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VISION AND JUDGMENT AS MEANS OF CHARACTER DEFINITION IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

by

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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Vision and Judgment as Means of Character Definition in Jane Austen's Novels," submitted by Lesley Hilda Willis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

An examination of Jane Austen's use of imagery of sight and blindness goes far to establish the importance of the concepts of vision and judgment in the novels, not only as moral themes but as means of defining character. Metaphors of sight and blindness are frequent, as are descriptions of visual activity; and their frequency attests their importance in Jane Austen's scale of values. The eyes themselves have a role to play in furthering the relationships between characters, for they can be used to communicate feelings and attitudes which, owing to the restraints of decorum, do not find expression in speech. This is especially important in the relationship between hero and heroine.

The vision and judgment of the heroine deserve special consideration. Heroines may be divided into two categories: observers, who are the principal media of vision in their novels, and protagonists, who are more directly involved in what passes and who grow in self-knowledge and in understanding of others. An appraisal of vision and judgment in the protagonist heroines of Northanger Abbey and Emma and the observer heroines of Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion shows that, though the distinction between protagonist and observer is not absolute, it is viable and contributes to our understanding of the different modes of vision which Jane Austen employs.

Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice and Fanny Price in Mansfield Park are singled out for separate study. Not only are they good examples of, respectively, the protagonist and the observer heroine, but the novels of which they are the central figures are particularly concerned with vision and judgment, and most of the characters are evaluated in relation to these concepts. But the study concentrates on Elizabeth and Fanny, whose vision dominates the books in which they figure, and whose judgments develop in totally different ways; that of Elizabeth adopting new premises under the influence of a stronger spirit, that of Fanny attaining maturity as she becomes independent of guidance.

The principles on which judgment is based are moral as well as rational in all the novels, but it is generally possible for them to be interpreted in a purely social context. In Mansfield Park, however, the religious basis of the principles that should direct judgment is made explicit through the idiom of the novel, the attitudes expressed by various characters, and the final evaluation of people and standards which crowns the action.

In the case of the complex central figures, the process of development is as important as the final evaluation which results from it; and it is notable that observer heroines begin to take on the characteristics of protagonists, and protagonists those of observers, as they move towards an unattainable ideal in which vision, judgment and action are synthesised.

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CHAPTER I

NORTHANGER ABBEY, SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, EMMA, PERSUASION

At the close of his study of dialogue in Jane Austen's novels, Howard Babb says that

> the underlying motif in Jane Austen's fiction is surely the disparity between appearance and reality. . . . The motif becomes explicit in one of Jane Austen's favorite figures of speech, "blindness." And each novel . . . traces the development of at least one major character from the blindness brought on by too exclusive a self-interest, of whatever sort, to the operative clarity that results from a greater self-consciousness and rigorous self-evaluation. The evolution of these characters - and they range from Marianne Dashwood to Captain Wentworth - is defined in their speeches; but it is defined as well through the contrasting behavior of other characters, major and minor, who reveal in their own speeches their different degrees of blindness and enlightenment, their differing capacities to appraise reality truly and thus to take effective moral action.[1]

Babb invokes the use of vision and blindness as means of character definition several times, but this aspect of Jane Austen's technique is not central to his examination of the texture of dialogue in the novels. Other critics take the significance of vision and blindness for granted, or refer only incidentally to these concepts.[2] Yet they are so basic to Jane Austen's subject matter that they merit an independent examination. In this thesis, therefore, I intend to consider vision, and the judgment that depends on vision, as means of defining character in Jane Austen's works. I

shall concentrate on Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park; but in this chapter, which will be concerned with Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Emma and Persuasion, I propose, for the sake of brevity and clarity, to consider vision and judgment primarily as they relate to the central figures of the novels.

Broadly speaking, the heroines of Jane Austen's works fall into two categories, observers (Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, Anne Elliot) and protagonists (Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse).[3] This is an over-simplification, since the categories overlap to some extent. The classification of heroines as observers or protagonists is, however, a useful working definition, since the observers tend to have more reliable vision, and to be less actively engaged in the plot than the protagonists, who are, furthermore, in the process of self-correction. But the division into observers and protagonists is primarily useful, not because it labels the heroines as sufferers or doers, but because the kind of role the heroines play affects the quality of their vision and, in consequence, the exercise of their judgment. In Jane Austen's novels, characters are defined not only by what they see or fail to see, but by their manner of seeing.

Throughout the sequence which I am taking as the effective order of composition - Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Emma,

Persuasion[4] - protagonist heroines alternate with observers, as though Jane Austen is continually adjusting her concept of vision and viewer. This very adjustment is of course a form of artistic development, but for the purposes of the present chapter I shall deal with development, not through the total sequence of novels, but in the two categories I have already defined - novels with observer and novels with protagonist heroines.

Protagonist Heroines

Imagery of vision is particularly frequent in relation to protagonist heroines, as is natural since the adjustments to be made in their vision constitute the principal sphere of activity in the novels in which they figure. Catherine Morland's "inquiring eye"[5] is constantly at work in Northanger Abbey, and her eyes illustrate her state of mind at various points in the story. She accepts Henry Tilney's invitation to dance with "sparkling eyes" (75), and later listens "with sparkling eyes" to everything he says (131). Her "unpractised eye" is not greatly impressed by the sumptuous furniture of the Abbey's dining-room (166), and her "greedy eye" glances rapidly over the manuscript she finds in the closet (172). The eye imagery applied to or used by Isabella Thorpe is subtly differentiated from that related to the heroine in order to suggest Isabella's artifice and to underline, through contrast, the simple integrity of Catherine. The contradiction embodied in a phrase

like "the laughing eye of utter despondency" (67) indicates how inconsistent Isabella is, and the continual association with Isabella of clichés to do with the eyes denotes her shallowness. James Morland finds it hard to greet his sister with sufficient attention while "the bright eyes of Miss Thorpe were incessantly challenging his notice" (45). Isabella lauds her friend's supposed penetration with the comment "oh! that arch eye of yours! - It sees through every thing" (117), and Mrs. Thorpe compounds the impression of her daughter's insincerity with another cliché; "we perfectly see into your heart. You have no disguise," she says when Isabella attributes her discontent over her marriage settlement to solicitude on James' account (136). General and Captain Tilney make use of clichés to do with eyes in paying insincere compliments (147, 187), or, in the General's case, to interpret Catherine's attitude as it suits him (177).

The integrity of the heroine of Northanger Abbey is indicated partly by the fact that she, in contrast with the less sincere among those she meets, has little to do with eye metaphors. They are only applied to her to reinforce our sense of the difference between Catherine's actual situation and the typical heroic plight, as when she is "disgraced in the eye of the world" by appearing, through John Thorpe's unpunctuality, to be without a partner at the Upper-rooms (53). Or such metaphors may mark Catherine's progress

in self-knowledge and discrimination of judgment, as happens when Henry's remonstrances "thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies" (199). But Catherine, in her character as protagonist, has less to do with metaphor than with actual looking. Her "quick eyes" (169) are, if not invariably observant, constantly on the watch for the things she wants to see. The impulsiveness and unreliability of her vision are attested by her rapid eye movements; her eyes "suddenly fell on a large high chest" (163), "directly fell on a roll of paper" (169), and are often "caught" by what interests her (182, 190). These examples all relate to what might be termed the literary theme of the novel, the disparity between Gothic romance and everyday human life.

The love theme of Northanger Abbey (which, of course, also involves discrimination between romance and reality) calls forth looking of a different kind, although still carrying the hallmark of Catherine's individuality. The heroine falls miserably short of the Richardsonian ideal of female decorum, sardonically referred to in the novel (29-30), that a young lady's feelings for a gentleman should never be aroused until solicited by him, for Catherine is positively eager to see Henry Tilney again after only their first meeting. If she does not, like Isabella, engage in pursuit, she is continually on the watch. Ignorant of the fact that he has left Bath, she is often "disappointed in

her hope of re-seeing her partner. . . . Every search for him was equally unsuccessful" (35). Later, when she fears she has offended the Tilneys, she is quite open in her attempts to gain Henry's attention at the theatre; "every other look upon an average was directed towards the opposite box; and, for the space of two entire scenes, did she thus watch Henry Tilney, without being once able to catch his eye" (92). There is, of course, a mutual consciousness here; it is not accidental that "his notice was never withdrawn from the stage during two whole scenes" (93).

Only Catherine's perfect ingenuousness safeguards her behaviour from the reproach of impropriety. But this is more than can be said for Isabella Thorpe, whose similar attempt to attract a young man's attention is excused neither by affection nor guilelessness. "Isabella's eyes were continually bent towards one door or the other" of the Pump-room in search of Captain Tilney (143), and when he makes his appearance "Isabella, earnestly fixing her eye on him . . . , soon caught his notice" (147). Immodest and insincere as Isabella is, however, she is instrumental in the broadening of Catherine's vision. John Thorpe is an easy nut to crack, even for so simple a girl as Catherine, whereas Isabella's air of assurance and experience, though almost immediately seen through by the reader, is difficult for someone as naive as the heroine to penetrate. But Isabella's expressions are so extravagant, and so inconsistent

with her conduct, that it is impossible for doubt not to dawn on Catherine eventually. "What a delightful girl! I never saw any thing half so beautiful!" Isabella says of Eleanor Tilney. "But where is her all-conquering brother? Is he in the room? Point him out to me this instant, if he is. I die to see him." Yet the next moment she is engrossed by chat with James, and Catherine "could not avoid a little suspicion at the total suspension of all Isabella's impatient desire to see Mr. Tilney" (57).

More than suspicion - alarm - enters Catherine's mind when she overhears the style of conversation between Captain Tilney and Isabella. Though, for the moment, she gives her friend the benefit of the doubt, she thinks it "strange that she should not perceive his admiration" (148). Her fears are aroused to such a pitch that she is driven to do what she has never done before - to bring her faculty of observation deliberately to bear on the matter. One passage in particular shows the evolution of Catherine's vision from an incidentally used faculty into a faculty controlled by judgment, and here, significantly, physical vision and intellectual perception mingle:

> Catherine, though not allowing herself to suspect her friend, could not help watching her closely. The result of her observations was not agreeable. Isabella seemed an altered creature. When she saw her indeed surrounded only by their immediate friends in Edgar's Buildings or Pulteney-street, her change of manners was so trifling that, had it gone no farther, it might have passed unnoticed. A something of languid indifference, or of that boasted absence of mind which Catherine had never heard of before, would occasionally come across her; but had nothing worse appeared, <u>that</u> might

only have spread a new grace and inspired a warmer interest. But when Catherine saw her in public, admitting Captain Tilney's attentions as readily as they were offered, and allowing him almost an equal share with James in her notice and smiles, the alteration became too positive to be past over. What could be meant by such unsteady conduct, what her friend could be at, was beyond her comprehension. Isabella could not be aware of the pain she was inflicting; but it was a degree of wilful thoughtlessness which Catherine could not but resent. James was the sufferer. She saw him grave and uneasy; and however careless of his present discomfort the woman might be who had given him her heart, to her it was always an object. (149)

The process of Catherine's observations is quite as interesting as are the judgments that result from them. The very fact that the heroine observes Isabella closely, with a view to gaining information, marks a development in her powers of seeing and judging, and "that boasted absence of mind which Catherine had never heard of before" is clearly being considered by an intelligence which has been brought not only to watch and reflect but to compare observations made at different times. In this way, nuances which would normally escape the heroine are brought to light. It is clear that Catherine's judgment is still subject to the bias of friendship; she even suppresses the operations of her reason when they are likely to be adverse to Isabella. Catherine cannot give a harsher label to her friend's behaviour than "wilful thoughtlessness"; but, although Isabella's motives are "beyond her comprehension," she is prevented neither from seeing the painful effects of her conduct nor from feeling resentment on James' account. When close observation is out of her power she falls back on the wholly

subjective method of judgment earlier ascribed to her by Henry - "with you, it is not, How is such a one likely to be influenced? . . . . but, how should I be influenced, what would be my inducement in acting so and so?" (132) This is patently the mode of evaluation Catherine brings to bear on Captain Tilney:

> For poor Captain Tilney too she was greatly concerned. Though his looks did not please her, his name was a passport to her good will, and she thought with sincere compassion of his approaching disappointment; for, in spite of what she had believed herself to overhear in the Pump-room, his behaviour was so incompatible with a knowledge of Isabella's engagement, that she could not, upon reflection, imagine him aware of it. (149)

It is quite obvious to the reader that there is nothing pathetic in Captain Tilney's situation vis-à-vis Isabella Thorpe, and Catherine's misplaced compassion serves to underline the naiveté of her viewpoint. The words "what she had believed herself to overhear in the Pump-room" reveal that Catherine is even prepared to call the evidence of her own senses into question in order to reconcile Captain Tilney's conduct with her own standards of right and wrong, and this may seem a retrograde step in the development of her vision. It hinges, however, on the personal bias in favour of Henry's connections summed up in the sentence, "his name was a passport to her good will"; where emotional prejudice obtains (as it does in anything to do with Henry Tilney), Catherine's judgment of people is still unreliable. This trait, although it is modified in the course of the novel, persists in Catherine, for Jane Austen never depicts a protagonist heroine

attaining perfection; there is always a realistic consistency in her outlook, however she may be improved. So we find Catherine, after the realisation of her errors of fancy regarding the General, not universally enlightened about her mistaken point of view:

> 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. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. (200)

And the heroine's persistent limitations make her all the more credible as a character.

Catherine's misjudgment of Captain Tilney is in exactly the same vein as her original misconception of his father, who is quite as necessary to the development of the heroine's vision as Isabella Thorpe. It would not be too much to say that, in this capacity, the General takes up where Isabella leaves off, for it is harder for Catherine to recognise the faults of Henry's father than to perceive those of her friend. By degrees, however, her undiscriminating prepossession in the General's favour gives way to an uneasy sense of his deficiencies. Catherine's first lengthy exposure to General Tilney's company elicits from her the reaction that the constraint of the meeting "could not be General Tilney's fault. That he was perfectly agreeable and good-natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not

admit of a doubt, for he was tall and handsome, and Henry's father" [129].[6] But, whether she admits it or not, it is clear that a little doubt has already entered Catherine's mind. Her good opinion of the General sinks a little more when she arrives in Milsom Street to begin her stay with the Tilneys; "she was far from being at ease; nor could the incessant attentions of the General himself entirely reassure her. Nay, perverse as it seemed, she doubted whether she might not have felt less, had she been less attended to" (154). The journey to Northanger affords further opportunities for reflections of this kind, and Catherine quickly forms the opinion that "General Tilney, though so charming a man, seemed always a check upon his children's spirits" (156). When he quits his daughter and her guest during their tour of the Abbey grounds, "Catherine was shocked to find how much her spirits were relieved by the separation" (179).

The internal recognition of simple dislike is (though always a hard task for Catherine where associations of personal attachment militate against it) reasonable and proper. But Catherine does not stop here. She very soon, and on the slightest of evidence, classifies the General as a "dreadfully cruel" husband (181), and shortly afterwards as a murderer, with "the air and attitude of a Montoni!" (187). Inconsistencies now appear within the very defects of the heroine's vision, for, while secretly shuddering at the General as a murderer, she takes his words on common subjects at their face value (205, 211). Not until she

realises the scepticism of Henry and Eleanor does the truth dawn on Catherine; "why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while, was most unaccountable! How were people, at that rate, to be understood?" (211) This very discrepancy between excess of suspicion on the one hand, and naiveté on the other, shows how incompatible are the fancies of a "raised, restless, and frightened imagination" (51) with the problems of discrimination posed by everyday life.

