such a fallible heroine that it is important that readers understand completely her strong and weak points. After Mr. Elton's proposal makes Emma realize that she has entirely mistaken his intentions toward Harriet, she tries to sort out the situation in her thoughts.

The hair was curled and the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable. It was a wretched business indeed. Such an overthrow of everything she had been wishing for. Such a development of everything most unwelcome! Such a blow for Harriet! That was the worst of all. Every part of it brought pain and humiliation of some sort or other; but compared with the evil to Harriet, all was light. . . .

How could she have been so deceived! He protested that he had never thought seriously of Harriet--never! She looked back as well as she could, but it was all confusion. . . .

The picture! How eager he had been about the picture! And the charade! And an hundred other circumstances--how clearly they had seemed to point at Harriet! To be sure, the charade, with its "ready wit"--but then, the "soft eyes"--in fact it suited neither; it was a jumble without taste or truth. Who could have seen through such thick-headed nonsense? (E, 108-109)

Most of the next several pages of the novel consist of narrated monologue. There are only occasional remarks that are obviously those of the narrator, such as the first

sentence in the passage and the sentence "She looked back as well as she could. . . ." These remarks function rather like stage directions would in a scene of dialogue. Readers are invited to recognize the sincerity of Emma's contrition, as well as the snobbishness of her feeling that Mr. Elton's proposal is an offense to her pride. This view of Emma's thoughts allows readers to see clearly her virtues and her shortcomings. Emma appears before readers as a mixture of kindheartedness and pride, repentance and a continuing desire to meddle in the lives of others. Seeing into Emma's thoughts allows readers to feel that they know Emma better than she knows herself. No matter how sincere her repentance, Emma's pride and managing propensities are so obvious that readers may well expect to see her in further trouble before long.

The external views of characters are for the most part created by scenes of dialogue. Norman Page states that Austen was "an enthusiastic theatregoer" who was also "fond of reading plays, and during her early years had had many opportunities of enjoying amateur theatricals." Page feels that "her interest in the stage has left its mark on her novels in the brilliance and variety of their dialogue."⁷⁴ The narrator presents scenes of dialogue with few or unobtru-

⁷⁴ Page, p. 114.

sive suggestions about a character's facial expression or tone of voice. As Craik notes, Austen's "powers of creating conversation--the actual cadences of the speaking voice--are such that incidental details of gesture and grimace are superfluous."⁷⁵ Austen does include "incidental details of gesture and grimace," but the weight of the scene always rests upon the dialogue. The first chapter of Pride and Prejudice is an excellent example of this technique. After witnessing the scene of dialogue between Mr. Bennet and his wife, the reader could almost dispense with the narrator's comments at the end of the chapter.

Although Austen does not rely completely on scenes of dialogue, she does use this technique to convey large portions of her story. This technique places extra demands on the perception of readers. They cannot relax and wait for the narrator to tell them everything they need to know. Readers must exercise their powers of observation and draw their conclusions from the action going on before them. As Catherine Lynch suggests, Austen "displays a respect for the reader and his judgment by 'showing' rather than 'telling' [much of] her story, by allowing characters to reveal themselves much in the manner of characters in a drama."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Craik, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Catherine Mary Lynch, "The Reader as Guest: Jane Austen's Audience," Unpublished Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1974, p. 33.

Indeed, Austen's use of scenes of dialogue places readers in the position of spectators at a drama. The attitude demanded of the reader-spectator is similar to the one Sedgewick identifies as the required attitude of the spectator at a drama: "a fusion . . . of superior knowledge and detached sympathy," an ironic attitude.⁷⁷

By combining scenes of dialogue with her heroine's perspective, Austen enables readers to exercise their perception and to obtain "superior knowledge." Litz notes that the relationship that develops between Captain Tilney and Isabella Thorpe in Northanger Abbey provides an example of "that easy balance between dramatic action and psychological exposition" Austen creates. While Isabella is waiting to learn what financial arrangement the Morlands will make for James when he marries her, she attends a dance but tells Catherine that she will not dance. Captain Tilney also attends and ridicules his brother Henry for dancing, and declares in Catherine's hearing that nothing could induce him to dance. However, when he sees Isabella, he wants to be introduced, even though Catherine says that Isabella will not dance. Much to Catherine's surprise, Isabella and Captain Tilney do dance. Several days later Catherine and Isabella meet in the pump-room. Although Isabella makes a

⁷⁷ Sedgewick, p. 33.

number of references to Captain Tilney, Catherine suspects nothing. When Captain Tilney arrives, his half-whispered comment to Isabella--"What! Always to be watched, in person or by proxy!" (NA, 121)--takes Catherine completely by surprise. Readers, however, are not surprised at all because they have been made aware of the relationship between Isabella and Captain Tilney through the action and dialogue. As Litz notes, the narrator's "voice has been reserved for the recording of Catherine's naive opinions, leaving the reader free to interpret the scene's dramatic irony." This technique, as Litz points out, "combines the effects of dramatic irony with the privilege of psychological interpretation." The reader is at once able to view "the action from Catherine's limited point of view and the author's omniscient perspective."⁷⁸ This technique is vital to the double view that Austen creates in each novel. Readers are able to see what the heroine sees and yet to see more than she sees.

However, Austen does not always make it easy for readers to grasp the reality of the situation. She often shapes the readers' responses by adding an element of mystery to her stories through her narrative technique. Readers must figure out some things for themselves. This technique

⁷⁸ Litz, p. 71.

appeals to what Booth terms the reader's intellectual or cognitive interests: the reader's desire to work out a puzzle, to discover the reality behind appearances.⁷⁹ David Demarest, Jr., suggests that "a good deal of the pleasure the reader finds in an Austen novel derives from a kind of detective story motif." Just as the heroines "are forever investigating the facade of social reality and attempting to make accurate judgments," so the readers are drawn into making their own investigations and judgments.⁸⁰ Each of Austen's heroines in Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, and Emma must learn that appearance is not the same thing as reality. Each discovers that her perceptions have been distorted by illusions. As Hough suggests, if "the awakening from a false view to seeing things as they are . . . is to be presented as effectively as possible, it is . . . necessary for a time that we shall share in the illusions" of the heroine. Hough also points out that "there are mysteries" in Austen's narrative method "but not mystifications. False directions are always linked to psychological plausibilities." Hough notes that "the reader must be

⁷⁹ Booth, Fiction, p. 125.

⁸⁰ David P. Demarest, Jr., "Legal Language and Situation in the Eighteenth Century Novel: Readings in Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Austen," Unpublished Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1963, p. 191, quoted in Hugh Kennedy, "Acts of Perception in Jane Austen's Novels," Studies in the Novel, 5 (1973), 22.

allowed to go astray, but he must not be constrained to do so; and the data on which a correct judgment could have been based are always present, however inconspicuously."⁸¹ The information the reader needs to construct a correct judgment is present, but it is not obvious because of the dual vision created for the reader by the narrator's shifting perspective. As noted earlier, in each of these three Austen novels, the dual vision involves readers in sorting out their perceptions, in distinguishing the real from the apparent.

In Northanger Abbey the double view created by the narrator's shifting perspective has an additional dimension. Not only does the narrator deftly shift the reader's attention back and forth between scenes of dialogue and Catherine Morland's point of view, she also shifts the reader's attention back and forth between the highly artificial conventions of sentimental and Gothic popular fiction and the prosaic realities of everyday life. In effect, readers experience a double-double view, which leads them to value reality and to exercise their perception.

Part of what Catherine must learn is to distinguish between fiction and reality. The narrator, by setting up the parody for the readers, has provided a way for them to learn also to distinguish properly between fiction and

⁸¹ Hough, pp. 211, 213.

reality. Although the narrator seems to assume that readers are well aware of the conventions sentimental and Gothic fiction, she carefully juxtaposes the artificial conventions and everyday reality. This method allows readers to enjoy the parody even if they are unfamiliar with the conventions. It also has the advantage of making reality seem more appealing and desirable than it might seem without the comparison. For example, readers are told that as a child Catherine "was fond of all boy's plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush" (NA, 9). Surely visions of the unnatural childhoods of heroines in popular fiction are meant to flit through the minds of readers at this point. The narrator goes on to comment that the little Catherine "was moreover noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house" (NA, 10). As Paulson points out, "Catherine, like Joseph [in Fielding's Joseph Andrews], is measured against the standards of popular fiction and found wanting--and so is made a more credible character."⁸² The parody makes readers aware of the artificiality of the conventions of popular fiction and

⁸² Ronald Paulson, Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England, p. 291.

leads them by means of contrast to value reality.

The parody does more. As Beach notes, "the absurdity of sentimental novel conventions" mirrors "the foibles and falsities of real life."⁸³ For example, according to the conventions of popular fiction, Captain Tilney as the brother of the man Catherine loves might be expected to villainously steal her affections or at the very least her person. However, when they meet, he laughs at Henry for dancing with her and she thinks he is "decidedly inferior" to Henry. After recounting this lack of enthusiasm on both sides, the narrator comments,

He cannot be the instigator of the three villains in horsemen's greatcoats, by whom she will hereafter be forced into a travelling-chaise and four, which will drive off with incredible speed. (NA, 109)

Yet, Captain Tilney does see himself as a rake, and when he meets Isabella Thorpe, who sees herself as a romantic heroine, they both play their parts to the hilt. Tilney plays his role for the fun of it. Isabella plays her on the chance of marrying a man wealthier than James Morland. As Beach says, "affectation, hypocrisy, and vanity distort reality (and morality)" just as the conventions of popular fiction distort reality.⁸⁴ The parody attacks false conventions in fiction, and the novel attacks false attitudes exhibited in

⁸³ Beach, p. 192.

⁸⁴ Beach, p. 193.

the behavior of its characters.

Catherine must learn that the behavior of Isabella Thorpe, John Thorpe, and General Tilney is not consistent with the appearance they try to project. She is never really taken in by Thorpe's clumsy attempt at being a rake. She does accept Isabella as a romantic heroine and realizes her falseness only when Isabella breaks her engagement with James. Catherine is never really comfortable with the General's pose as a generous, modest, easy-to-please host. Although early in the novel she sees no flaws in those people around her, later she becomes very aware of the flaws in the General, and her imagination gives him a character of the darkest Gothic hue. When she discovers her mistake, she once again errs by underestimating his ill-nature and by not considering his reasons for promoting her friendship with his son and daughter. Although readers see things from Catherine's perspective, they feel they understand a good deal more than Catherine does. However, readers are apt to underestimate seriously the character of General Tilney and even that of John Thorpe. The true natures of the General and Thorpe should be obvious to the readers. Yet, readers may well find that the distraction of watching Catherine struggle with her faulty perception and of waiting for her to shed her Gothic delusions and find "reality" has been too great and that their own perceptions have failed the test.

Hugh Hennedy notes that readers seem encouraged to feel a bit superior to naive Catherine because of her imperception. The General's "brutal treatment" of Catherine shatters that "sense of superiority" very quickly.⁸⁵ Readers may at this point find that they must adjust that third view they created for themselves out of the elements of Catherine's view of events and the scenes of dialogue.