Catherine's absurd fantasy about the General undoubtedly constitutes her greatest error of judgment, and this error is finally attended by her greatest access of perspicacity. But the person whom it is most important that Catherine should learn to evaluate with justice is Henry Tilney. Tilney, however, is so much more volatile and complex than any of the other characters the heroine learns to penetrate, and has such an advantage over her in superior wit and knowledge of the world, that Catherine is always a step behind him. It is true that she begins to gain insight into his character from an early stage in their relationship. Listening to Henry discussing muslins with Mrs. Allen, "Catherine feared . . . that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others" (29). Increasing familiarity, however, coupled with an increasing fondness, has a tendency to dim perceptiveness in Catherine, so that from this point onwards her knowledge of Henry is

hampered by the force of her predilection in his favour. Typical passages are "it was no effort to Catherine to believe that Henry Tilney could never be wrong. His manner might sometimes surprize, but his meaning must always be just" (114), and "it being at any time a much simpler operation to Catherine to doubt her own judgment than Henry's, she was very soon obliged to give him credit for being right" (211). Henry's actual rightness or wrongness in such cases is incidental; what counts is the extent of Catherine's belief in him.

The clearest and (for her) most valuable insight into Henry's character is gained as a result of his guidance of her own thoughts and feelings - guidance which, as she accepts its validity, must convince her of his superior worth. General Tilney and Isabella Thorpe have negative parts to play in the development of Catherine's vision; it is Henry, a mentor-figure as well as a lover, who functions most positively as an agent of perception in Northanger Abbey. Catherine quickly submits her aesthetic judgment to his; walking with Henry and Eleanor in the environs of Bath, "she soon began to see beauty in every thing admired by him" (111); and when about to inspect the grounds to Northanger, Catherine feels that since Henry has gone to Woodston, "she should not know what was picturesque when she saw it" (177). She readily admits Henry's jurisdiction on moral as well as aesthetic questions. When the Isabella-James-Captain Tilney

triangle comes under discussion, Henry directs Catherine's thoughts so that she must discriminate and evaluate in a manner novel to her. The first such discussion forces Catherine to disallow that bête noire of her judgment, the bias of affection:

> "Is it my brother's attentions to Miss Thorpe, or Miss Thorpe's admission of them, that gives the pain?"
> "Is not it the same thing?"
> "I think Mr. Morland would acknowledge a difference. No man is offended by another man's admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can make it a torment."
> Catherine blushed for her friend. (151)

When the subject is next discussed, Henry helps Catherine to arrive at a rational appraisal of her own feelings on the loss of Isabella's friendship:

> "You feel, I suppose, that, in losing Isabella, you lose half yourself: you feel a void in your heart which nothing else can occupy. Society is becoming irksome; and as for the amusements in which you were wont to share at Bath, the very idea of them without her is abhorrent. You would not, for instance, now go to a ball for the world. You feel that you have no longer any friend to whom you can speak with unreserve; on whose regard you can place dependence; or whose counsel, in any difficulty, you could rely on. You feel all this?"
> "No," said Catherine, after a few moments' reflection, "I do not - ought I? To say the truth, though I am hurt and grieved, that I cannot still love her, that I am never to hear from her, perhaps never to see her again, I do not feel so very, very much afflicted as one would have thought."
> "You feel, as you always do, what is most to the credit of human nature. - Such feelings ought to be investigated, that they may know themselves." (207)

Henry does not attempt to impose his own opinions on his disciple in these conversations. He always says, in effect, what he says about Catherine's absurd suspicions of his father; "consult your own understanding, your own sense of

the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you" (197).

By the end of Northanger Abbey Catherine Morland's outlook on life has become geared to common sense rather than fantasy. Her feelings during her last night at Northanger contrast in origin with those excited on the night of her arrival; "how different now the source of her inquietude from what it had been then - how mournfully superior in reality and substance! Her anxiety had foundation in fact, her fears in probability" (227). But on the personal level Catherine's judgments are still naive, for she persists in estimating other people's conduct by what her own views and reactions would be. When General Tilney returns unexpectedly to Northanger, Eleanor and Catherine think it is the Captain who has arrived. Catherine composes herself to meet him as follows; "she trusted he would never speak of Miss Thorpe; and indeed, as he must by this time be ashamed of the part he had acted, there could be no danger of it" (222). On the morning of her enforced departure Catherine thinks it possible that the General may regret the affront he has given; "what so natural, as that anger should pass away and repentance succeed it?" (227) Even Henry is judged in this manner, for she imagines that he would not dare speak to the General about the abrupt termination of her visit (231); it takes Henry's personal explanation to enlighten her here.

Catherine learns to distinguish between appearance

and reality in principle, but she still has difficulty in judging individuals. The implication is that her vision and understanding of the world, now established on a reasonable basis, will continue to develop under the guidance of Henry.

Henry's function with regard to Catherine resembles Darcy's in relation to Elizabeth Bennet, although the hero of Northanger Abbey is more obviously necessary to the adjustment of the heroine's vision than is the hero of Pride and Prejudice. The parallel between the Henry-Catherine and Mr. Knightley-Emma relationships is even clearer, the differences arising mainly from the self-sufficiency which allows Emma to ignore, for much of the novel, her own need of a mentor.

Emma Woodhouse erroneously fancies herself both clever manager and astute observer, as she later sorrowfully realises; "with insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny" (E 412-413). The distinction between vision and judgment is more subtle in Emma's case than in that of Catherine Morland, or even that of Elizabeth Bennet. In Northanger Abbey Catherine's thoughts are presented, but her misinterpretations of reality are so patent that the difference between apparent and real is no less clear to the reader than Catherine's failure, during most of the novel, to discriminate adequately between the two. Elizabeth Bennet is much more the medium of observation in Pride and Prejudice than Catherine is in Northanger

Abbey,[7] but, although much of the action is filtered through Elizabeth's consciousness, the book is by no means limited to this kind of presentation. From an early point, too, clues about the probable inaccuracy of Elizabeth's vision are given, so that the reader is prepared to discover the disparity between actuality and appearance before it bursts on Elizabeth herself.

To some extent what is true of Elizabeth Bennet is also true of Emma Woodhouse, but Emma's consciousness, though not as fully the medium of observation in the novel as that of Strether, for example, is in Henry James' The Ambassadors, and though narrower in scope than his,[8] is so closely interwoven with the reader's perception of events that it is more difficult for the reader to differentiate between apparent and real in Emma than in either of the earlier novels with protagonist heroines.

At times Emma's errors of judgment are so glaring that the reader's response is quite different from hers. Emma's plan of improving Harriet, for instance, seems to her to be actuated by the most superior motives:

> 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. (23-24)

The emphasis here is very much more on the part Emma is to play than on the benefit Harriet is to receive, and the complacency that informs the plan is underlined by the repetition

of Emma's sentiments; "in every respect as she saw more of [Harriet], she approved her, and was confirmed in all her kind designs" (26). The recurrence of the word "kind" in this context is a signal that Emma's judgment is unreliable, for it is obvious to the reader that what to Emma seems kind is really patronising.

Emma has, on the other hand, good reason to be in the dark about one of the major undercurrents in the novel, the Jane Fairfax-Frank Churchill engagement, of which even the reader must be kept in ignorance until the plot has reached an advanced stage. In this sphere, perception for the reader comes through the medium of Mr. Knightley, not Emma, and only one definite clue is given by Frank Churchill himself in Emma's presence. When Emma discusses with him her suspicions about Mr. Dixon and Jane Fairfax, Frank's agreement is so expressed that its elaborate irony would strike anyone less engrossed by the creations of her own fancy than the heroine. She builds much on the near-accident in which Mr. Dixon saved Jane Fairfax from falling overboard:

> "You observed nothing of course, for it seems to be a new idea to you. - If I had been there, I think I should have made some discoveries."
>
> "I dare say you would; but I, simple I, saw nothing but the fact, that Miss Fairfax was nearly dashed from the vessel and that Mr. Dixon caught her. . . . I do not mean to say, however, that you might not have made discoveries." (218)

Frank Churchill's subsequent remarks are still more pointed:

> "Your reasonings [about the pianoforté] carry my judgment along with them entirely. At first, while I supposed you satisfied that Col. Campbell was the giver, I saw it only as

paternal kindness, and thought it the most natural thing in the world. But when you mentioned Mrs. Dixon, I felt how much more probable that it should be the tribute of warm female friendship. And now I can see it in no other light than as an offering of love."

There was no occasion to press the matter farther. The conviction seemed real; he looked as if he felt it. (219)

With the last sentence the reader's viewpoint must diverge sharply from Emma's, as Emma's does from the author's. But even this incident, while it shows that Frank Churchill's judgment does not coincide with Emma's to the extent she imagines, does not hint at his predilection for Jane Fairfax. A clue to this is given when Emma's suspicions about Mr. Dixon are aroused by the fact that he preferred Jane Fairfax's playing to Miss Campbell's:

"Miss Fairfax . . . must have felt the improper and dangerous distinction."

"As to that - I do not - "

"Oh! do not imagine that I expect an account of Miss Fairfax's sensations from you, or from any body else . . . But if she continued to play whenever she was asked by Mr. Dixon, one may guess what one chuses."

"There appeared such a perfectly good understanding among them all - " he began rather quickly. (202)

Even Emma, however, may be forgiven for failing to notice such minute nuances of behaviour, for it is not until a second or subsequent reading of the novel, when the reader has prior knowledge of the secret, that he begins to remark the tiny signs of Frank's duplicity. In a case where Emma's own blindness is partly justified, the difficulty of assessing the real state of affairs is compounded for the reader.

The importance of attaining accurate vision is attested in Emma by the high incidence of metaphors to do

with the eyes and of terms describing visual activity. As a rule such terminology is either applied directly to Emma herself or applied to others through the medium of her consciousness, and this focuses attention on the heroine's vision to a far greater degree than is the case in Northanger Abbey or even Pride and Prejudice. Emma is continually using eye metaphors to put her meaning across. "If I had set my heart on Mr. Elton's marrying Harriet, it would have been very kind to open my eyes," she says to Mr. Knightley (66) - and the complication of metaphor here reflects her embarrassment and evasiveness. Eye metaphors can also indicate Emma's very real care for the way she appears to others; and when discussing marriage with Harriet she declares "never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's" (84).

The importance of blindness in Emma's figurative language corresponds to that of vision, although its connotations vary for her. She wishes to avoid what she considers the blindness of warm emotion (86), but subconsciously resents the fact that her brother-in-law is not blind to her faults (93). Emma resents him equally, however, for thinking her "blind and ignorant, and in want of counsel" on the subject of Mr. Elton (112). She would like Mr. Elton to ignore distinctions of rank in Harriet's favour; but his blindness to the social distinctions above him is offensive

to Emma because she is insulted by its consequences. Metaphors of vision and blindness, indeed, combine to express the force of Emma's indignation; Mr. Elton has "the arrogance to raise his eyes to her" (135) because he is "blind to what rose above" him (136). Mr. Woodhouse's failure to suspect the possibility of romance between Emma and Frank Churchill, on the other hand, is blessed as "favouring blindness" (193). The fact that her attitude to blindness varies according to circumstance is itself an indication of the vagaries of Emma's vision. It is not until much later, when she realises her own error and folly, that Emma is able to use the term without personal bias and give it a rational application to her own conduct; "what blindness, what madness, had led her on!" she thinks, when Harriet's and her own feelings for Mr. Knightley burst on her (408), and variants of the term "blindness" figure largely in her subsequent reflections (415, 416, 426, 427). The most ironic comment on Emma's blindness is given through some of the heroine's earlier thoughts about Harriet; "I would not change you for the clearest-headed, longest-sighted, best-judging female breathing" (269). The whole of Emma's manipulation of her friend's vision and judgment is, in fact, fraught with irony, and Harriet herself unwittingly adds to this effect when she praises Emma as a person "who can see into everybody's heart" (404).

When Emma considers the physical appearance of either

Jane Fairfax or Harriet Smith, she is particularly struck by the eyes. Harriet's "soft blue eyes" excite her admiration (24), and this softness, which accords with her friend's general character, is referred to on other occasions (23, 72, 76). Even Jane Fairfax, the object of Emma's secret envy, cannot fail to impress the heroine on this score; "her eyes, a deep grey, with dark eye-lashes and eye-brows, had never been denied their praise" (167). Emma's own eye (described by Mrs. Weston as "the true hazle eye - and so brilliant!" [39]) is remarkable both for energy and expressiveness. These qualities are strikingly brought into play on the occasion of the ball at the Crown, a scene of visual activity even more intense than that which takes place at the balls in Pride and Prejudice. Frank Churchill, the first person she meets, seems to have been on the watch; and "though he did not say much, his eyes declared that he meant to have a delightful evening" (319). Mr. Weston's eyes are as expressive as his son's, for he "looked his most perfect approbation" of Frank's engagement to dance with Emma (325). Mrs. Elton is chiefly engaged in relating other people's observations to herself - "everybody's eyes are so much upon me" - but still she notices that there are few pearls in the room besides her own (324).

All this is observed both by Emma and the author, but when dancing begins the narration is more particularly allied to Emma's personal viewpoint. It is she who notes Mr. Knightley standing among the lookers-on, and the interest she

takes in his appearance and behaviour at this point is a prelude to her subsequent recognition of the love she feels for him. A little eye-dialogue starts up between the two; "whenever [Emma] caught his eye, she forced him to smile," and Mr. Knightley, in his turn, "seemed often observing her" (326). This interchange is temporarily interrupted by another matter for observation on Emma's part:

> The two last dances before supper were begun, and Harriet had no partner; - the only young lady sitting down; - and so equal had been hitherto the number of dancers, that how there could be any one disengaged was the wonder! - But Emma's wonder lessened soon afterwards, on seeing Mr. Elton sauntering about. He would not ask Harriet to dance if it were possible to be avoided: she was sure he would not - and she was expecting him every moment to escape into the card-room.
>
> Escape, however, was not his plan. He came to the part of the room where the sitters-by were collected, spoke to some, and walked about in front of them, as if to show his liberty, and his resolution of maintaining it. He did not omit being sometimes directly before Miss Smith, or speaking to those who were close to her. - Emma saw it. She was not yet dancing; she was working her way up from the bottom, and had therefore leisure to look around, and by only turning her head a little she saw it all. When she was half way up the set, the whole group were exactly behind her, and she would no longer allow her eyes to watch; but Mr. Elton was so near, that she heard every syllable of a dialogue which just then took place between him and Mrs. Weston [in the course of which he positively refuses to dance with Harriet]; and she perceived that his wife, who was standing immediately above her, was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances. (326-327)

"Smiles of high glee passed between him and his wife" in their moment of triumph - but Emma, who perceives all this with indignation, is soon appeased; "in another moment a happier sight caught her; - Mr. Knightley leading Harriet to the set!" The whole incident sparks off another and more satisfactory visual interchange between Mr. Knightley and Emma;

"her countenance said much, as soon as she could catch his eye again" (328), and after supper, "her eyes invited him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked." Mr. Knightley "looked with smiling penetration" at Emma in surmising the reason for the Eltons' rudeness (330), and Emma, moving like him from the sphere of vision to that of judgment, confesses herself to have been entirely mistaken about Mr. Elton's character and feelings (330-331). In return for this Mr. Knightley acknowledges an improved opinion of Harriet, and even mitigates his previously harsh judgment of Emma's matrimonial projects for the vicar (331) - concessions which, although highly pleasing to Emma at the time, cause her many a pang later.

The scene at the Crown contains the germ of a crucial misunderstanding between Emma and Harriet. Until the final éclaircissement (405-411) Emma imagines that she not only understands but directs her friend's ideas. When she detects the burgeoning of a new attachment in Harriet (341) she relates its cause to the wrong incident and therefore the wrong person; Frank Churchill's rescue of Harriet from the gypsies seems to her to have effected what is actually triggered off by Mr. Knightley's kindness and courtesy at the Crown. The two friends are thus, without knowing it, at cross-purposes, and Emma's encouragement of Harriet paves the way for her own subsequent anguish.