In Pride and Prejudice, Austen's use of narrative perspective recreates for readers what Howard Babb calls "the quality of our social experience, that sense we often have of the ambiguities inherent in behavior." Babb states that Austen manages this effect mainly "through engaging us, alongside the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet, in making out a number of characters largely on the basis of what they do in public."⁸⁶ The two most important characters to test the perceptions of Elizabeth and the readers are Darcy and Wickham. Elizabeth prides herself on her discernment of character, and readers seem encouraged in a variety of ways, as mentioned in the second chapter of this study, to agree with her evaluations of Darcy and Wickham. However, readers may notice that Elizabeth's judgment of the two men is based in part on their very different initial reactions to her.

⁸⁵ Hugh Hennedy, "Acts of Perception in Jane Austen's Novels," Studies in the Novel, 5 (1973), 29.

⁸⁶ Babb, p. 113.

Darcy insulted her. Wickham seemed to like her from their first meeting. Readers may also notice that Elizabeth is judging both men on appearance, on their public manners. Because Darcy seems reserved and Wickham seems open, she sees Wickham as good and Darcy as lacking in goodness. When Elizabeth tells her sister Wickham's story of Darcy's injustice, she concludes her argument in Wickham's behalf with the comment "Besides, there was truth in his looks" (PP, 60). This evidence may strike readers as inadequate for judging character. Early in the novel, readers are subtly warned that Elizabeth is not always a sound judge of character, in spite of her ready wit and her confidence in her judgment. The surprise and disappointment she feels when her friend Charlotte Lucas agrees to marry Mr. Collins suggests how much she has misjudged Charlotte's character. Nevertheless, Elizabeth seems more perceptive than the other characters, and readers may go along with her judgment of Wickham and Darcy. If so, readers may well echo Elizabeth's statement on discovering the reality of the situation: "There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it" (PP, 155). Whether readers are surprised or not, they are hardly able to miss the emphasis on the unreliability of appearance as a basis for forming judgments.

The shifts in narrative perspective in the early portions of the novel allow readers to see into the mind of Darcy just enough to realize that he is falling in love with Elizabeth. The narrator manages these shifts carefully, often adding an unobtrusive comment herself. For example, at the end of a dialogue between Darcy and Elizabeth, this rapid shift in perspective occurs.

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

The underlined portion indicates commentary by the narrator and it creates a bridge between the thoughts of Elizabeth and those of Darcy. E. M. Halliday states that "suspense in this novel . . . depends mostly on our waiting for Elizabeth to discover . . . that Darcy is in love with her; and that she is in love with Darcy." It is important that "the reader . . . be led to suspect both of these things before Elizabeth does, or the suspense is lost." Evidence of these developments is conveyed by the narrator's shifting perspective. "Once it is firmly established that Darcy is slipping, however reluctantly," the shifts into his thought stop.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁷ E. M. Halliday, "Narrative Perspective in Pride and Prejudice," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 15 (1960), 68.

narrator's perspective concentrates on Elizabeth thereafter. Elizabeth's perceptions are distorted by her prejudice. Readers may take up her prejudice along with her point of view. They, too, may be deceived by appearances. The shifting narrative perspective allows readers to experience distorted perceptions and deceptive appearances as they work to reconcile the materials they have been given into a third view for themselves.

Although Austen stated that in Emma she may have created a heroine whom no one but she would like, she has in fact created a heroine whom readers can like quite well while still being aware of all her shortcomings. Austen helps readers to arrive at the desired evaluation of Emma through the narrative perspective. First of all, extended inside views of Emma's thoughts and emotions enable readers to feel a measure of sympathy for her. As Booth states, "the sustained inside view [is] one of the most successful of all devices for inducing a parallel emotional response between the deficient heroine and the reader."⁸⁸ And Emma is deficient. She is charming in some ways: her lack of vanity in her appearance, her sense of humor, her sense of duty to her father. She also has serious flaws: her social snobbery, her faulty perception, her desire to meddle in the lives of

⁸⁸ Booth, Fiction, pp. 228-29.

others. If all readers had were an external view of Emma, if they saw her only as Jane Fairfax does, for example, they would feel very little sympathy for her. However, as Booth points out, it is important that readers develop sympathy for Emma so that they will care about what happens to her and be pleased at the happy resolution of her problems and at the mending of her flaws. The internal view readers are given of Emma makes her virtues apparent. For example, readers must applaud her consistent and sincere efforts to keep her querulous father contented, as well as her conscious exertions to maintain family harmony when the difficult John Knightley is present. Readers become aware of her virtues and the difficulties of her situation because of the inner view they have of her, and therefore they do feel a certain measure of sympathy for her. In fact, as Booth notes, because of the inside view, readers tend to grant Emma's faults the same tolerance they would grant their own.

The inside view generates sympathy in the readers, but to have a balanced opinion of Emma readers must also become aware of her distorted view and her errors. The readers' critical awareness of Emma is created by the narrator's withdrawal of the flexible perspective from the inner view of the heroine. The narrator uses several techniques to help readers see Emma objectively. The narrator herself evaluates Emma's actions. She exercises her right of

omniscience and presents a conversation when Emma is not present. For example, the narrator records the conversation between Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley in which they discuss Emma's behavior. The narrator sometimes dips into the thoughts of other characters for an evaluation of Emma. Readers are generally aware of Mr. Knightley's opinion of Emma's actions. The narrator also presents scenes of dialogue which readers must interpret for themselves. As Litz notes, these scenes help readers maintain their grip on objective reality.⁸⁹ Readers must be able to recognize Emma's errors in spite of their sympathy for her, or, as Booth points out, they will "miss much of the comedy that depends on Emma's distorted view." Readers who do not "recognize [Emma's] faults with absolute precision cannot enjoy her comic abasement" or appreciate the absolute fitness of her predicament when she discovers she has unwittingly been encouraging Harriet to love the man she herself loves.⁹⁰

The narrator's flexible perspective, therefore, creates sympathy in the reader by one narrative perspective and strengthens the reader's objective judgment of Emma by another narrative perspective. The use of these two narrative perspectives draws readers into the novel in several ways.