Mr. Knightley himself performs a function unique in

the Jane Austen canon. It is necessary to the plot of Emma that Mr. Knightley (and through him the reader) should suspect the attraction between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax while Emma is yet in total ignorance of it, and therefore Jane Austen enters Mr. Knightley's consciousness more than she does that of any other man in her novels. There is of necessity such a sharp cleavage between Emma's vision and the reader's here that, while the narrative centres on Mr. Knightley's consciousness, Emma is temporarily pushed away from the foreground of the novel. Mr. Knightley's suspicions are aroused by visual means and communicated in visual terms:

> While so many were devoting [Frank Churchill] to Emma, and Emma herself making him over to Harriet, Mr. Knightley began to suspect him of some inclination to trifle with Jane Fairfax. He could not understand it; but there were symptoms of intelligence between them - he thought so at least - symptoms of admiration on his side, which, having once observed, he could not persuade himself to think entirely void of meaning, however he might wish to escape any of Emma's errors of imagination. She was not present when the suspicion first arose. He was dining with the Randalls' family, and Jane, at the Eltons'; and he had seen a look, more than a single look, at Miss Fairfax, which, from the admirer of Miss Woodhouse, seemed somewhat out of place. (343-344)

The contrast between Mr. Knightley's vision and Emma's is clear, even explicit. Unlike Emma, Mr. Knightley is receptive to ideas which do not originate with himself; unlike her, too, he is not blinded by his own inclinations. His vision is further unlike Emma's in being closely allied with his judgment, and his judgment sharpens his vision so that he goes on to observe even more closely:

When he was again in their company, he could not help remembering what he had seen; nor could he avoid observations which . . . brought him yet stronger suspicion of there being a something of private liking, of private understanding even, between Frank Churchill and Jane. (344)

The conversation about Mr. Perry's setting up his carriage (344-345), pregnant with implications for Mr. Knightley, is unattended to or unheard by Emma, who goes into the house ahead of the rest to prepare her father for his unexpected visitors. At this point, therefore, Mr. Knightley is the sole medium of observation, and he is as active in this role as possible. He suspects some secret intelligence on the subject between Frank and Jane:

From Frank Churchill's face, where he thought he saw confusion suppressed or laughed away, he had involuntarily turned to [Jane's]; but she was . . . behind, and too busy with her shawl. . . . . Mr. Knightley suspected in Frank Churchill the determination of catching her eye - he seemed watching her intently - in vain, however, if it were so - Jane passed between them into the hall, and looked at neither. (346-347)

The game which is played after tea affords him a better vantage point; "Frank was next to Emma, Jane opposite to them - and Mr. Knightley so placed as to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation" (347). As the game progresses, both feeling and judgment are evoked by his observations:

Disingenuousness and double-dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part.

With great indignation did he continue to observe him; with great alarm and distrust, to observe also his two blinded companions. (348)

What Mr. Knightley really objects to is Frank Churchill's deliberate and unfair manipulation of the judgment of others

through distorting their vision. Mr. Knightley tries to warn Emma, but she laughs off his hints, makes her own mistakes, and learns only in retrospect how right he has been; his role on this occasion is to elucidate the reader's vision rather than the heroine's. Here Mr. Knightley's function in the novel differs greatly from that of Henry Tilney in Northanger Abbey or Mr. Darcy in Pride and Prejudice. All three are mentors, but while Mr. Knightley has a less tractable heroine to deal with than Catherine Morland, and a far less alienated one than Elizabeth Bennet is for much of Pride and Prejudice, Emma is less attentive to the hero's counsels than Catherine, more obstinate in pursuing her own way in spite of the hero's views than Elizabeth. Emma is pleased by Mr. Knightley's (or anybody's) praise, but not until he criticises her rudeness to Miss Bates does she begin to accept his authority as a mentor - and this incident affords an opening partly because his advice does not run counter to any imaginative scheme on Emma's part.

Catherine Morland fabricates reality, Elizabeth Bennet misunderstands it, and Emma Woodhouse tries to manipulate it to suit her own design. Her perceptions, though naturally acute, are so confused by her wishes that she is continually liable to misinterpret what she sees, as she does, for example, throughout Mr. Elton's supposed courtship of Harriet. The episode is full of ambiguities which appear straightforward to the heroine; "the speech [about the charade] was more to Emma than to Harriet, which Emma could

understand. There was deep consciousness about him, and he found it easier to meet her eye than her friend's" (71). Her own comment on this incident reveals Emma's pertinacity in wrong judgment; "do not be overpowered by such a little tribute of admiration. If he had been anxious for secrecy, he would not have left the paper while I was by; but he rather pushed it towards me than towards you" (77-78). Disillusionment does not enlighten Emma as to the falsity of the principle which has directed her in this matter; she thinks only that the principle has been misapplied, and perhaps carried too far.

Emma's failure to divine the root cause of her mistake leads to further impairment of her vision, and during the whole of the Frank Churchill-Harriet episode (which is more completely the creation of Emma's brain than even the business of Mr. Elton) she becomes so absorbed in her wishes and plans that she cannot see at all. But for the fact that "it was [Frank's] object to blind all about him" (427), Emma would become ridiculous in this part of the novel. She is so far from realising this herself, however, that if anything she exercises her vision more than before. On Frank Churchill's return from Enscombe she still believes him to be in love with her, although to a lesser degree than formerly:

> They met with the utmost friendliness. There could be no doubt of his great pleasure in seeing her. But she had an almost instant doubt of his caring for her as he had done, of his feeling the same tenderness in the same degree. She

watched him well. It was a clear thing he was less in love than he had been. Absence, with the conviction probably of her indifference, had produced this very natural and very desirable effect. (316)

Once more we feel the justice of Mr. Knightley's earlier comment: "Better be without sense, than misapply it as you do" (64).

T. S. Eliot speaks of the "dissociation of sensibility."[9] In Emma, more than in any other of Jane Austen's novels, dissociation of judgment is in question - the dissociation of judgment from vision. Vocabulary to do with observation (as distinct from metaphors of seeing and descriptions of visual activity) and vocabulary that bears on judgment are, therefore, prominent features of the novel's language. After Mr. Knightley's warning that Mr. Elton is most unlikely to marry Harriet, Emma takes comfort in the thought that Mr. Knightley has not "the skill of such an observer on such a question as herself" (67). She protests to Mr. Elton that she has been "in the daily habit of observing" his attentions to Harriet (130), and Frank's complimentary references to Emma in a letter to Mrs. Weston lead her to "discern the effect of her influence and acknowledge the greatest compliment perhaps of all conveyed" (266). Correct observation in the novel belongs to Mr. Knightley, and it is through her desire to assess his feelings for Harriet that Emma finally learns to apply her own powers; "she should see them henceforward with the closest observance; and wretchedly as she had hitherto misunderstood even those she was watching,

she did not know how to admit that she could be blinded here" (416).

Emma's judgment is badly in need of correction, and its workings are therefore continually emphasised. When she first plans a marriage between Mr. Elton and Harriet, "she feared it was what every body else must think of and predict" (35). With unconscious irony she later remarks to Harriet, "hitherto I fancy you and I are the only people to whom his looks and manners have explained themselves" (56). Attacked by Mr. Knightley, she tells him he is "not just to Harriet's claims. They would be estimated very differently by others as well as myself" (62), and Mr. Knightley's indignant disagreement cannot deprive her of the feeling that she is "a better judge of such a point of female right and refinement than he could be" (65). Not satisfied with claiming good judgment for herself, she attributes this quality to Mr. Elton in a measure convenient for her plans; "more than a reasonable, becoming degree of prudence, she was very sure did not belong" to him (68). With unconscious irony she deliberates on Mr. John Knightley's supposed mistake in cautioning her about Mr. Elton, "amusing herself in the consideration of the blunders which often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstances, of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into" (112). An echo of this passage is later to be found in her admission to Mr. Knightley that her mistake, with regard to Frank Churchill at least, has been a common one, "yet it may not be

the more excusable in one who sets up as I do for Understanding" (427).

A motif that runs through the novel is that of taking up an idea and running away with it. After her disappointment in Mr. Elton, Emma feels that "she had taken up the idea . . . and made every thing bend to it" (134), and later she reproaches Mrs. Weston with doing the same thing in regard to Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax (226). Even Miss Bates echoes the motif; "one takes up a notion, and runs away with it," she remarks when Mr. Dixon is under discussion (176). This, indeed, is what Emma habitually does, but from time to time clearer insights are forced or dawn upon her. Reflecting on Mr. Elton's unpardonable conceit,

> Emma was obliged in common honesty to stop and admit that her own behaviour to him had been so complaisant and obliging, so full of courtesy and attention, as (supposing her real motive unperceived) might warrant a man of ordinary observation and delicacy, like Mr. Elton, in fancying himself a very decided favourite. If she had so misinterpreted his feelings, she had little right to wonder that he, with self-interest to blind him, should have mistaken her's. (136)

But Emma does not pursue this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion. She certainly resolves against overt matchmaking in future (though it transpires that she is not above tacit encouragement of a preference) but she does not regret or even realise her worst error, that of preventing the match between Harriet and Robert Martin.

With regard to Frank Churchill, even Emma's fancy brings her nearer enlightenment:

> Though thinking of him so much, and, as she sat drawing or

working, forming a thousand amusing schemes for the progress and close of their attachment, fancying interesting dialogues, and inventing elegant letters; the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she refused him. . . . When she became sensible of this, it struck her that she could not be very much in love. (264)

But, if her fancy leads her aright in this instance, it far more frequently leads her astray. After Frank Churchill rescues Harriet from the gypsies, Emma speculates as follows on the possibility of a romance between them:

Could a linguist, could a grammarian, could even a mathematician have seen what she did, have witnessed their appearance together, and heard their history of it, without feeling that circumstances had been at work to make them peculiarly interesting to each other? - How much more must an imaginist, like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight! - especially with such a ground-work of anticipation as her mind had already made. (335)

It is probable that the final words belong to the author's consciousness rather than to Emma's.

Just as vision in Emma is allied with fancy, so her judgment is allied with her emotions. The discovery of her true feelings for Mr. Knightley precipitates a rational appraisal of her behaviour, and at this point in the novel metaphors of vision come into their own; "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 inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct!" Emma's review of the past calls forth metaphors of blindness in abundance. "What blindness, what madness, had led her on!" (408) she thinks immediately, and when her thoughts turn to Mr. Knightley, "she could not flatter herself with any idea of

blindness in his attachment to her" (415). Proposing to observe Mr. Knightley and Harriet together, "she did not know how to admit that she could be blinded here" (416), though to Mr. Knightley himself she confesses her previous "blindness to what was going on" between Frank Churchill and Jane (426).

Her first endeavour, on being shocked by Harriet's hopes, is "to understand, thoroughly understand her own heart" (412), and her efforts in this direction are sustained even in her anguish:

> The only source whence any thing like consolation or composure could be drawn, was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that, however inferior in spirit and gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone. (423)

Emma's growth in self-knowledge, in fact, makes so sudden, so radical a change in her that Jane Austen describes it as a "developement of self" (409).

Observer Heroines

In two of the novels with observer heroines Jane Austen incorporates a protagonist figure who, while not central like the heroine, is of importance comparable even to hers. Marianne Dashwood, in Sense and Sensibility, and Mary Crawford, in Mansfield Park, are not of the stature of Elinor Dashwood or Fanny Price, but they have more significant parts to play in their respective novels than Jane Bennet in Pride and Prejudice or Harriet Smith in Emma. Jane Austen seems

almost fearful that an observer heroine, standing alone, may be inadequate for her artistic purpose, and it is not until Persuasion that the necessity of a secondary female figure to help focus the heroine's vision is superseded by the creation of a hero worthy of even more intimate and sustained observation. In Sense and Sensibility and Mansfield Park, therefore, the quality and even the incidence of metaphors of vision are substantially the same as they are in Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice and Emma, but they are more closely associated with the secondary protagonist figure, and with minor characters, than with the heroine herself, though the heroine's vision is often the medium through which they are rendered.

This is particularly so in Sense and Sensibility, where Marianne Dashwood is almost as major a figure as Elinor, the heroine (the very antithesis of the title, in which she appears to counterpoise her sister, indicates her prominence). Eyes are, here as in the novels already discussed, the most remarkable and active organs. Lucy wipes her eyes as she complains of the difficulties of her engagement (SS 133) and "her little sharp eyes" are "full of meaning" as she tries to hurt Elinor (146). Her triumph in being the prime object of Mrs. Ferrars' civility is "declared by Lucy's eyes" (238), and she subsequently looks her tenderness at Edward and watches narrowly as Elinor talks to him (241). Colonel Brandon is much less active in the story than

Lucy, but his very inaction, coupled with emotional involvement, forces him to observe. He fixes his eyes on Marianne (55, 236), gives her "looks of anxious solicitude" when she begins to develop the illness that almost takes her life (305), and, when she is on the road to recovery, regards her with a "melancholy eye and varying complexion" (340). Even Mrs. Ferrars engages in visual activity, principally to communicate unfavourable sentiments; she "eyed [Elinor] with the spirited determination of disliking her at all events" (232).

But it is the expressive Marianne whose eyes are most frequently observed. Willoughby can only maintain his opinion against her until "the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be displayed" (47); a pointed compliment leads Marianne to fix her "fine eyes" on him "so expressively . . . as plainly denoted how well she understood him" (73). Offended by Mrs. Jennings' raillery on the subject of beaux, she "turned her eyes towards Elinor to see how she bore these attacks" (34); and much later, hampered by Lucy's unwelcome presence, she looks at Edward and Elinor "with the most speaking tenderness" (242). Willoughby, like Marianne, communicates through expression, but his expressions do not, like hers, necessarily reveal his true feelings. It is significant that, vital and vivacious as he seems, evidence of visual activity on Willoughby's part is rare. When it occurs it is generally sifted through the unreliable consciousness of Marianne, who imagines him, for example, supporting a convincing explanation of his unstable

behaviour with "the eloquence of his eyes" (202).

"Your eyes have been reproaching [Marianne and Willoughby] every day for incautiousness," Mrs. Dashwood says to Elinor at one point (79). Elinor's eyes too, then, can be expressive. Yet, as she is the medium of vision, we are far more conscious of her sight than of her eyes; and even her love of drawing and painting attests her preference for the role of onlooker, as well as her capacity for sustained and clear observation. The party at which Elinor and Marianne eventually meet Willoughby in London is the scene of looks and expressions which tell much about all three:

> Elinor perceived Willoughby, standing within a few yards of them, in earnest conversation with a very fashionable looking young woman. She soon caught his eye, and he immediately bowed, but without attempting to speak to her, or to approach Marianne, though he could not but see her; and then continued his discourse with the same lady. Elinor turned involuntarily to Marianne, to see whether it could be unobserved by her. At that moment she first perceived him, and her whole countenance glowing with sudden delight, she would have moved towards him instantly, had not her sister caught hold of her.
>
> "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "he is there - he is there - Oh! why does he not look at me? why cannot I speak to him?"
>
> "Pray, pray be composed," cried Elinor, "and do not betray what you feel to every body present. Perhaps he has not observed you yet."
>
> This however was more than she could believe herself; and to be composed at such a moment was not only beyond the reach of Marianne, it was beyond her wish. She sat in an agony of impatience, which affected every feature.
>
> At last he turned round again, and regarded them both; she started up, and pronouncing his name in a tone of affection, held out her hand to him. He approached, and addressing himself rather to Elinor than Marianne, as if wishing to avoid her eye, and determined not to observe her attitude, inquired in a hurried manner after Mrs. Dashwood, and asked how long they had been in town. Elinor was robbed of all presence of mind by such an address, and was unable to say a word. But the feelings of her sister were instantly expressed. Her face was crimsoned over, and she exclaimed in a voice of the greatest emotion, "Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning

of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?" (176)

The differences between the three in quality of vision, and in response to what is seen, are unmistakable in this passage. Elinor, as usual, keeps her feelings to herself, and observes - not as a passive onlooker, but as a watchful, interested party who is by no means inactive in the scene. She tries to compose Marianne and even physically restrains her, while all the time judging the duplicity of Willoughby's conduct; she is sure that he has seen her sister, though he behaves as if he has not. Typically, Elinor tries to persuade her sister to hide her feelings, and to this end says what she does not believe herself. Marianne, on the contrary, expresses her emotions at once, not only with her face but with her whole body, and she does not attempt to separate private feeling from public reaction. Willoughby differs from both sisters; he sees as clearly as either, but his reaction is not spontaneous like Marianne's, nor is it controlled in the same manner as Elinor's. His restraint is all exerted on the side of insincerity, for he pretends to see less than he really does so that his reaction may be modified accordingly. He later describes this occasion from his own viewpoint:

"What a sweet figure I cut! - what an evening of agony it was! - Marianne, beautiful as an angel on one side, calling me Willoughby in such a tone! - Oh! God! - holding out her hand to me, asking me for an explanation with those bewitching eyes fixed in such speaking solicitude on my face! - and Sophia, jealous as the devil on the other hand, looking all that was - Well, it does not signify; it is over now. - Such an evening! - I ran away from you all as soon as I could; but not before I had seen Marianne's sweet face as white as death. - <u>That</u> was the last, last look I ever had of her; -

the last manner in which she appeared to me. It was a horrid sight!"

This passage, while it proves that Willoughby is not lacking in perception, proves too that his perceptions are of a strange order. He is concerned with appearance rather than reality, with roles rather than with ethics, and first and foremost his mind turns to the part he himself has played; "what a sweet figure I cut!" Visual impressions of a superficial nature make the strongest impact on Willoughby's imagination, as the concluding words of the passage reveal; "when I thought of her to-day as really dying, it was a kind of comfort to me to imagine that I knew exactly how she would appear to those, who saw her last in this world. She was before me, constantly before me, as I travelled, in the same look and hue" (327). There is a fanciful, egotistical cast to all his observations, for Willoughby is unable to divorce vision from considerations of self.

The watchfulness Elinor displays on the evening of the fateful meeting with Willoughby suits with the character of her observation at all times. The clarity of her vision is due partly to her sensitiveness to the feelings of others; Colonel Brandon's real regard for Marianne "first became perceptible to Elinor, when it ceased to be noticed" by those who had fancied an immediate prepossession in her sister's favour (49). For his personal character, too, "she beheld in him an object of interest" (50). If Elinor is wrong in seeing "an intimacy so decided, a meaning so direct, as marked a perfect agreement" between Marianne and Willoughby (60), she

is at least basing her judgment on what is reasonable and probable. But, clear though Elinor's vision is, it has other, more personal characteristics. It is informed by feeling - Colonel Brandon's apparently hopeless affection for Marianne, for example, is seen by Elinor with concern (49, 169) - and it is active, deliberate and therefore responsible. It affects Elinor's behaviour as well as her emotions, whether she is "wishing to prevent Mrs. Jennings from seeing her sister's thoughts as clearly as she did" (167) or striving to gain a clearer insight into something herself. Marianne, although intelligent, never observes anything which has not previously engaged her interest, and therefore Colonel Brandon's "fond attachment" does not "burst on her" until "long after it was observable to everybody else" (378). Her vision is narrowed, not by want of capacity for perception, but by the bent of her personality. But Elinor's interest in others is so great that even Mr. Palmer's motives are deemed worthy of scrutiny (112), and when her sister's welfare is in question her efforts, of course, are all the greater:

> Elinor was resolved not only upon gaining every new light as to [Willoughby's] character which her own observation or the intelligence of others could give her, but likewise upon watching his behaviour to her sister with such zealous attention, as to ascertain what he was and what he meant, before many meetings had taken place.

And her plan does not stop with the intention to judge. She has determined on the pattern of future conduct which her judgment will necessitate:

> Should the result of her observations be unfavourable, she was determined at all events to open the eyes of her sister;

> should it be otherwise, her exertions would be of a different nature - she must then learn to avoid every selfish comparison, and banish every regret which might lessen her satisfaction in the happiness of Marianne. (159).

Elinor is, in fact, a responsible observer, and it is this responsibility, even more than the feeling that informs her perceptions, which engages her actively in the novel; just as it is Fanny Price's lack of effective responsibility through much of Mansfield Park, much more than the general correctness of her vision, which makes it hard to give her character substance above and beyond the role of observer.

We are told at the beginning of Sense and Sensibility that Elinor has strong feelings (6). Nevertheless, in the early chapters Marianne stands, broadly speaking, for sensibility,[10] and Elinor for sense. But as the book progresses, Marianne gains in sense and Elinor, to a lesser extent, in the sensibility which has always seemed peculiarly the portion of her sister. Elinor's change is the more surprising of the two, for the antithesis of the title and the events of the opening chapters imply that sensibility is condemned. But Jane Austen is quite capable of undermining the complacency which may result from too facile an interpretation of the text, and in the third volume in particular sensibility is even more distinctly characteristic of Elinor's vision than a responsible outlook, and becomes the prime means of engaging her in the action of the novel. Here Jane Austen turns the tables on the heroine as well as the reader, for Elinor is, by now, overconfident in the

impartiality and accuracy of her vision. Her reflections on Colonel Brandon's attitude to her sister at Cleveland show the author's irony at work:

> His open pleasure in meeting her after an absence of only ten days, his readiness to converse with her, and his deference for her opinion, might very well justify Mrs. Jennings's persuasion of his attachment, and would have been enough, perhaps, had not Elinor still, as from the first, believed Marianne his real favourite, to make her suspect it herself. But as it was, such a notion had scarcely ever entered her head, except by Mrs. Jennings's suggestion; and she could not help believing herself the nicest observer of the two; - she watched his eyes, while Mrs. Jennings thought only of his behaviour; - and while his looks of anxious solicitude on Marianne's feeling, in her head and throat, the beginning of an heavy cold, because unexpressed by words, entirely escaped the latter lady's observation; - she could discover in them the quick feelings, and needless alarm of a lover. (305)

Marianne's illness turns out, of course, to be far from a matter for "needless alarm," but Jane Austen's irony is all the more skilful for being appended to a passage which shows, more clearly than usual, the discrimination of Elinor's vision and the accuracy of her judgment.

In the final chapters the fusion of sense and sensibility in Elinor becomes apparent. Marianne's illness and Willoughby's explanation combine to disturb her balanced, though deep emotional response to what she sees; with regard to her sister, "her apprehensions once raised, paid by their excess for all her former security," and she "fancied that all relief might soon be in vain, that every thing had been delayed too long, and pictured to herself her suffering mother arriving too late to see this darling child, or to see her rational" (312). One cannot say that Elinor's fears are

unreasonable, but the emotional terms in which they are expressed indicate that they are heightened by her imagination. In Willoughby's case rational judgment still controls her emotions, but not without a struggle:

> She felt that his influence over her mind was heightened by circumstances which ought not in reason to have weight; by that person of uncommon attraction, that open, affectionate, and lively manner which it was no merit to possess; and by that still ardent love for Marianne, which it was not even innocent to indulge. But she felt that it was so, long, long before she could feel his influence less. (33)

By the time she hears, as she supposes, of Edward's marriage to Lucy, sensibility is so strong within her that, under the shock, its claims can hardly be reconciled with those of sense; "she saw them in an instant in their parsonage-house; saw in Lucy, the active, contriving manager. . . . In Edward - she knew not what she saw, nor what she wished to see; - happy or unhappy, - nothing pleased her; she turned away her head from every sketch of him" (357-358).

At the end of Sense and Sensibility, however, the antithesis of the title has been reconciled in Elinor, more satisfactorily, perhaps, than in her sister, and Elinor has not only the responsibility that goes with sense (the mainspring of her character for most of the book), but the poignant emotional involvement that comes from the infusion of strong feeling with sensibility. Although basically an observer, Elinor takes on more and more of the characteristics of a protagonist heroine as the novel advances.

To some extent Fanny Price, in Mansfield Park, also

takes on the characteristics of a protagonist heroine. But observer heroines undergo much less internal change than protagonist heroines, for self-knowledge and good judgment are prerequisites of their roles. The later the novel, the less change is discernible in the observer heroine. Elinor Dashwood alters more than Fanny Price, whose influence and standing undergo more transformation than her personality; but even Fanny increases her knowledge of herself and others in the course of Mansfield Park. Only Anne Elliot, the heroine of Persuasion, has at the outset already attained full maturity, so that her personal growth cannot be any part of the novel's theme. She has the clearest and most comprehensive vision of all Jane Austen's heroines, and she is most fully the medium of observation in the novel of which she is the central figure.

Anne Elliot's reactions, emotional and moral, to what she sees, constitute the novel's sphere of action, and vision is therefore extremely important in Persuasion. Eyes, and metaphors to do with eyes, are once again prominent in the novel's language, though this terminology does not centre quite so much on the heroine herself as it would do were she the active, protagonist type, with a vision in need of adjustment. Uppercross Cottage is "quite as likely to catch the traveller's eye" as the Great House (P 36); Mary's eyes brighten when Anne offers to stay at home with her sick little boy (57); Mr. Clay prepares his client to receive applications to rent Kellynch by flattering him with the

idea that "Sir Walter Elliot has eyes upon him which it may be very difficult to elude" (17), and Sir Walter, in his turn, "must ever look with an evil eye on any one intending to inhabit that house" (24). "Modest Sir Walter" observes that "he had never walked any where arm in arm with Colonel Wallis, (who was a fine military figure, though sandy-haired) without observing that every woman's eye was upon him; every woman's eye was sure to be upon Colonel Wallis" (142). Mr. Elliot's eyes brighten (143) as he recognises in his cousin Anne the person whose face "caught his eye" at Lyme (104). Anne, driving along a Bath street in her friend's carriage, is perfectly conscious "of Lady Russell's eyes being turned exactly in the direction for [Captain Wentworth], of her being in short intently observing him" (179). Mrs. Clay bursts into insincere comments on the behaviour of Mr. Elliot, "not daring, however, to turn her eyes towards Anne"; and when the subject gets out of hand, she escapes by "lifting up her hands and eyes, and sinking all the rest of her astonishment in a convenient silence" (213).

The character most attentively observed in the course of Persuasion is, of course, Captain Wentworth, who was formerly engaged to the heroine. As Anne is particularly interested in any feelings he may have to express, it is natural that she should take note of his eyes. She is not present when he discusses the question of marriage with his sister, "his bright, proud eye" speaking "the happy conviction that he was nice" in his choice (62); but Mrs. Croft's observations

are borne out by what is remarked on several occasions by Anne. The brightness of his eyes is often mentioned. "A certain glance of his bright eye" informs Anne, but no-one else, that he was at some pains to get rid of Dick Musgrove (67). Mr. Elliot's admiration of Anne at Lyme causes Captain Wentworth to give her "a glance of brightness" (104), and when he wants Anne to read the letter he has written to her at the White Hart, the Captain looks at her "with eyes of glowing entreaty" (236). These descriptions of his eyes all add to the impression of vitality which is so understandably attractive to the gentle Anne. The expressiveness of Captain Wentworth's eyes is also important, indicating as it does "the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character" which Anne "prized . . . beyond all others" (161). Anne's penetration is, of course, assisted by her prior knowledge of his nature, but there can be no doubt of the accuracy of her impressions at the White Hart, when Mr. Elliot is under discussion; "Captain Wentworth was all attention, looking and listening with his whole soul" (224).

Anne Elliot's observations and judgment must be accepted if the course of events in Persuasion is to be understood, and her vision is not, therefore, something to be evaluated by the reader like that of Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse. It follows that less emphasis is placed on vocabulary to do with judgment in Persuasion than in novels with protagonist heroines. Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that Anne's personality is not defined through her

judgment. It is, at least partly, so defined, but because the definition is positive it is less complex and therefore less central to the presentation of the heroine than is the case with, say, Emma Woodhouse. The type of hero-heroine relationship that exists in Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice and Emma, where the judgment of the hero is superior to that of the heroine, is totally reversed in Persuasion, where it is Anne's judgment that gives stability of viewpoint to the story. Deeply mortified by Captain Wentworth's opinion of her deterioration, Anne nevertheless "could take no revenge, for he was not altered, or not for the worse. She had already acknowledged it to herself, and she could not think differently, let him think of her as he would" (61). Absorbed as she is in her watchful affection for the Captain, she yet has attention to spare for others around her. A sense of filial respect makes her wish her knowledge of her father less (34), but those who resist observation arouse her suspicions. While Mrs. Clay's real purpose is not hard to fathom, Mr. Elliot, with a more subtle motivation and greater plausibility, poses a more difficult problem. The very fact that there is a difficulty goes against him in Anne's estimation:

> Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character. That he was a sensible man, an agreeable man, - that he talked well, professed good opinions, seemed to judge properly and as a man of principle, - this was all clear enough. He certainly knew what was right, nor could she fix on any one article of moral duty evidently transgressed; but yet she would have been afraid to answer for his conduct. She distrusted the past, if not the present. . . . Who could answer for the true

> sentiments of a clever, cautious man, grown old enough to appreciate a fair character? How could it ever be ascertained that his mind was truly cleansed? (160-161)

Unlike Lady Russell, Anne does not confuse manner with character. Indeed, she has "a quickness of perception . . . , a nicety in the discernment of character, a natural penetration, . . . which no experience in others can equal" (249). But Anne's judgment is not intuitive, although she is influenced by personal preferences - for "the frank, the open-hearted, the eager," for example (161). The characteristic processes of her mind are indicated by the verbs used in a sentence on her reflections about Mrs. Smith; "she watched - observed - reflected - and finally determined." In the same way the nouns and adjectives in the lines that follow indicate the principles on which her judgment is based; "a submissive spirit might be patient, a strong understanding would supply resolution" (154).

The most distinctive and personal characteristic of Anne Elliot's vision is not, however, its justice but its feeling. The fact that she can be captivated (161) or even, temporarily, bewitched (160), does not detract from the accuracy of Anne's vision, but these and other emotions give a sympathy for her viewpoint which it is hard to feel for that of Fanny Price in Mansfield Park.

The greatest intensity of feeling is conveyed by the visual dialogue which develops between Anne and Captain Wentworth as the novel goes on. A metaphor of vision is used to give a nostalgic review of their previous relationship - "it

would be difficult to say which had seen highest perfection in the other" (26) - but their present, more complex relationship must be worked out through direct observation. At first this observation is rather negative in character, for Anne and Captain Wentworth try to avoid seeing each other (55, 59), and when they are in the same room for the first time it is just a case of "her eye half met Captain Wentworth's" (59). Memories of the year in which they met and parted must arise, but they have less poignant meaning for the Captain than for Anne, who cannot even look at him when he speaks of the year six:

> Though his voice did not falter, and though she had no reason to suppose his eye wandering towards her while he spoke, Anne felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself. There must be the same immediate association of thought, though she was very far from conceiving it to be of equal pain. (63)

At first, the observation is more on Anne's side than the Captain's, but gradually she becomes sensible that Captain Wentworth is beginning to pay her more attention; "once she felt that he was looking at herself - observing her altered features, perhaps, trying to trace in them the ruins of the face which had once charmed him" (72). Still, however, it is chiefly Anne's feeling which imbues the growing interchange of looks between the two, for Captain Wentworth has only "some natural sensation of curiosity" about her (61), while she has discovered that "to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing" (60). It is not until the visit to Lyme that the Captain's interest in Anne is

rekindled by a stranger's admiration; "he gave her a momentary glance, - a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you, - and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again'" (104). The crisis of Louisa's fall makes Frederick Wentworth turn to Anne, this time in need:

> Both [Charles and Captain Wentworth] seemed to look to her for directions.
>
> "Anne, Anne," cried Charles, "what is to be done next? What, in heaven's name, is to be done next?"
>
> Captain Wentworth's eyes were also turned towards her. (111)

From this point onwards there seems an equal, though not necessarily a similar consciousness between them. The warmth of Captain Wentworth's appeal to Anne to stay and nurse Louisa - an appeal which is almost a tribute - fills them both with emotion; "'you will stay, I am sure; you will stay and nurse her;' cried he, turning to her and speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past. - She coloured deeply; and he recollected himself, and moved away" (114). This tentative approach to "restoring the past" is the real beginning of the rapprochement between the two, for all the emotions the Captain now shows with regard to Anne are capable of a favourable interpretation. When they next meet, in Bath,

> he was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her, than she had ever observed before; he looked quite red. For the first time, since their renewed acquaintance, she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two. She had the advantage of him, in the preparation of the last few moments. (175)

The meeting at the concert brings equal, but more pleasurable

embarrassment. While Captain Wentworth is talking of the Musgroves' parental kindness in promoting Louisa's marriage, "a sudden recollection seemed to occur, and to give him some taste of that emotion which was reddening Anne's cheeks and fixing her eyes on the ground" (182). But embarrassment, for Anne, is transformed into happiness on the reflection that his words, his manner, his "half averted eyes, and more than half expressive glance;" indicate that his heart is returning to her (185). There is a good deal of visual manoeuvring still to be gone through, however:

> Anne's eyes . . . distinguished Captain Wentworth, standing among a cluster of men at a little distance. As her eyes fell on him, his seemed to be withdrawn from her. It had that appearance. It seemed as if she had been one moment too late; and as long as she dared observe, he did not look again: but the performance was re-commencing, and she was forced to seem to restore her attention to the orchestra, and look straight forward.
>
> When she could give another glance, he had moved away. He could not have come nearer to her if he would; she was so surrounded and shut in: but she would rather have caught his eye. (188)

The minute description of this near-exchange of glances conveys the impression of great emotional intensity, an impression which is sustained and even heightened during their next meeting. Now, Anne is very much aware of the "enquiring eyes" of Captain Wentworth, turned to her when Mr. Elliot is under discussion (224), and, as she indirectly disclaims any eagerness to be with her cousin, she dares "not even to try to observe" the effect of her words (225).