⁸⁹ Litz, p. 146.

⁹⁰ Booth, Fiction, p. 250.

Litz finds that the "constant interaction between external and internal reality" enables readers to gain "a double sense of dramatic events and their interpretation by an individual consciousness."⁹¹ This sense of duality at first creates in readers a suspicion that perhaps Emma's perception of events is faulty. Mr. Elton seems so attentive to Emma that readers begin to wonder if Harriet is really his object as Emma thinks. As their suspicions multiply, readers become more and more absorbed and amused. The dual views force readers to sort out their perceptions and create a third view for themselves. The dual perspectives involve readers directly with the theme of the novel. The major movement in Emma is the heroine's progression from blindness to perception and enlightenment. The narrative technique draws readers into this process. They too participate in a movement from imperception to perception as they realize Emma's errors before she does and come to judge events for themselves.

In all three of the novel discussed in this study, Austen's rhetorical technique of having the narrator shift perspectives compels readers to create their own view from the two views offered to them by the heroine's thoughts and the scenes of dialogue. Readers may feel themselves

⁹¹ Litz, p. 146.

comfortably superior to Catherine's naive view, they may like Elizabeth so well that they forget to question her prejudiced view, they may be so completely involved with Emma's highly imaginative way of looking at events that they neglect to evaluate her perceptions--but only for a time. The scenes of dialogue offer information that does not agree with the views of the heroines and the readers must reconcile their conflicting impressions. They must test their perception and exercise their judgment.

Austen works in several ways to help readers maintain the proper balance of sympathy and judgment for the heroine. One technique is the skillful arrangement and handling of events. Emma, Austen's most fallible heroine, requires the most delicate management. An example of the technique of balancing events is found in Emma and Harriet's visit to a family of poor sick cottagers. Emma's practical, non-romantic attitude toward the poor and her ability to enter "into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always [give] her assistance with as much intelligence as goodwill" (E, 71) help her to appear in a good light. The narrator must handle the actual visit to the cottage carefully or the plight of the poor and the picture of Emma as a ministering angel may become too prominent and destroy the readers' objectivity. Although the readers and the narrator approach the cottage with Emma and Harriet, only Emma and Harriet enter it. When

they emerge, the readers are told that the cottage has a great deal of wretchedness within and without, but they never get a description of it. Emma comments that the visit has made a sober impression on her, but she wryly acknowledges that the impression may not be long-lasting. The narrator immediately shows this to be the case for this brief scene introduces the episode in which Emma deliberately breaks her shoelace so that she may stop at Mr. Elton's house, thereby throwing Harriet and Mr. Elton together to further the romance she thinks her efforts at matchmaking have sparked. Through the narrator's skillful handling of the material, the readers are not depressed by the poor nor overly impressed or disgusted with Emma as she moves from sense into silliness.

The narrator also helps readers to maintain the desired attitude toward the heroine by making direct or indirect apologies for or criticisms of her. The narrator often makes a direct apology for the heroine's conduct when readers might be tempted to be too severe. Booth points out that in Northanger Abbey the narrator apologizes for Catherine's failure to immediately see through John Thorpe.⁹²

[His] manners did not please Catherine; but he was James's friend and Isabella's brother; and her judgment was further bought off by Isabella's assuring her . . . that John thought her the most charming girl in the

⁹² Booth, Fiction, p. 186.

world, and by John's engaging her before they parted to dance with him that evening. Had she been older or vainer, such attacks might have done little; but, where youth and diffidence are united, it requires uncommon steadiness of reason to resist the attraction of being called the most charming girl in the world, and of being so very early engaged as a partner. . . . (NA, 40)

This apology serves two purposes. It quiets any feelings of impatience readers may have because of Catherine's lack of perception. And it helps readers to understand Catherine's character.

Apologies are made less frequently for Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice. Her errors are not so obvious to the readers, and, as the readers' awareness is being tested, the narrator does not call attention to them by making apologetic comments. However, just in case readers may have any doubts about Elizabeth's change of heart toward Darcy, the narrator makes this comment.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a 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 somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill-success might perhaps authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. (PP, 190-91)

The narrator does occasionally, and with a very delicate touch, point out that Elizabeth's judgment is susceptible to errors caused by vanity. When Wickham's partiality for Elizabeth ceases and he becomes the admirer of another young

lady, the narrator notes,

The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young lady, to whom he was now rendering himself agreeable; but Elizabeth, less clear-sighted perhaps in his case than in Charlotte's, did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more natural; and while able to suppose that it cost him a few struggles to relinquish her, she was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both; and could sincerely wish him happy. (PP, 104; emphasis added)

The use of the word "perhaps" softens the judgment. Readers are probably less aware of the suggested criticism because it is slipped into a passage that is explaining something they are quite interested in at the moment--Elizabeth's practical reaction to finding that Wickham has transferred his attention elsewhere.

In another instance, Emma receives an apologetic comment when Mr. Knightley proposes and she keeps back the information that Harriet thinks she loves him and he loves her.

Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material. Mr. Knightley could not impute to Emma a more relenting heart than she possessed or a heart more disposed to accept his. (E, 343)

The narrator only rarely calls Emma's faults directly to the readers' attention. The narrator does make this remark at the beginning of the novel.