The visual dialogue between Anne and Captain Wentworth reaches its climax in the culminating scene at the

White Hart. The subject of long engagements is under discussion, and Anne

> felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill all over her, and at the same moment that her eyes instinctively glanced towards the distant table, Captain Wentworth's pen ceased to move, his head was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look - one quick, conscious look at her. (231)

A conversation between Anne and Captain Harville on love in men and women succeeds, and when Captain Wentworth, at its close, leaves the room with his friend, Anne has not time for more than bewilderment at his going without a look before he returns to draw out a letter and, "with eyes of glowing entreaty fixed on her," to signal to Anne that she should read it (236). The verb used to describe Anne's response forms a strong contrast with her usual mild ways; "her eyes devoured" the letter (237). After this, only one more exchange of glances, when they meet on the way to Camden-place, is necessary. "As if irresolute whether to join [Anne and Charles] or to pass on, [Captain Wentworth] said nothing - only looked. Anne could command herself enough to receive that look, and not repulsively" (239-240). The way is now clear for their reconciliation.

This emotional language of the eyes, although most moving and most intense in Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, is by no means confined to Persuasion. It occurs to some extent in all the novels, but more particularly where a vital relationship of some kind is established between the hero and heroine. Edmund remains unobservant until the very end of

Mansfield Park, and Edward Ferrars plays little direct part in Sense and Sensibility; but Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, in Pride and Prejudice, are constantly communicating with each other through their eyes, and such communication is found to a certain degree in Northanger Abbey and even in Emma. Visual language is not, furthermore, restricted to the eye-dialogues of the hero and heroine. Characters often reveal things about themselves with their eyes (to other characters or to the reader) which they would never reveal in their speech, and through this dimension of vision they gain the intimacy and intensity which Charlotte Brontë and others have missed in Jane Austen's writings.

Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice and Emma - the novels with protagonist heroines - show a progressive increase in complexity both of material and treatment. The development in novels with observer heroines follows a different pattern, for in these there is a gradual synthesis of feeling, vision and judgment in the central figure. Sense and Sensibility, for example, begins with an antithesis between feeling and judgment, and though there is a progressive reconciliation between the two in the heroine as well as in her sister, the antithetical effect is never entirely overcome. In Mansfield Park there is a much greater synthesis of feeling and judgment in the character of the heroine, but, pervasive and powerful though her vision may be, the scope of the novel is too large to be covered completely by the

comprehension of Fanny Price. In Persuasion the sphere of action is narrowed so that it centres on what directly affects the central figure, and in Anne Elliot there is the first full synthesis of vision and feeling.

I have spoken several times of the artistic development in the novels, and it should be made clear that, as used in this chapter, the term implies the exploration of new themes and techniques, and does not necessarily indicate improvement. It is impossible not to feel that Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility are more limited in scope and technique than the other novels, but it would be unsafe to say that Mansfield Park is inferior to Persuasion or Pride and Prejudice to Emma, though the writing of Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park may well have been necessary to the evolution of Emma and Persuasion. It is certainly the case that Jane Austen's approach differs significantly in each of her last four novels, and that one cannot assume progression (or decline) on the basis of place in the sequence.

My approach in this chapter may have suggested that the development in Jane Austen's works is chiefly between alternate novels, and this of course would be misleading. The development is continuous, but the relationship between what Rubinstein would describe as the pairs of novels - Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion[11] - is chiefly one of adjustment; continuity of development is more obvious between alternate novels, that is, novels as divided into

the two categories I have previously defined.

All the novels are facets of Jane Austen's artistic criticism of life. In each the quality of vision and judgment is different, and the subject matter on which they are brought to bear varies too, though the basic issues of identity, personal relationships and fulfilment through marriage remain the same. But for the purposes of this study, the novels of most interest are Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park. I have decided to consider these books in particular detail for a variety of reasons. Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price are fairly representative of the categories of protagonist and observer heroine to which they respectively belong, and therefore a comparison of the uses of vision and judgment as means of character definition in these novels will be appropriate. The nature and scope of vision, as well as its application to the heroines, are different in the two novels, and this furnishes a further basis of comparison between them. Also different are the very principles of judgment in Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, for the questions at issue are quite distinct; they are moral in both novels, but in Pride and Prejudice they are primarily personal, in Mansfield Park primarily ethical and religious. The two novels have, furthermore, a special relationship within the Austen canon. The final revisions of Pride and Prejudice immediately preceded, and may, to some extent, have been concurrent with, the composition of Mansfield Park,[12] so that points of comparison between these novels are particularly

interesting as regards Jane Austen's development in theme and technique.[13] But, if the two books are almost contemporary, they nevertheless represent totally different phases of Jane Austen's artistic experience. Pride and Prejudice has maturity of form, style and viewpoint, but it really embodies the fullest development of earlier thematic and technical trends. Mansfield Park, though far less unified in treatment than Pride and Prejudice, represents a new and ambitious departure; and in this novel Jane Austen gains a mastery of vision which is not the less fascinating for its diversity of application.

CHAPTER II

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Elizabeth Bennet is the quintessential protagonist heroine,[1] deeply engaged in the action of the book yet with powers of vision and judgment which, though continually exercised, are badly in need of modification. She is, furthermore, surrounded by other characters who are also occupied in seeing and being seen. Much of the idiom of Pride and Prejudice reflects the importance attaching to visual impressions (it is interesting to note that First Impressions was the original title of the novel). Such impressions have a significant bearing on the way characters judge each other, and, even on the purely physical level, they are an important factor. The faces of the all but dowerless Bennet sisters, for example, must necessarily be their fortunes, and no-one is more fully aware of this than Mrs. Bennet; when Jane becomes engaged to Mr. Bingley, she exclaims "I knew you could not be so beautiful for nothing!" (PP 348) The beauty of Jane and Elizabeth is frequently the subject of discussion among other characters, and we are told a good deal about the appearance of Lydia and Mary. The sisters are, in their turn, very conscious of the appearance of others; Kitty and Lydia, like Mrs. Bennet before them,

are highly susceptible to the appeal of a dashing uniform, and even Elizabeth remarks jokingly to Jane that a young man ought to be handsome if he possibly can (14).

At the Meryton assembly there is a great play on the degree of handsomeness of both ladies and gentlemen, and the degree of pleasure that their looks excite. The adjectives "agreeable" and "disagreeable," the verbs "to admire" and "to be struck" (key terms throughout the novel), figure largely in this chapter. They concentrate the sense of surface impressions given and received, and, with their connotations of superficial response, set the scene for the interplay of mistaken and gradually corrected ideas which constitutes the novel's main sphere of action. All the characters are to some extent defined through various aspects of the metaphor of vision, which at the Meryton ball is applied first in terms of the community and then in terms of some of the individuals who compose it. To begin with, the community appears as an anonymous mass; "Mr. Darcy . . . drew the attention of the room" at his entry. The reaction to him, phrased in terms of his external attributes, is then split between ladies and gentlemen; "the gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley" (10). But when the tide turns against him, disapproval soon narrows down from the general reaction, "every body hoped that he would never come there again" (11), to the individual indignation of Mrs. Bennet

resulting from Darcy's slight of her daughter. The interchange of unfavourable impressions between Darcy and Elizabeth is effected without any overt communication between the two, and the development of their relationship is shown by the gradual, but by no means smooth or even synthesis of corrected perception with communication.

Eye imagery pervades Pride and Prejudice. At an early stage in her vital and stormy relationship with Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet notes that "he has a very satirical eye," and adds "if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him" (24). Charlotte Lucas warns her friend "not to be a simpleton and allow her fancy for Wickham to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man of ten times his consequence" (90), and Charlotte herself chooses her morally degrading, though materially respectable lot in marriage "with her eyes open" (216). Mr. Bingley's large fortune is worthless in the eyes of Kitty and Lydia when compared with an ensign's uniform (29), and Lydia sees "with the creative eye of fancy" (232) the streets of Brighton covered with officers. Sir William Lucas' clumsy gallantry to Elizabeth at Netherfield takes the form of complimenting "the bewitching converse of that young lady, whose bright eyes are . . . upbraiding me" (92). Elizabeth herself, after Lydia's elopement, bewails the fact that "the necessity of opening her eyes to his character" (285) never occurred to her.

The eyes themselves are important. It is significant

that Mr. Darcy's first unflattering impressions of Elizabeth (having "detected with a critical eye" several faults in her face and figure) are modified by the discovery that although "she had hardly a good feature in her face . . . it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" (23). From this time onwards Elizabeth's eyes become a bone of contention between Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley, and their exchanges on the subject help to pinpoint the strengthening of Darcy's regard for Elizabeth and the deterioration of his never very satisfactory relationship with Miss Bingley herself.

The eyes are the most active organs in a novel which is full of the idea of energetic movement. When the gentlemen come into the drawing-room after dinner at Netherfield we read that "Miss Bingley's eyes were instantly turned towards Darcy" (54) - and indeed, Miss Bingley, in her flattery, jealousy and suspicion, is one of the most watchful characters in the book. In the early chapters she comments frequently on what Darcy does. She even, temporarily, manages to involve him in her actions: "Miss Bingley succeeded . . . in the real object of her civility [to Elizabeth]; Mr. Darcy looked up" (56). Darcy himself, on another occasion, "was beginning to determine not to fix his eyes on Elizabeth, when they were suddenly arrested by the sight of [Wickham]" (73).

The Netherfield ball (and balls are always suitable occasions for watching and being watched) is one at which

eyes are particularly active. Elizabeth tries, "by many significant looks and silent entreaties," to prevent Mary's engaging in a display for which she is not fitted. She fixes her eyes on her sister "with most painful sensations," and "watched her progress through the several stanzas with an impatience which was very ill rewarded at their close." Mary begins again, and Elizabeth has to assess the effect of the catastrophe on others. "She looked at Jane, to see how she bore it; but Jane was very composedly talking to Bingley. She looked at his two sisters . . . and at Darcy. . . . She looked at her father to entreat his interference" (100). The unfavourable notice excited by certain members of the Bennet family on this occasion has far-reaching consequences; but equally important is the fact that several of those present (notably Elizabeth, Sir William Lucas and Mr. Darcy) observe the growing attachment between Bingley and Jane.

At the inn at Lambton, Elizabeth finds "it was not often that she could turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy himself; but, whenever she did catch a glimpse, she saw an expression of general complaisance . . ." (263). When the whole party is collected together at Pemberley, she realises that "there was scarcely an eye which did not watch [Darcy's] behaviour when he first came into the room" (269). Later, at Longbourn, "Elizabeth looked expressively at Lydia" (316) to try to tone down the indelicacy of her conversation.

As relationships between the principal characters grow more intense, eyes become at once keener and more

expressive. On Bingley's seating himself next to her sister at Longbourn,

> Elizabeth, with a triumphant sensation, looked towards his friend. He bore it with noble indifference, and she would have imagined that Bingley had received his sanction to be happy, had she not seen his eyes likewise turned towards Mr. Darcy, with an expression of half-laughing alarm. (340)

Later, tried almost beyond endurance by the untimely restrictions of her role as coffee-pourer, Elizabeth "followed [Darcy] with her eyes" (341); and perhaps no phrase denotes more expressively the love she feels. The fact that eyes, in the last chapters of the novel, are often turned towards Darcy, symbolises a growing recognition of his strength, superiority and importance.

The act of looking plays a considerable part in the development of mutual awareness and reciprocal feeling between certain characters, and the increasing complexity of this aspect of the metaphor of vision parallels the growing intricacy of personal relationships within the book. From characters watching other characters (Mr. Darcy regarding Elizabeth with disdain at the Meryton assembly, for example) the metaphor rapidly evolves to include the more complex pattern of the watcher watched; "occupied in observing Mr. Bingley's attentions to her sister, Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend" (23). Later the idea becomes more complicated as the very nature of the watcher's watching is observed. Charlotte, hoping that Darcy admires Elizabeth, sets herself to find it out:

> She watched him whenever they were at Rosings, and whenever he came to Hunsford; but without much success. He certainly looked at her friend a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but she often doubted whether there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind. (181)

Charlotte is not the only one to be interested in the state of other people's affections; Mrs. Gardiner "narrowly observed" Elizabeth and Wickham (142); Miss Bingley watches Darcy jealously to ascertain the nature of his feelings for Elizabeth; and both the Gardiners (joined, finally, by the whole of the party at Pemberley) observe Darcy and Elizabeth.

Some aspects of character are delineated in terms of the capacity to see, and of these intelligence (a dominant quality in the hero and heroine, and one whose manifestations give the novel much of its sparkle) is the most notable. Jane Austen means Darcy to be regarded as Elizabeth's superior, particularly in the sphere of the understanding and its application to everyday life. This is shown by Elizabeth's own appraisal of what they could be to each other; "by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance" (312). Mr. Bennet's assessment of what his daughter needs in a marriage partner, given in a moment of unusual seriousness, underlines the importance of superiority in the hero; "I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed

your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior" (376). Darcy's superiority is often overlooked because he is less attractive than Elizabeth, and has a much smaller share of the limelight; but the intention to make him excel the heroine in understanding and strength of character is affirmed and in some degree carried out by the steady progress of his perceptions from error to accuracy. He makes mistakes, but wishful thinking plays little part in them; and he is much more receptive to corrective impulses than is Elizabeth, who, like Emma Woodhouse, abuses her gifts. She mistakes her lively imaginative powers for perceptiveness, and therefore does not subject them to the control of reason; once she has taken up an idea (which she does too quickly) she feels no need to question its validity further. Where Elizabeth is prejudiced she can even decide in advance what she is going to see; before the ball at Netherfield, for example, she anticipates "seeing a confirmation of every thing in Mr. Darcy's looks and behaviour" (86). Darcy's reappraisal of Elizabeth, on the other hand, begins in the early chapters of the novel, and, his "mortifying" discovery of her physical charms once made (23), the way is open for an increasing admiration of her personality. He soon suspects his "danger" (52); but Elizabeth so little understands his feelings that she can only account for his frequent observation of herself by supposing that "there was a something about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present" (51).

In characters of less integrity and intelligence vision and judgment are affected by expediency, and Mrs. Bennet's views on Darcy's physical appearance before and after his engagement to her daughter constitute a glaring example of this. The perceptions of minor characters, indeed, are skilfully used to suggest their limitations. The too favourable impression that might otherwise be given by Charlotte Collins' watchfulness on behalf of Elizabeth is modified by subsequent insight into her true motives:

> In her kind schemes for Elizabeth, she sometimes planned her marrying Colonel Fitzwilliam. He was beyond comparison the pleasantest man; he certainly admired her, and his situation in life was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Mr. Darcy had considerable patronage in the church, and his cousin could have none at all. (181).