The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way and a dis-

position to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her. (E, 5-6)

The phrases "rather too much" and "a little too well" seem to qualify the criticism. The last part of the passage seems to suggest that these problems do not offer any immediate danger. The fact that this passage is part of a much longer one also tends to keep readers from regarding it seriously. In another passage, the narrator does state that Emma is misinterpreting Mr. Elton's wishes:

[Mr. Elton] had not really the least inclination to give up the visit; but Emma, too eager and busy in her own previous conceptions and views to hear him impartially or see him with clear vision, was very well satisfied with his muttering acknowledgement of its being "Very cold, certainly very cold." (E, 90)

Yet, as Beach notes, "the context makes it slightly ambiguous whether Emma is simply misunderstanding Mr. Elton's desire to visit, or his desires in general." Beach also states that the narrator generally points out Emma's faults indirectly through an ironic choice of words.⁹³

Emma did not repent her condescension in going to the Coles. The visit afforded her many pleasant recollections the next day, and all that she might be supposed to have lost on the side of dignified seclusion must be amply repaid in the splendour of popularity. She must have delighted the Coles--worthy people who deserved to be made happy!--and left a name behind her that would not soon die away. (E, 183; emphasis added)

⁹³ Beach, pp. 152-54.

The narrator's ironic diction reminds readers of Emma's egotism. The narrator then softens the ironic criticism by immediately showing Emma's concern for having told Frank Churchill about her suspicions that Jane Fairfax cares for Mr. Dixon.

Austen often uses the technique of allowing a character within the story to praise or judge the heroine. Readers find Catherine a likable character because the witty and intelligent Henry Tilney values her. Henry's compliments emphasize Catherine's good points for the readers. When Catherine tries to understand why Isabella and Captain Tilney are dancing after they both declared that they would not dance, Henry tells her,

"Your attributing my brother's wish of dancing with Miss Thorpe to good nature alone convinced me of your being superior in good nature to all the rest of the world." (NA, 110)

When Isabella tries to get Catherine to patch up her engagement with Catherine's brother, Henry underlines Catherine's good qualities by telling her that

". . . if you would stand by [your brother], you would not be much distressed by the disappointment of Miss Thorpe. But your mind is warped by an innate principle of general integrity, and therefore not accessible to the cool reasonings of family partiality, or a desire of revenge." (NA, 183)

When Henry discovers what Gothic notions Catherine has been indulging in concerning his mother's death, his lecture brings tears of shame to Catherine's eyes and "more

thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies than all their several disappointments had done" (NA, 165). Catherine feels terribly embarrassed. Henry, however, makes it clear that he forgives her for her foolishness. He never speaks of it again, and he continues to treat her with the same regard as before. His forgiveness helps readers to be tolerant with Catherine, too.

In Pride and Prejudice, several characters influence the readers' opinion of Elizabeth. As Beach notes, "all the reasonable and/or good-natured characters (Mr. Bennet, the Gardiners, Charlotte, Jane and Bingley) have affection and respect for Elizabeth."⁹⁴ Readers take it as a positive recommendation that Mrs. Bennet regards Elizabeth as "the least dear of all her children" (PP, 73). Austen does not employ a character to act as a spokesman in this novel as she did in Northanger Abbey with Henry Tilney. In Pride and Prejudice the readers' perceptions are put to a more rigorous test. Even when opinions counter to Elizabeth's are given, readers tend to discount them. Jane, for example, often takes the view that proves to be correct in the Darcy-Wickham problem. However, both Elizabeth and the readers tend to disregard Jane's opinions because of her extremely good nature and kind heart. Mrs. Gardiner proves to be a

⁹⁴ Beach, p. 75.

wise judge, and she points out to Elizabeth the practical reasons why she should not encourage Wickham's attentions. Yet, for the most part, Elizabeth goes without any correction other than what she receives from her own conscience.

Emma, Austen's most seriously erring heroine, is admired by most of her family and friends. Mrs. Weston is a worthy character, but readers are told early in the story that she is too lenient where Emma is concerned. Mr. Knightley is the most penetrating judge of character in the novel. Still he is not infallible, as his jealousy of Frank Churchill shows. He consistently tells Emma when he thinks she is going astray. Beach suggests that "Mr. Knightley's overt criticisms imply his understanding of Emma's worth."⁹⁵ That such a worthy character shows concern and love for Emma helps readers to value her. More and more throughout the novel Emma herself realizes her faults and judges herself. Perhaps her most severe test comes when Harriet tells her that she loves Mr. Knightley and that she thinks he loves her in return. Emma is shocked into a realization of her own feelings for Mr. Knightley and of her own irresponsibility in the matter.

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How incon-

⁹⁵ Beach, p. 153.

siderate, how irrational, how unfeeling, had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world. Some portion of respect for herself, however, in spite of all these demerits . . . and a strong sense of justice by Harriet . . . gave Emma the resolution to sit and endure farther with calmness. . . . Harriet had done nothing . . . to deserve to be slighted by the person whose counsels had never led her right. (E, 324)

Because Emma is so seriously at fault, her own realization of her errors is doubly necessary. The readers may be influenced by the praise and blame other characters bestow on Emma, but, before they can completely forgive her, they need to know she thoroughly recognizes her mistakes. Emma's own direct judgments of herself help readers to achieve the desired attitude toward her.

Austen's narrative method is a complex system of techniques subtly designed to shape the readers' response to the heroine. It requires readers to analyze and evaluate their perceptions of the heroine and her world much as the heroine must learn to analyze and evaluate her own perceptions.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATOR-READER RELATIONSHIP

Although style, characterization, and narrative method all involve the reader in the story, the narrator-reader relationship Austen creates has perhaps the greatest influence on the reader's willing involvement in the story. The narrator is just a bit different in each novel. She is most apparent in Northanger Abbey, where, in addition to her other duties, she conducts the parody of sentimental and Gothic popular fiction. The narrator is least apparent in Emma. Her absence allows the readers to feel that they are seeing most of the story from Emma's point of view. The narrator in Pride and Prejudice is present but not obviously so, especially as her playful wit seems so much like that of the main character. In each novel, however, the narrator uses the same techniques to establish the relationship with the reader. She creates a sense of community--a sense that she and the reader share tastes, values, and feelings--through the use of irony and a moral stance.