Her own possible advantage is given equal weight with that of her friend, so that Charlotte's worst fault - her disproportionate stress on prudential considerations - is always kept in view.

Mrs. Bennet's unreasonableness, her total incapacity to learn from the chastening experiences of the past, are forcefully brought home towards the end of Pride and Prejudice by her giving way to "all the happy schemes, which the good humour, and common politeness of Bingley, in half an hour's visit, had revived" (339). Later her impressions are recorded in a vulgar idiom reminiscent of her earlier remark that Jane "would have got Mr. Bingley, if she could" (140); "she had seen enough of Bingley's behaviour to Jane, to be convinced that she would get him at last" (343). Mr. Bennet,

as an intelligent man, has a far greater responsiblity in this sphere than his wife, and his reactions to what he perceives indicate, therefore, a fault of a more serious nature than Mrs. Bennet's; a moral laxity. Although he sees all the absurdity and impropriety of his family's behaviour, he evades his duty to interfere and contents himself with "enjoying the scene" (103). The very word "scene" (which occurs frequently in the novel) suggests, in this context, the role of spectator which he has no right to assume here.

To some extent character in Pride and Prejudice is defined by the way different people see the same things. On its simplest level this appears at the Meryton assembly. Bingley

> had never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life; every body had been most kind and attentive to him, there had been no formality, no stiffness, he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful.

Darcy, however,

> had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Miss Bennet he acknowledged to be pretty, but she smiled too much.

Their differing reactions amply justify Jane Austen's comment on the impression each is likely to give to strangers; "Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence" (16).

First impressions of the same individual can also reveal telling discrepancies. Elizabeth's mistaken view of

(16); "happy did [Elizabeth] think it for Bingley and her sister that some of the exhibition had escaped his notice, and that his feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which he must have witnessed" (102).

Failure to see, whether wilful or otherwise, is as much a means of character definition as vision itself. Mary Bennet's wilful vanity - and her obstinacy in persevering in it - show clearly in her refusal to take Elizabeth's unspoken hints at Netherfield (100), and Lydia, as a general principle, "never heard nor saw any thing of which she chose to be insensible" (316). "The world" (that anonymous but ubiquitous participant in all Jane Austen's novels) is, says Wickham, "blinded by [Darcy's] fortune and consequence, or frightened by his high and imposing manners, and sees him only as he chuses to be seen" (78). This is a fault to which "the world" is particularly prone, but although it shows signs of falling into this error at the Meryton assembly, it ends by making the opposite mistake - for "the world" does not love to be scorned.

Among the minor characters there are those who, although they cannot see very clearly themselves, are quite able to provide a display for the eyes of others. Mary Bennet has pretensions to intelligence, but in fact she sees very little; the best she can do is to be seen. So, at the Netherfield ball, "an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to her" (100); and, while she deliberately ignores

Elizabeth's disapproval, she is blissfully unconscious of the unfavourable impression she is producing on the company as a whole. Other characters, such as Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins, are not only unaware of the ridiculous figures they cut but are quite oblivious of the fact that they are making any display at all, and it is Elizabeth who suffers the shame of their misconduct; "to Elizabeth it appeared, that had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit, or finer success" (101-102). But there was no agreement; all their impropriety springs from their various levels of insensitivity or foolishness.

There is a clear distinction between failures of vision in the principal characters and those in minor, adversely regarded characters such as Mrs. Bennet. The major characters have always the possibility of change; minor figures have a potential limited to error.[3] Intermediate characters such as Jane and Mr. Bingley, however, are effectively distinguished from either of the two groups indicated above. Jane and Bingley show little variation and no development, but their perceptions are always of an order high enough to raise them above the restricted sphere of minor figures. Jane's undiscriminating sweetness, too, saves her from Elizabeth's radical errors - "I never thought Mr. Darcy so deficient in the <u>appearance</u> of [goodness] as you used to do," she says (225) - it also robs her mind of the keenness which

characterises that of her younger sister. In adversity Elizabeth can be guided by Jane's account of the facts, but she can attach no weight to the opinions her sister forms on the basis of those facts.[4]

Failures of vision in the principal characters are more complex. Elizabeth's mistaken judgment of Darcy and Wickham exposes her to irony; she is irritated by Bingley's "blind partiality" to his friend (90), and this shows up her own far greater blindness. A similar pattern of irony is discernible when Elizabeth asks Mr. Darcy if he never allows himself to be blinded by prejudice (93).

The clue to Elizabeth's mistakes of perception and judgment is given in her reaction to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; "with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, and with a judgment too unassailed by any attention to herself, she was very little disposed to approve them" (15). At first sight this seems like undiluted praise of Elizabeth, but the "with a judgment . . . unassailed by any attention to herself" contains the hint of a fault. When Elizabeth's judgment <u>is</u> assailed by attention to herself, it becomes distorted. She lacks the impersonal vision which, however clouded at first (and it must be remembered that he has just gone through the distress of his sister's near-elopement) goes with a stronger intelligence like Darcy's. Elizabeth's failure to submit her perceptions to the discipline of reason is to some extent excused, or at

least explained, by her family circumstances. Her home is in many respects uncongenial, and her sense of the situation has sharpened her vision until she has the clearest possible view of each member of the family. Elizabeth is conscious of this herself, and thinks that her perception of everyone else will be as accurate. She forgets, however, that a lifetime of intimate observation leaves an intelligent person little possibility of mistake; and her disillusionment about Charlotte ought to warn her that even in the case of a friend of long standing her judgment is not always reliable.

If Elizabeth makes many mistakes, she acknowledges her want of perception with great candour when conviction of her error is forced upon her. After reading Darcy's letter, "of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd"; and, as she comments wryly to herself, "had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind." Her clarity of vision now extends not only to the error, but the motives behind it, giving evidence of her sound moral sense; "pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned" (208). Elizabeth's personal pride is, in fact, as great as Darcy's, though it is of a different order; and, of the two, her pride is potentially the more harmful to its possessor, for it distorts her perception of people and things far more, and more subtly than does

Darcy's.

Elizabeth is shocked by Darcy's letter, with its revelation of the truth about Wickham. But long before she receives the letter she has been given opportunities to modify her views of both men. Her disappointment in Bingley and in Charlotte makes her realise "the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense," but, characteristically, she not only expresses her disillusionment in exaggerated terms - speaking of the "inconsistency of all human characters" (135) - but she fails to follow up her new viewpoint by testing the appearance of merit or sense in Wickham, or its converse (as regards merit at least) in Darcy. Her bitter outburst to Jane reveals three shortcomings linked with perception in Elizabeth; her tendency to make extreme, almost random judgments; her failure to apply the results of her thinking to everyday experience, and her failure to carry her train of thought through to its logical conclusion and question the appearance of merit as well as that of culpability.

This first step towards true awareness does not, in spite of the formulation in general terms which is prompted by Elizabeth's bitterness, do more than shake her confidence in her judgment on certain specific issues. The comparatively slight effect produced by two severe shocks following close upon one another demonstrates the heroine's tenacity in clinging to her prejudices. A third shock, coming soon after the other two, gives Elizabeth an opportunity to consider her

opinions again. Wickham's defection in favour of Miss King and her ten thousand pounds is viewed by Elizabeth with a touch of the cynicism which appears to derive from her previous disillusionment. She is "watchful enough to see it all" (149), but she "did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence" (150). Jane Austen steps into the story herself to make it clear that she is "less clear-sighted perhaps in his case than in Charlotte's" (149-150), for she wishes it to be quite plain that Elizabeth's original mistakes of judgment are very hard to eradicate (and, of course, she wishes gradually to dissociate the reader from Elizabeth's point of view). Typically, the heroine's final impression of Wickham on this occasion is couched in visual terms; "she parted from him convinced, that whether married or single, he must always be her model of the amiable and pleasing" (152). Elizabeth's enduring conviction of his amiability is strengthened at this point by a circumstance which has nothing to do with Wickham's character at all; the strong contrast she feels between Wickham's powers of entertainment and the dullness of Sir William and Maria Lucas, her travelling companions on the following day. Once the heroine has taken up an idea, as she supposes on a reasonable basis, it may be reinforced quite irrationally.

But although Elizabeth has not yet changed her opinion of Wickham or Darcy, her faith in her own judgment has now been undermined sufficiently for her views to alter under the pressure of an adequate stimulus. Elizabeth's

favourable estimate of Wickham is first modified by the kind of impression which has often led her into error before - the superficial impression derived from her early acquaintance with Colonel Fitzwilliam:

> Elizabeth was reminded by her own satisfaction in being with him, as well as by his evident admiration of her, of her former favourite George Wickham; and though, in comparing them, she saw there was less captivating softness in Colonel Fitzwilliam's manners, she believed he might have the best informed mind. (180).

There are several points of significance in this paragraph. Elizabeth's continuing responsiveness to admiration is evident, and the term "favourite," implying a partial judgment, shows her tendency to bias. She has, however, reached the point of comparison, opening at least the possibility of unprejudiced views. The word "former," qualifying "favourite," not only testifies to her command of herself but inspires hope that a subconscious rejection of Wickham may already have begun; and her recognition of the greater importance of a superior mind than of charming manners indicates that Elizabeth is beginning to give a more rational perspective to what she perceives.

The conversation between Elizabeth and Colonel Fitzwilliam about Darcy's match-breaking, coming just before Darcy's proposal and heightening all her resentment against him on Jane's account, serves two purposes. It leads to a stormy proposal scene, ensuring that Darcy's letter loses none of its sharpness of impact through the preparation for the truth that has already been given. Besides this,

Elizabeth's misgivings about her mother and, to a certain extent, her father (187), condition her to admit the justice of Darcy's objections on the score of family. The groundwork for the éclaircissement of Darcy's letter has been detailed and consistent, but as Elizabeth is, for the most part, the centre of consciousness in the novel, and the reader's sympathies are largely engaged with her, the reader is almost as unconscious of such preparation as Elizabeth herself. Darcy's missive seems a sudden disclosure of the truth, and the significance of the events leading up to his letter (events which, properly appraised, could have given valuable clues about the true state of affairs) is felt chiefly in retrospect. Jane Austen has continued to show Elizabeth's errors, and her realisation of them, in so natural a manner as not to lose the impact of the novel's turning point.

The burst of realisation and self-knowledge which follows Elizabeth's reperusal of the letter is largely formulated in terms of vision. Metaphors of vision are particularly frequent, and now seem blatantly superficial, when she attempts to cling to her former opinion of Wickham; "his countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue"; "she could see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address" (206). When the emphasis shifts from memory to judgment, metaphors of vision are used to describe the revolution in Elizabeth's ideas. "She was <u>now</u> struck with the impropriety of such

communications to a stranger. . . . She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct. . . . How differently did every thing now appear in which he was concerned!" (207) Elizabeth's change of opinion comes, in fact, as a result of memories reviewed from a different perspective (an excellent memory is an important aspect of the heroine's intelligence in Pride and Prejudice, and a great convenience for the author in this crucial scene).

Jane Austen is careful to safeguard the consistency of Elizabeth's character during this chapter, where there is grave danger of giving a change of personality as well as a change of mind. The heroine's just perceptions come to her in the same way as her mistaken ones have done; the picture is simply reversed. "[Wickham's] attentions to Miss King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary. . . . His behaviour to herself could now have had no tolerable motive" (207). Elizabeth's tendency to bias is still evident as the inrush of logic struggles to impose itself on her habitual angle of vision; "for a few moments, she flattered herself that her wishes did not err" (205); "but no such recollection befriended her" (206).[5] Her intellect is such that, when squarely faced with the truth, she must accept it; but she assimilates the truth in her own characteristic way. The operative word in this chapter of realisation seems to be "struck" (207, 209), for it indicates, what is borne out by the rest of the novel, that Elizabeth has an

intuitive and not a logical intelligence.

I hope to show later that Elizabeth's potential for just judgment and rational feeling is expanded through the agency of Darcy; but her full potential for error, in feeling as well as perception, is revealed through her relationship with Wickham. The superficiality of Elizabeth's feelings for him is carefully indicated. Her first impressions of Wickham are merged in those of her flirtatious and frivolous sisters, Kitty and Lydia; "the attention of every lady was soon caught by a young man, whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike appearance. . . . All were struck with the stranger's air, all wondered who he could be."[6] This, while it seems fairly innocent, could put Elizabeth on the same level of triviality as her younger sisters but for the fact that Jane (who, for all her faults of judgment, cannot be called trivial) is one of the group and is implicated in the general feeling. When the passage moves on to a more minute description of the stranger, the sentiments given first are presumably those of Lydia and Kitty; "the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming." Elizabeth is not, however, explicitly dissociated from this opinion, and the sentences immediately following the one just quoted show a gradual blend of the viewpoints of Kitty, Lydia and Elizabeth. "His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address."

Up to and including "a good figure," the sentence smacks more of the younger than the elder sisters, although it is quite consistent with the views of all. With the words "very pleasing address," however, the emphasis shifts; this trait undoubtedly appeals to Lydia and Kitty, and to Jane as well, but Elizabeth (as is borne out by the growth pattern of her friendship with Colonel Fitzwilliam) is the sister most responsive to conversational powers. When Wickham's "happy readiness of conversation" proves to be "perfectly correct and unassuming" (72), there can be no doubt that the author has moved away altogether from the judgments of Kitty and Lydia, who would value such niceties less than Elizabeth. Eventually Jane too is excluded. It is Elizabeth who sees that the meeting of Wickham and Darcy is full of embarrassment, and her dawning interest in Wickham is given added impetus by curiosity - a motive quite characteristic of her. Prejudiced as she already is against Darcy, her curiosity about the relationship of the two men is likely to work in Wickham's favour.

From the first the impression Wickham makes on Elizabeth is no less strong than vivid, and at their second meeting she feels that "she had neither been seeing him before, nor thinking of him since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration."[7] When he enters, Wickham is "the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned." The "almost" probably means Jane, who is also of the party; her presence allows Jane Austen to make a slightly ambiguous

statement which implicates the heroine in the flirtatiousness of the others without specifically labelling her as flirtatious. Since Wickham takes the initiative, Elizabeth's responsiveness to his attention can safely be shown in the words "Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself" (76). The balance of the two sentences hints at the absurdity of the situation and so suggests that Wickham may turn out to be less impressive than he at first appears; but Elizabeth is too much involved in what is going forward to see any of the absurdity she normally delights to observe. By the end of the evening her intelligence is completely subordinated to her fancy as far as Wickham is concerned; "whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went away with her head full of him" (84).[8]

Although we are told at the time of Wickham's defection that "her heart had been but slightly touched" (149), still it <u>was</u> touched, touched enough for Elizabeth not to want to rule out the possibility of marrying him. After only their third meeting she is pleased at having the opportunity to introduce him to her parents, and since she sets little store by her mother's opinion her wish that Wickham should meet <u>Mrs</u>. Bennet can only be interpreted as a possible preliminary to courtship. Mrs. Gardiner, a more or less detached observer, is made uneasy by the obvious preference the two show for each other; and although there is no reason to disbelieve Elizabeth's assertion that she is not in love

(144), she cannot guarantee that she will remain heartwhole. This is in itself suggestive in view of Darcy's later comment; "I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it . . . frankly and openly" (367). Even Kitty and Lydia, indeed, notice Wickham's "defection" from their sister (150).