Alistair Duckworth states that "Austen's narrator assumes an easy community with her readers . . . a community

[that is] sensed by present day readers, many of whom are neither English nor bourgeois."⁹⁶ This sense of an assumed community is suggested by Eudora Welty's comment that

The felicity the novels have for us must partly lie in the confidence they take for granted between the author and her readers. We remember that the young Jane read her chapters aloud to her own lively, vocative family, upon whose shrewd intuition, practiced and eager estimation of conduct, and general rejoicing in character she relied almost as well as she could rely on her own. The novels still have the bloom of shared pleasure.⁹⁷

Some critics suggest that this feeling of confidence between writer and reader, this sense of community, is the result of a cultural situation in which an author could write knowing the values and tastes of his readers because, as Steinmann says, "there was only one novel-reading public, and every novelists had this public in mind."⁹⁸ In other words, some critics suggest that Austen's sense of community is a reflection of what once was a reality. While it is true that the reading public in Austen's time was not as diverse as it is today, it was far from being homogeneous. As Lloyd Brown states, Austen was well aware of "the diverse standards represented by her readership."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Alistair M. Duckworth, "Prospects and Retrospects," in Jane Austen Today, pp. 29-30.

⁹⁷ Welty, p. 4.

⁹⁸ Steinmann, p. 287.

⁹⁹ Lloyd W. Brown, Bits of Ivory: Narrative Techniques in Jane Austen's Fiction, p. 203.

Austen makes this point in her novels. John Thorpe, who read and relished The Monk, represents far different tastes than does Mrs. Morland, who enjoyed Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. Moreover, Austen was aware of the diversity of tastes represented by even the people she knew personally. She recorded the reactions of her friends, family, and acquaintances to several of her novels. This brief selection of comments from "Opinions of Emma" reveals a variety of tastes and values.

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Digweed did not like it so well as the others: in fact if she had not known the author would hardly have got through it.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Jeffrey (of the Edinburgh Review) was kept up by it three nights.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Austen-Leigh, pp. 328-31. M.P. refers to Austen's Mansfield Park; P. and P. to Pride and Prejudice.

Llyod Brown points out that those who suggest that Austen "writes with full confidence in . . . her agreement with the reader" because she really could expect that her contemporary audience shared her tastes and values have misinterpreted the situation. Brown notes that Austen's "easy intimacy with one group of readers (the young Jane Austen and her family circle . . .) is counterbalanced by the writer's awareness of 'outside' tastes in the reading public."¹⁰¹ The illusion Austen creates of writing for one audience is just that--a created illusion. It is a part of her art, a part of her rhetorical strategy for involving readers in her fictional world.

Austen's creation of a narrator-reader relationship based on a sense of community is similar to the relationship Fielding's narrator creates with his readers. Austen's narrator is far less noticeable than Fielding's flamboyant intrusive narrator, who is continually breaking into the action to make comments about the story, the characters, or something that seems only distantly related to the task at hand. However, like Fielding, Austen uses irony and a moral stance to create a narrator-reader relationship.

As Robert Alter points out in Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, "irony operates upon the reader not only to

¹⁰¹ Brown, p. 203.

make him aware of mutually qualifying meanings, but also to implicate him in a particular relationship with the narrator and the material narrated." He states further that the use of irony "implies both complicity and superiority--complicity between the ironist and the discerners of the irony, who share a sense of intelligent superiority to the unwitting objects of the irony."¹⁰² Austen also uses irony in this way. In Emma the narrator records Emma's reactions to Harriet Smith in this fashion.

She was not struck by anything remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging--not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk--and yet so far from pushing, showing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of everything in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense and deserve encouragement. Encouragement should be given. . . . She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting and certainly a very kind undertaking, highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (E, 20)

Readers have little difficulty recognizing that Emma's grand scheme of playing benefactress is not founded on unselfish motives. The ironic language of the narrator--"not inconveniently shy," "showing so proper . . . a deference," "seeming so pleasantly grateful"--along with the repeated use in the last section of the passage of the pronoun "she"

¹⁰² Robert Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, pp. 39-40.

in reference to Emma herself, underscore the selfishness of Emma's interest in Harriet. This use of irony not only suggests to the reader what Emma's true motives are, it also brings the reader into a special relationship with the narrator. It is as if the narrator says to the reader, "This is what Emma thinks, but you and I who are a bit more intelligent, perceptive, and clear-sighted than Emma understand that her motives are not unmixed with selfishness." In this passage, therefore, the narrator uses irony to imply things about herself, the reader, and Emma--all at the same time. Austen uses this technique repeatedly in all her work. The narrator's use of irony coupled with the reader's perception and appreciation of the irony gives the reader the feeling that he and the narrator have kindred sensibilities.

Austen limits the obvious intrusions of the narrator, relying heavily on irony to communicate the presence of the narrator to the reader. This technique has a special effect on the relationship of narrator and reader. John Preston points out that Austen uses "irony to render the narrative intelligence as a kind of third dimension to the action, or as a colour filter, not visible itself but affecting all the tones in the scene." Preston notes that "the reader is conscious of the play of mind rather as an enlargement of his own sensibilities than as the mechanism of narration."