Elizabeth's attachment to Wickham is meant to make her appear ill-judging, but not foolish; and the danger that she may appear shallow because she is attracted by him must be circumvented. She is certainly influenced by the appeal of a handsome face, by curiosity, flattered self-esteem, and her dislike of another man - none of which are noble motives, although some may be harmless. These motives, however, are offset by others that are more attractive or more worthy, although they do not in this case operate in Elizabeth's best interests. If she feels curiosity about the connection between Wickham and Darcy, this curiosity soon changes to concern and compassion for another's supposed wrongs; if she is unjust to Darcy and oblivious of the impropriety of her new friend, she is not afraid to take the side of the comparatively humble against the great and powerful. She may allow herself to be biased against someone on the score of character, but she does not share Miss Bingley's more debased prejudices on the grounds of rank only (94-95). Jane Austen can safely laugh at her heroine's susceptibility to personal charms when she shows her at the same time to be influenced

by a delicate, if misapplied sense of honour; "Elizabeth honoured [Wickham] for such feelings [as his motives for refusing to expose Darcy], and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them" (80). Elizabeth's misjudgment of Wickham is, furthermore, somewhat extenuated by the fact that those who should be more clear-sighted than she also misunderstand him. Her father is "partial" to Wickham, and even her aunt, the sensible Mrs. Gardiner who warns her of the imprudence of such an alliance, thinks that if the gentleman only had enough money her niece "could not do better" (144). The heroine's mistake is further palliated by the error of the community at large, summed up in a metaphor the extravagance of which reflects the exaggerated sentiments involved; "all Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man, who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light" (294).

However misguided she may appear, Elizabeth gains rather than loses sympathy through her ill-founded attachment. Before the ball at Netherfield the very superficiality of her feelings for Wickham assumes an attractive character; "she had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of his heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening" (89). Her femininity and light-heartedness are so appealing that they are sure to carry the day with the reader. It is to the credit of Elizabeth's magnanimity, moreover, that she is

pleased by Wickham's friendly farewell when she leaves for Hunsford (151-152). But when the shock of Darcy's letter has forced her to take a fresh look at Wickham's behaviour to herself and others, she sees that his renewed attentions, on her return to Longbourn, are an insult. In addition, she has now fathomed his essential monotony; "the very gentleness which had first delighted her" is now seen to be characterised by "an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary" (233). Wickham may therefore be said to act, in a sense, as a stimulus to the development of rationality in the heroine. But the lack of development in Wickham - for his words and attitude are substantially the same whether he is confiding in a sympathetic hearer, seeking to renew a flirtation, or talking to the sister of the woman he has seduced - makes him most effective as a static measure of the extent of Elizabeth's internal change.

Elizabeth's early reactions to Wickham illustrate the shifting grounds of her unaided attempts at logic. She honours him for refusing to expose Darcy out of respect for his father (80), yet she is associated by implication with the approval of totally opposite conduct that follows later; "to his other recommendations was now added that of general unreserve. The whole of what Elizabeth had already heard . . . was now openly acknowledged and publicly canvassed" (138). Elizabeth tacitly approves Wickham's resolution not to be driven away by Darcy (78), yet soon afterwards she "highly approved his forbearance" (115) in absenting

himself from the Netherfield ball. All this is borne in upon her when she reviews her relationship with Wickham in the light of Darcy's letter, and she perceives that she has not simply made an honest mistake, but has sought and been satisfied with error. She has trusted too much to the accuracy of her perceptions ("there was truth in his looks" [86]) and she has received unsubstantiated vituperation as "a very rational account" (84). Elizabeth has not simply misinterpreted the available evidence, but analysed it on the wrong principle. The clue to this is given in her warmest praise of Wickham - "he is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable man I ever saw" (144). The error here lies not in Elizabeth's estimate of her feelings but in their foundation. She is fonder of Wickham than of other men because he is the most agreeable she has met - that is, he is the handsomest, the best conversationalist and the most gallant to herself.

Although Elizabeth has always been interested in Darcy, he has no positive influence over her until she reads his letter. Her intuitive intelligence now has to grasp facts made plain by Darcy's agency, and, as Elizabeth's erroneous opinions have been formed partly on the basis of prejudice against him, it is characteristic that her impulse should now be to go to the other extreme. The very force of her language (thought or spoken) indicates this. Wickham's "eagerness to grasp" even Miss King's mediocre fortune is now "solely and hatefully mercenary" (207), and the terms in

which she speaks of her own conduct are still stronger; she has acted "despicably," been "wretchedly blind," and the discovery of her mistake is "humiliating" (208). But though excess of warmth persists in Elizabeth's reflections, her language, and consequently her thoughts, have entered a new phase. Her attempts to reason about the contents of Darcy's letter are expressed in very Darcy-like terms; she "weighed every circumstance with what she meant to be impartiality - deliberated on the probability of each statement" (205). True to her personal approach, Elizabeth puts herself, in a manner of speaking, in Darcy's place by reasoning about what she has read and experienced along the lines of his probable logic. This is how she makes the quick jump from bias to impartiality on reading Darcy's letter, for impartiality is the basic principle of Darcy's reasoning. Once the jump has been made, Elizabeth is able to determine not only Wickham's and Darcy's but her own methods and motives, until she arrives at the climax of the scene; "till this moment, I never knew myself" (208).

But it is not enough that Elizabeth's early illusions should be destroyed. She must continue to grow towards wisdom, and in order to do so she makes a subconscious attempt to imitate the processes of Darcy's superior understanding - an imitation which manifests itself in the phraseology of her reconsidered judgments. Darcy's continuing influence over Elizabeth is attested at subsequent points in

the novel. When she discusses the letter with Jane, her own style of reasoning and self-expression alternates with words more characteristic of Mr. Darcy. Though tinged with disillusionment, such lines as the following are typical of Elizabeth; "it is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually abusive without saying any thing just; but one cannot be always laughing at a man without now and then stumbling on something witty" (225-226). But Jane's near-reproof of Elizabeth's flippancy of manner, if not of meaning, almost immediately produces this logically structured observation; "the misfortune of speaking with bitterness, is a most natural consequence of the prejudices I had been encouraging" (226). Elizabeth's representation of the discredit which Lydia has brought, and is likely to bring on her family (231) reproduces the substance of Darcy's remarks on the impropriety of several of her relations (198);[9] and she finally comes to feel an affection for Darcy which, in being "reasonable and just" (334), seems peculiarly adapted to the outlook of its object.

A certain diffidence in Elizabeth is a necessary concomitant of the process of assimilating Darcy's viewpoint to her own, and this is partly responsible for the subdued tone which has given rise to criticism of the last part of Pride and Prejudice as an anti-climax.[10] It is, in fact, a skilful exposition of Elizabeth's new growth in awareness - an awareness that, based on the firmer and more just

principles of consideration she is evolving, is moral as well as emotional.

The second half of Pride and Prejudice is as much concerned with perception as the first, but it is a less impulsive, less self-assured, less physical perception. Darcy's explanatory letter is a form of revelation quite in keeping with Elizabeth's suddenness in assimilating impressions, and it also accords with Darcy's role as the person from whose superior mind Elizabeth must benefit.[11] From Darcy's letter onwards, the book is contrived to show Elizabeth approaching wisdom, though she never fully attains it; the implication is, indeed, that perfection in this respect will always be out of reach. Marriage to Darcy is necessary to give the best adjustment to Elizabeth's qualities, and indeed to his, by the balance of temperament between them. Elizabeth's consistency, safeguarded during the shocked reflections that succeed the receipt of the letter, is, therefore, carefully preserved in the chapters that follow. During the second half of the novel her perceptions, though different in kind from what they were before, are still assimilated in the manner we have come to associate with her. The word "astonishment," which suggests a sudden flash of illumination, is at least as frequently used in the second part of the novel as in the first. Such terms as "astonished," "amazed," "strikingly," are continually associated with Elizabeth in the early chapters of the third volume, while the more sedate "surprised" is the only word of this

kind applied to Darcy himself (251, 255).

Throughout Pride and Prejudice Elizabeth's ideas come to her with the speed and totality of impact of visual impressions. Her opinions of people often, therefore, take the form of pictures, which leave, if not a permanent, at least a durable impression on her mind. She talks of taking Mr. Darcy's likeness at the Netherfield ball (94), and when she discovers Mr. Darcy's active interference between Bingley and Jane, her increased resentment presents itself to her imagination in similar terms; Colonel Fitzwilliam's joke about Darcy's triumph elicits the internal response that "it appeared to her so just a picture of Mr. Darcy, that she would not trust herself with an answer" (186). But in the second half of the novel, although this type of impression remains characteristic of Elizabeth's turn of mind, there is a proviso for the subsequent modification of such pictures. Elizabeth no longer takes the immediate impression to be necessarily the true one; she becomes conscious that people and situations may be viewed in different "lights." "In what an amiable light does this place him!" thinks Elizabeth when the housekeeper at Pemberley praises her master (249). Embarrassed at being found there herself, she thinks "how strange must it appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man!" (252). The last reflection shows that Elizabeth is as yet far from having corrected all her mistakes of judgment, yet she does want to gain a new insight into Darcy's character; "she longed to know what

at that moment was passing in his mind" (253).

Just before the meeting at Pemberley Elizabeth's "picture" judgments are symbolically synthesised into the most accurate opinion of Darcy that can be arrived at without his personal intervention. Before she has had time to digest the new ideas suggested by Mrs. Reynolds' warm praise, Elizabeth is (typically) "arrested" by a picture of Darcy in the portrait gallery; "she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her." This time, however, Elizabeth is not content simply to be "struck"; "she stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation" (250), trying, in fact, to bring into play her increasing powers of logic by using the portrait as a focus for her ideas about Darcy:

> There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. . . . As she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression. (250-251)

But Elizabeth's view of Darcy is still rather wide of the mark, for when he appears, almost immediately afterwards, she still thinks of him as "so vain a man" (252).

If Elizabeth is anxious about Darcy's opinion of her, Darcy (whom we now meet for the first time since the letter episode) is at least as anxious about Elizabeth's view of him. He realises the power of even brief impressions over her mind, and exerts himself to project as favourable an

image as possible. It is particularly interesting to note that in retrospect he says "my object . . . was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to " (370).[12] Darcy here seems as ready to accommodate Elizabeth's visual imagination by using the vocabulary of display, as she is to adopt his vocabulary of judgment in considering the letter.

Darcy's own faults of judgment have always been clearly explained. They spring partly from a mistaken sense of pride - "his character was to speak for itself," as Mrs. Gardiner comments (322) - and partly from a failing the reverse of Elizabeth's, a tendency to allow the influence of friendship too little weight in the formation of his views. The faults of perception of both are parodied when they, with Bingley, argue the rights and wrongs of the latter's probable behaviour if asked by a friend to defer leaving his house. All the elements leading up to the scene where Elizabeth considers the letter are present; Darcy talks of deceitful appearances (48) and the need for intellectual conviction, Elizabeth asserts the claims of friendship to influence even where conviction is lacking, and Bingley gives an exaggerated sketch of Darcy's actual process of reasoning; "let us hear all the particulars, not forgetting their comparative height and size; for that will have more weight in the argument, Miss Bennet, than you may be aware of" (50).

The modifications in Darcy's vision of the heroine are so orderly as to need no detailed separate examination, but he too needs to reach beyond his normal pattern of thought in order to clarify the basis of his judgment. Elizabeth's indignant refusal is the turning-point in Darcy's own growth of awareness, for by this he learns not to overrate the claims of worldly pride. Their need of each other is thus affirmed, yet Elizabeth's greater need is emphasised by her later turning-point and the fact that it is presented through her own consciousness, as well as through the realisation of more serious mistakes on her part than Darcy has ever made.

The predominant impression in Pride and Prejudice is one of an increasing self-knowledge on the part of the principal characters, especially Elizabeth. But the other, related area of growth - the development of Elizabeth's rational love for Darcy - must also be taken in account, as her vision of Darcy is vital to the evolution of her powers of feeling and judging. In the first part of the book Elizabeth is giving a trial to the love at first sight so firmly relegated to an inferior status at Lambton. Elizabeth's infatuation for Wickham is to some extent a reaction from her original dislike of Darcy, and the spurious relationship between Wickham and the heroine plays a part, especially as far as Elizabeth is concerned, in building the magnetic attraction between Darcy and herself - even in the

negative form of a personality conflict. Wickham is, in fact, used as a stalking-horse for Darcy's interests, and when, in the second half of Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth begins to view Darcy favourably, there is a strong sense of underlying attraction already present for her to draw upon. Wickham's very accusations present Darcy in a forceful, though negative light, and as the shallow artificiality of Wickham's own character becomes more and more apparent, this negative impression begins increasingly to work in Darcy's favour. Wickham is also indirectly useful in arousing sympathy for Darcy at an early stage of the novel, for the reader is made aware of two factors which are, in the first half of Pride and Prejudice, outside the range of Elizabeth's comprehension. One is the possible and even probable injustice of Wickham's account of Darcy, and the other is Darcy's growing affection for Elizabeth. At the Netherfield ball Jane Austen enters the hero's mind to reveal that "in Darcy's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards [Elizabeth], which soon procured her pardon [for her sauciness about Wickham], and directed all his anger against another" (94). The implications of these words are calculated to predispose the reader in Darcy's favour. This is particularly important since Darcy himself cannot be allowed too much prominence if Elizabeth's misunderstanding of his character is to be sustained; yet he is so necessary to the heroine's intellectual and emotional development that he

must not sink into oblivion during his absence, as Edward Ferrars does during long stretches of Sense and Sensibility. Wickham's most important function as regards the theme of rational love, however, is to present living testimony of the worthlessness of love at first sight, and therefore (by implication) of the value of a love grounded solidly in reason.

Rational love is concerned quite as much with judgment as with feeling, and feeling here is rooted in the moral sense (though this by no means excludes the possibility of personal magnetism, which certainly exists between heroine and hero). According to the antithesis of the title Darcy must vanquish his pride and Elizabeth her prejudice, though each has also a share of the other's besetting sin to overcome. Darcy's growth in humility follows a straightforward pattern characteristic of his logical bent of mind, and culminating in his remark to Elizabeth after their reconciliation - "by you, I was properly humbled" (369). Elizabeth, however, true to her intuitive grasp of ideas, develops humility in fits and starts after receiving Darcy's letter. When she has digested its contents she grows "absolutely ashamed of herself" (208). Talking it over with Jane two weeks later, she admits she has been "weak and vain and nonsensical" (226); but she cannot be humble in the fullest and best sense of the word without Darcy's direct, though unconscious, intervention. When she sees his magnanimous behaviour at Pemberley, Elizabeth's feelings change from simple

self-reproach, compassion and respect to an increasing gratitude - an important factor in Jane Austen's ideal of rational love.[13] Darcy's still greater magnanimity in bringing about the marriage of Lydia and Wickham causes Elizabeth to attain the generous humility so far removed from preoccupation with self that it sees its own faults as the foil for another's virtues; "for herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him" (327).

Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy are, of course, defined principally through her own words and thoughts. But a striking exception to this occurs when she learns of Lydia's elopement. In the midst of a scene of shock and distress, Jane Austen pauses to analyse and justify her heroine's feeling for Darcy. To judge by its tone, the passage could well have been taken from the final chapters of Mansfield Park:

> 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, exept 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. (279)

The importance of the passage is underlined by its seeming incongruity in the context; the sudden change of perspective gives the utmost prominence to the value of rational affection. Towards the end of the novel Jane Austen goes still further in pinpointing reason as the basis of Elizabeth's

love; Darcy "was the person . . . whom she regarded . . . with an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just, as what Jane felt for Bingley" (334).

Sometimes, however, Elizabeth's attractiveness is a threat to the purpose of Pride and Prejudice, especially in relation to this very theme of rational love. It would be going too far to lay to her charge E. M. Forster's generalisation about characters in fiction - "they try to live their own lives and are consequently often engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book"[14] - but while the interest excited by the heroine's vivacious personality ensures that the development of her self-knowledge is always a dominant factor in the novel, the moral aspect of the love story is sometimes overshadowed. Close reading, nevertheless, will reveal that Jane Austen analyses it consistently and carefully, even in the first, less introspective half of the book.

One reason why the second half of Pride and Prejudice is sometimes felt to drag is that Jane Austen is no longer building up the sense of physical attraction between Darcy and Elizabeth, previously established through mutual conflict, the agency of Wickham and the atmosphere of energy and vitality which pervades the first part of the novel. To some extent this sense of physical attraction carries over into the second part through its own momentum; but the absence of the hero for several chapters of course lessens its vitality. But a change of tone in Pride and Prejudice is

both necessary and desirable after the episode of Darcy's letter. If the existence and burgeoning of error can only be revealed by lively contacts between the heroine and other characters, the process of self-correction is internalised to a large degree and therefore necessarily more subdued in tone. Humility and self-reproach allow little scope for the demonstration of vivacity, and although Elizabeth quips with Jane as before (225-226), she has a note of seriousness not discernible in their earlier discussions of Wickham and Darcy (85-86).