The narrator's use of irony in this manner gives the reader the sense of being "taken beyond [his] usual capacities" to take his place beside the narrator.¹⁰³

The purpose for which irony is used also contributes to the reader's sense of community with the narrator. Malcolm Bradbury points out that "in [Henry] James irony frequently administers emotional loss, while in Jane Austen it frequently elicits emotional and moral growth."¹⁰⁴ This comment helps to explain part of the reader's reaction to the nature of Austen's irony. When each of Austen's heroines realizes the irony of her situation, when she understands how far she has been led astray by her own insistent imperceptions, then she is ready to grow. The narrator's use of irony has this "happy ending" in view. Susan Gubar suggests that "we take comfort in the narrator's assumption" that the heroine's realization "will teach her how to love" and "will double her vision so that she can see herself as she is seen." It is "this imaginative act," notes Gubar, "that links the reader and the narrator to the characters [and] that raises our admiration for 'Jane Austen,'"¹⁰⁵ the implied

¹⁰³ John Preston, The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ Susan Gubar, "Sane Jane and the Critics: 'Professions and Falsehoods,'" Novel: A Forum on Fiction, 8 (1975), 259.

author. Austen's use of irony is not divisive, even though it does allow the reader to feel a bit superior to the heroine for a portion of the novel. Austen uses irony for the positive purpose of adding to the community of perceptive individuals to which the narrator and the reader belong.

The narrator's moral stance also contributes to the narrator-reader relationship. Alter suggests that Fielding's narrator creates a "community of values" by tacitly assuming that he and the reader share a common moral viewpoint. Fielding's narrator, Alter states, "is able to conjure up a sense of common viewpoint with the reader that is part actual persuasion, part fictional equivalent of real agreement," by projecting "a witty, humane" personality that the reader comes to like and trust and with whom the reader can even "feel a sort of urbane camaraderie of like intelligences."¹⁰⁶ Austen's narrator establishes and reinforces the reader's sense of a common moral viewpoint through the conceptual vocabulary, subtle moral commentary, and philosophical or witty generalizations and aphorisms.

Behind the narrator's use of a vocabulary of general and conceptual terms is, as Graham Hough suggests, "the assumption that many things can be taken for granted" between narrator and reader. Both "are presumed to share a common

¹⁰⁶ Alter, p. 45.

knowledge and to be in natural agreement" on such matters as "what an unpretentious old-fashioned gentleman's house is like" or "what an attractive intelligent girl is like." And, as Hough notes, "if this is true on the social and material plane it is even more so on the moral plane." The precise and consistent use of conceptual terms to evaluate behavior, as discussed in the first chapter of this study, can induce readers to adopt the moral standard the conceptual terms imply, at least for the length of the novel. Hough calls "the great abstract words of moral evaluation . . . completely authoritative symbols." Hough also points out that the narrator's "language is highly evaluative, but it is never in the least hortatory or persuasive." This quality makes the conceptual terms seem especially convincing. As Hough suggests, "Like Hamlet we sometimes doubt a lady who protests too much; Jane Austen establishes her reliability by never protesting at all."¹⁰⁷

Austen's narrator also contributes to the reader's sense of sharing a common moral viewpoint through the careful use of moral commentary. When the narrator makes a value judgment, she increases the validity of that judgment by immediately showing the character in an action that supports it. For example, the narrator makes a value judgment when

¹⁰⁷ Hough, p. 208.

she describes John Knightley as having manners that were reserved and a temper that "was not his greatest perfection" (E, 77). In the scene that follows this description and on throughout the novel, John Knightley consistently displays these traits. Readers share the narrator's opinion because they see that it is valid.

Furthermore, as Litz points out, the narrator "uses her right to judge character and assert norms of behavior with discretion" by assigning moral judgments harsher than those she makes to one or more characters within the story. For example, in Emma the narrator establishes Mr. Knightley as a character of moral authority. As Litz states, "by the end of the fifth chapter we have complete faith in his judgment. Explicit moral comment becomes increasingly the province of Mr. Knightley, whose position within the story enhances its force."¹⁰⁸ Henry Tilney fills this office in Northanger Abbey. In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Bennet and Mrs. Gardiner both contribute moral commentary of a rather mild kind. All of these characters are shown to be admirable and all view the action from a common moral viewpoint that is shared by the narrator and presumed to be shared as well by the readers.

Austen's narrator adds to the reader's sense of a

¹⁰⁸ Litz, p. 148.

community of values, of a shared way of looking at the world, through the use of philosophical or witty generalizations and aphorisms. As Howard Babb suggests, the use of generalizations tends to unify the sensibilities of the narrator and the readers.¹⁰⁹ Isobel Armstrong remarks that Austen's use of aphorisms implies a "confident assumption that the reader will and can only share her norms" and that the narrator and reader share a common body of knowledge and experience as well.¹¹⁰

Austen's narrator wisely states:

A sanguine temper, though forever expecting more good than occurs, does not always pay for its hopes by any proportionate depression. It soon flies over the present failure and begins to hope again. (E, 116)

The reader agrees. In Emma he sees this trait exhibited throughout the novel by Mr. Weston who is always expecting a visit from his son Frank, who keeps postponing it.

The narrator makes a variety of comments that fit the category of common wisdom about human nature. Another example:

She [Elizabeth] found, what has been sometimes found before, that an event to which she looked forward with impatient desire, did not, in taking place, bring all satisfaction she had promised herself. (PP, 163)

This one states a frequently observed fact. Sometimes the

¹⁰⁹ Babb, p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Isobel Armstrong, "Middlemarch: A Note on George Eliot's Wisdom," in Critical Essays on George Eliot, p. 120.

generalization suggests a moral evaluation:

How little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue. (PP, 214)

Very often the aphorisms are witty and ironic:

Woman is fine for her own satisfaction alone. No man will admire her the more, no woman will like her the better for it. Neatness and fashion are enough for the former, and a something of shabbiness or impropriety will be most endearing to the latter. (NA, 61-62)

Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. (NA, 93-94)

When Miss Hawkins marries Mr. Elton, the narrator comments:

Human nature is so well disposed towards those who are in interesting situations that a young person who either marries or dies is sure of being kindly spoken of. (E, 143)

And when the thoroughly unpleasant Mrs. Churchill, one of Austen's off-stage characters, obligingly dies, the narrator describes the general reaction in this manner:

Goldsmith tells us that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but die; and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill fame. (E, 307-308)

Perhaps the most well known of Austen's ironic generalizations is the first sentence of Pride and Prejudice, which establishes the tone as well as the subject of the novel:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a fortune, must be in want of a wife. (PP, 1)

Whether the aphorisms and generalizations are wise, moral,

or ironic, or a combination of all three, they imply that the narrator and the readers share a sense of common understanding.

The personality that Austen's narrator projects holds the narrator-reader relationship together. Booth describes Austen's narrator as "friend and guide." The narrator seems to be the author dramatized, and "'Jane Austen' like 'Henry Fielding' is a paragon of wit, wisdom, and virtue." In describing the effect of the narrator's personality in Emma, Booth states,

'Jane Austen' has learned nothing at the end of the novel that she did not know at the beginning. She needed to learn nothing. She knew everything of importance already. We have been privileged to watch her as she observes her favorite character climb from a considerably lower platform to join the exalted company of Knightley, 'Jane Austen,' and those of us readers who are wise enough, good enough, and perceptive enough to belong up there too.

As Booth says, readers find in the personality of the narrator "a mind and heart that can give [them] clarity without oversimplification, sympathy and romance without sentimentality, and biting irony without cynicism." Austen's efforts in creating a narrator-reader relationship are so successful that, in Booth's words, readers have the feeling "of traveling with a hardy little band of readers whose heads are screwed on tight and whose hearts are in the right place."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Booth, Fiction, pp. 264-66.

Perhaps the personality the narrator projects as a wise and witty friend and guide is so effective because it devises a role of discriminating and perceptive friend for the reader to fill. Lynch states that Austen "has created a good role for us, a role of fairness and intelligence, and unselfish interest in others. This is surely our better self. Living it helps to make [Austen's] novel an enjoyable experience for us."¹¹²

Mary Lascelles states that "the relationship of story-teller to reader . . . lies at the core of narrative art."¹¹³ Austen's creation of a narrator-reader relationship based on a sense of community encourages readers to involve themselves in the fictional world and to adopt the standards and values of that world. The narrator-reader relationship also urges readers to live up to the role of perceptive friend.

¹¹² Lynch, p. 133.

¹¹³ Lascelles, p. 208.

CONCLUSION

Jane Austen's fiction contains a variety of rhetorical techniques that work to shape the reader's responses. These techniques work through style, characterization, narrative method, and narrator-reader relationship to interest readers in the novel and to encourage readers to exercise their powers of perception and judgment.

Two features of Austen's style--conceptual terms and ironic language--shape the reader's responses. Austen's use of a conceptual vocabulary encourages readers to exercise their discernment. By consistently using conceptual terms very precisely to analyze character and behavior, Austen makes readers aware of the terms, the meanings they have, and the standards they imply. When the conceptual terms are attached to behavior, they seem to make it something that can be rationally evaluated. Readers tend to accept the terms as a way of judging character and evaluating actions, at least for the length of the novel.

The second feature of Austen's style--ironic language--delights readers and leads them to exercise their perception. There is a sense of playfulness in the great variety of forms Austen's verbal irony assumes and in the frequency with which

Austen uses it. This playful quality makes her verbal irony attractive to readers and adds to their interest in the novel. Because readers find ironic language enjoyable, they willingly do what the language asks of them. Every time readers note the use of ironic language, they recognize the difference between appearance and reality.

Austen uses characterization in at least five ways to shape the reader's responses. She encourages readers to recognize that character is more important than physical appearance by emphasizing behavior and minimizing appearance. She interests readers in realistic rather than ideal main characters. These characters appeal to readers because they exhibit that mixture of strengths and weaknesses readers encounter in people in the real world. Austen shapes the reactions of readers to characters by the way in which she presents their speech. Characters reveal their natures to the readers by what they say, the words they select, and the way they converse with others. Austen deepens readers' awareness and understanding of the thematic concerns of the novels by having many of the characters exemplify some aspect of the theme. Austen also exercises the readers' perception, judgment, and sympathy by portraying some characters in such a way that readers seem to be encouraged to feel otherwise than they should about them.

Austen's narrative method embraces a variety of

techniques that involve the reader in analyzing and evaluation his perceptions. The narrator's shifting perspective creates a double view for readers. They see into the heroine's thoughts, and they witness scenes of dialogue. From this combination of subjective and objective information, readers must create a third view for themselves. The flexible narrative perspective helps readers to view the fallible heroines with balanced blend of sympathy and judgment. The narrator supports this balanced view by using additional techniques, such as the ironic arrangement of events and the use of direct and indirect apologies and criticisms.

Austen also shapes the reader's responses through the development of the narrator-reader relationship. Austen's narrator acts as the friend and guide of the reader and encourages the reader to share in a community of like tastes, values, and feelings. The narrator builds this sense of community by using irony to imply that she and the reader have similar understandings. The narrator also adopts a moral stance that suggests she and the reader share the same moral viewpoint. The narrator creates the role of perceptive friend for the reader to fill, a role she makes seem so attractive that the reader strives to live up to its demands on his perception.

Austen's rhetorical techniques involve the reader in

the fictional world, a world where the ability to make judgments is important. The reader must learn to discern between appearance and reality, just as the heroine must. Austen's varied rhetorical techniques entice the reader to become involved in the process of distinguishing appearance from reality, and they prepare him to perceive correctly.

Austen's art is a reader-oriented art. Austen takes great care to shape the response of her readers. Although she seems to assume that she and the reader share the same outlook and the same world, she leaves nothing to chance. Readers are carefully led by style, characterization, narrative method, and narrator-reader relationship to willingly involve themselves in a fictional world where they must exercise their perceptions.

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