The revision of opinions, and of the basis on which judgment is formed, is interwoven with the collapse of romantic partiality and the growth of rational love. These processes, too, must be largely internal, and Darcy does not reappear until Elizabeth is ready to embark on the final stage of growth - a mutual interplay of understanding and affections. This time Wickham does not act as a medium for the transmission of Darcy's forceful personality. For some time the hero figures only in Elizabeth's reflections about him - reflections based on knowledge we already have. His impact on the reader of course diminishes (hence the criticisms of Darcy as being stiff and wooden).[15] But what is at issue is Darcy's impact on Elizabeth herself, and it is essential that she should have a "breathing space" in which to revise her ideas and begin to recognise her dependence on Darcy for further development. Consistency of character, however, is carefully maintained.[16] By playing on the idea

of seeing the same people in different lights, Jane Austen reassures us that they are the same people, and on the surface the change appears to be simply one of viewpoint. This softens the abruptness of the transition from extrovert to something approaching an introvert, so marked in Elizabeth's case that she is evidently beginning to take on some of the characteristics of an observer heroine.[17]

Although the tone of Pride and Prejudice becomes more serious, it certainly never becomes sombre; the confrontation between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine, for example, gives it a tremendous fillip. The second half of the book, too, is full of the backlash of irony prepared in the first half, and although this is less light-hearted than the statements in which it originates, there is no falling-off in wit.[18] A change in genre from comedy to tragedy is prevented by the expert handling of the aftermath of seduction. Lydia's unchanged thoughtlessness and the fact that "it was not on her side a scheme of infamy" (292) make it impossible to regard her as a determined sinner like Maria Rushworth in Mansfield Park. The tailing-off of Wickham into anti-climax reduces the sense of wrong committed, and the marriage itself, although a "patched-up business" (357), does give Lydia some "claims to reputation" (387), so that she need not face a lifetime of bitterness. No such upheavals as those which permanently affect the Bertrams take place in the community at Longbourn. We are expressly told that Mrs. Bennet remains

unchanged (385), and though Kitty will be better safeguarded, and therefore better than her sister, there is no radical transformation of attitude in Mr. Bennet comparable to that of Sir Thomas Bertram. Lydia and Wickham once discovered, "his chief wish . . . was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in seeking her were over, he naturally returned to all his former indolence" (309). His continuing cynicism as a husband is revealed by Jane Austen's comment on Mrs. Bennet's lack of improvement; "perhaps it was lucky for her husband, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that she still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly" (385).

Jane Austen has achieved such a complete synthesis of plot, characterisation, style and moral theme in Pride and Prejudice, that it is hard to see how the various elements in the novel could have been better harmonised. Yet in one sense she has failed, for the change of tone in the second half of the book is not radical enough to do full justice to the theme of rational love. The resolution of the Wickham-Lydia elopement, and still more its lack of far-reaching consequences for others, are, though credible in themselves, too light-hearted to provide an effective contrast to the union of rational love entered into by Elizabeth and Darcy. The guilt of the elopement is, indeed, played down until it seems little more than an offence against good taste.[19]

Moral seriousness (especially where such a sin as sexual immorality, the deepest wrong in the Jane Austen canon, is involved) demands continuing implications and therefore an open-ended effect, whereas sophisticated romantic comedy, which is predominantly the genre of Pride and Prejudice, requires a neat rounding-off of ends. Elizabeth Bennet herself is presented a degree less substantially than she should be owing to the rather lightweight conclusion of the theme of rational love; yet Jane Austen could not have altered the tone of Pride and Prejudice further without sacrificing the consistency as well as the peculiar charm of the novel. The fault in the presentation of the heroine is not such as to impair the dominant theme of self-knowledge, which depends on Elizabeth's character for its effectiveness and on which, in turn, Elizabeth's personal impact principally depends.

It is one of those cases where the flaw is better than the correction would be, especially as it does not materially detract from the novel's appeal. Jane Austen does, however, try to avoid any such preponderance of the "light, and bright, and sparkling"[20] in her next novel, Mansfield Park.

CHAPTER III

MANSFIELD PARK

In one sense Jane Austen's novels form a continuum, for although each stands as a separate, self-contained work, the values examined in one illuminate the meaning of others. This relationship is particularly strong between Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park. Ideally the reader, having realised the superiority of rational love over infatuation in Pride and Prejudice, comes to Mansfield Park with this knowledge and takes it for granted as a principle of right thinking, so that Jane Austen is left free to explore other areas of profound interest. The same applies to the theme of self-discovery which, in Pride and Prejudice, is central; having fully established the importance of clear inward vision based on a conscious identity - something towards which she has been working since Northanger Abbey - Jane Austen turns this vision outwards upon the world in Mansfield Park. This has a radical effect on characterisation, resulting in a heroine more passive, more entirely geared to observation than such an observer heroine as Elinor Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility. It follows that Fanny Price is a much less dominant central figure than Elizabeth Bennet; but on the other hand, the importance of

minor characters in the later novel is greater than that of minor characters in Pride and Prejudice. The imagery of Mansfield Park is an index of change in Jane Austen's approach to her subject matter, and I shall deal first with vision and judgment as they affect figurative language. I shall then discuss the minor and intermediate characters as they are defined in terms of these concepts, and finally I shall examine the vision of Fanny Price and that of other major characters in relation to hers. These areas must inevitably overlap, but I think the purposes of discussion will best be served by the separation I have envisaged.

Imagery of Sight

Stress on the physical appearance and activity of eyes in Pride and Prejudice is transmuted in Mansfield Park into a more exclusive concern with the observations made by their means. Mary Crawford is the only character whose eyes (as distinct from her vision) are much attended to; in this respect, she is like Elizabeth Bennet, to whom she has frequently been compared by critics.[1] "Her eyes brightened as she spoke" of the summer spent at Mansfield (MP 210), Edmund sees them sparkle as she talks of an invitation to stay with friends in London (256), and "her eyes, bright as they had been before, [showed] they could yet be brighter" on looking at Edmund's chain (274). Mary's "lively dark eye, clear brown complexion, and general prettiness" attest both her physical charms and her vivacious

personality (44).[2] But while in Pride and Prejudice we see much through Elizabeth Bennet's eyes, Mary Crawford is rarely a medium of vision in Mansfield Park, and Jane Austen never makes any attempt at a sympathetic identification of the reader's with Mary's viewpoint. And although Elizabeth's visual activity has its own intrinsic appeal, our concern with that of Mary Crawford derives chiefly from Fanny's interest in the subject. Mary's expressions are usually observed and often interpreted by Fanny; she accepts the gift of a necklace with reluctance, for example, because "there was an expression in Miss Crawford's eyes which she could not be satisfied with" (260).

In Pride and Prejudice Darcy's admiration of the heroine's eyes enhances her attractiveness and makes the reader begin to view Darcy himself with sympathy. In Mansfield Park, on the other hand, the first appraisal of Mary Crawford's appearance, coming from both Tom and Edmund, has the effect of anonymity and cannot build up sympathy for any of those involved. The very fact that Mary's dark, lively eyes contrast with Fanny's soft light ones[3] goes against Miss Crawford, for Jane Austen is continually at pains to show that we should sympathise with Fanny.[4]

Mutual observation and interaction are of primary importance in Pride and Prejudice. The expression of the eyes is therefore a significant factor in description, and gains in meaning from being interpreted by other characters. In Mansfield Park, on the other hand, such expressiveness is

little emphasised, though it sometimes adds meaning to a remark. "I take the part which Lady Ravenshaw was to have done," says Maria to Edmund, "and (with a bolder eye) Miss Crawford is to be Amelia" (139). Into the parenthetical phrase are compressed both awareness of Edmund's growing infatuation for Miss Crawford, and a sign, strengthened by her preceding words, that if Maria's conduct is based on any law it is on the law of precedent and not on that of principle. The "repulsive looks" which Mrs. Norris directs at Susan (448) are even easier to interpret, for they originate in a character whose vision depends on warped judgment, who is very rarely seen from inside and never presented sympathetically. Fanny herself is given substance from time to time by authorial description of this sort. In the scene where she first becomes prominent at Mansfield, for example, the scene in which she is asked to act, Fanny's visible reactions to the request are clearly shown; the "most frightened look" (145) soon gives way to "growing more and more red from excessive agitation" (146). It is Edmund, however, whose moods and reactions are most often indicated by such descriptive statements, for we seldom enter his mind; Jane Austen is more interested in Fanny's view of Edmund than she is in Edmund himself. Passages about him are full of phrases such as "a look of even fond dependence on [Fanny's] good nature" (172), "a look of consciousness" (214), "looks on his side of grateful affection" (270), and "the kind smile of an affectionate brother" (222). At such moments Fanny,

who observes these expressions, is not reading his character but gauging his attitude towards either herself or Miss Crawford.

Physical appearance is not so significant in Mansfield Park as in Pride and Prejudice. But nevertheless, Fanny's appearance becomes increasingly important as the novel goes on. Just as Elizabeth Bennet gradually acquires some of the characteristics of an observer heroine, so, when Fanny becomes more positively engaged in the action of Mansfield Park, she begins to take on a few - only a few - of the qualities of a protagonist heroine. One of these is a more concrete physical presence. Although she is "quite overlooked by her cousins" in the bustle of their father's return (176), Sir Thomas gives her an unexpectedly kind greeting and not only compliments her on her looks but leads her nearer the light to inspect her more closely (178) - an indication of the greater importance she will assume in the family circle from now onwards. Later, when she becomes interesting to Henry Crawford, her looks, and particularly her eyes and their expression, are discussed by brother and sister (229-230). But neither Fanny's eyes nor her general physique ever assume the importance they would have if she were a protagonist heroine. The process of transformation in Fanny is, in fact, rounded off almost with a laugh - "what was there now to add, but that [Edmund] should learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones" (470) - as if to say that Fanny has no need to compete with the protagonist

figure Mary on Mary's own terms.

If the eyes themselves are much less important here than in Pride and Prejudice, eye metaphors are nonetheless frequent in Mansfield Park. Mr. Crawford, at Sotherton, speaks of "the advantages of other eyes" (84); Maria has been "brought up under [the] eye" of Mrs. Norris (203); Mary Crawford says she has "no eye or ingenuity" for planning improvements (57), and later asks Fanny to write a note that will "gladden Henry's eyes" (394). Fanny is pleased to dine at the parsonage because, "simple as such an engagement might appear in other eyes, it had novelty and importance in her's" (219). Edmund thinks of such weighty matters before the Mansfield ball that it is "of less moment in his eyes than in those of any other person in the house" (255). Of the theatrical episode he later says to Fanny "I was playing the fool with my eyes open" (350), and still later he uses the same metaphor to express his disappointment in Mary Crawford; "the charm is broken. My eyes are opened" (456). Mary herself writes that Maria and Julia have "shut their eyes to the truth" about their brother's illness (434), and Fanny, moving to Mansfield with Edmund at the end of the novel, finds that the parsonage "soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park, had long been" (473).

There are also many other varieties of metaphor to do with vision in the novel. Sir Thomas Bertram disdains "the being quick-sighted on such points" as matrimonial advantage to members of his family (238); Fanny has been "long lost sight of" by the Prices (382). Edmund is pleased that Mary approves her brother's choice because he "had not depended upon her seeing every thing in so just a light" (351); Fanny is enlightened about Tom's illness by the "very few lines from Edmund [which] shewed her the patient and the sick room in a juster and stronger light than all Lady Bertram's sheets of paper could do" (429). But frequently as such metaphors occur in Mansfield Park, they are less prominent in the language of the novel than are metaphors of vision in Pride and Prejudice. In Mansfield Park metaphors of blindness predominate, for failures of vision are more serious in this novel than in Pride and Prejudice and they must be strongly emphasised. Every character except Fanny exhibits some degree of blindness. Tom, Edmund and Mrs. Norris are guilty of "blindness to [the] true cause" of Julia's discomposure (163); Mrs. Norris' judgment is "so blinded" that she does not anticipate her brother-in-law's disapproval of the theatricals (179), and Mr. Yates talks about the play with "so blind an interest" that he does not see his host's displeasure (184). Sir Thomas, musing on his daughter's approaching marriage to Mr. Rushworth, thinks of "the blindness of love" (201), while Edmund, with even

greater unconscious irony, calls Fanny to witness that he has never been blind to Mary's faults (270). Mrs. Price indulges in "blind fondness" for certain of her children (396), but Mrs. Norris is still more culpable in feeling blind affection for Maria and Julia (463) and, when Maria's elopement shatters her happiness, blind anger towards Fanny (448). Fanny herself, the principal medium of a just moral vision within the novel, turns the metaphor to account another way and says of Henry's flirtations "I was quiet, but I was not blind" (363).

Lesser degrees of blindness are expressed in terms of defective vision. Much of this will be dealt with later, but it will be helpful to consider briefly some of the forms which these failures of vision can take. One such form is the inability to sustain observation, to extend sight into perception. This fault constitutes one of the few points of resemblance between Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford. But the resemblance does not go very deep. Edmund, preoccupied by his infatuation, cannot feel wholehearted sympathy for Fanny's cares; "though he looked at her with his usual kindness, she believed he had soon ceased to think of her countenance" (268). This is quite characteristic of Edmund's vision, and it indicates why, though far from blind to moral truths (his very concern with them is one of the reasons why he does not see Julia's misery), Edmund often fails to realise the moral implications of what he sees. This failure

comes out in the blindness to Henry's flirtations with his sisters (116, 163) which later gives way to an inadequate perception of what has been happening (350). But it is more evident in his relationship with Mary Crawford. Edmund is characteristically bemused by the surface she presents, and he later admits that, "as far as related to mind," he has been dwelling on the creature of his own imagination (458). Edmund's incapacity to sustain observation on a personal level is the shortcoming of a simple, well-meaning, if not discerning man. But this failure has a different origin in Mary, though its effects are similar. Her attention falters even when her brother's interest is in view, for, after making "a sure push at Fanny's feelings" on the subject of William's promotion, she has been "first watching her complacently, and then musing on something else" (364) - and Jane Austen does not even specify what the something else is.[5] Mary's inability to concentrate is the product of a superficial and self-centered mind, unused to deep or sustained reflection.

As physical vision blends with perception, errors of judgment emerge which reveal, if not blindness, inadequacy or bias. Edmund is especially pleased to see Fanny and Mary together at the parsonage because he imagines an intimate friendship has been developing between them (211). Conversely, he is surprised that when the Crawfords leave, "the friend and companion, who had been so much to [Fanny], should not be more visibly regretted" (366). In both cases Edmund fits or

tries to fit his observations to a preconceived idea. Sometimes an impression becomes so firmly fixed that he disregards evidence which could contradict it; Fanny, reflecting on his infatuation for Miss Crawford, thinks that "her faults were what they had ever been, but he saw them no longer" (264).

Edmund's errors are easily seen. Sir Thomas Bertram, however, reveals a more confusing blend of accuracy and inaccuracy. His opinion that Mr. Crawford admires Fanny is justified, but the corresponding assessment of Fanny's response is based on his own expectations; "I never perceived [Henry's attentions] to be unpleasant to you," he says to his niece (316). The errors of Mrs. Norris are more straightforward, for in her mind there is little or no connection between vision and judgment. One of the most striking examples of this occurs in relation to the theatricals, for Mrs. Norris is "ashamed to confess having never seen any of the impropriety which was so glaring to Sir Thomas" (188).

Mrs. Norris is blind without knowing it, and without power to change; but the wilful blindness that ignores reality can just as effectively distort judgment. The errors of such an attitude are pinpointed from time to time through sustained metaphors. Mary Crawford, happy to conjure up imaginary pictures in conformity with her desires, resents the encroachments of hard fact:

> Startled [by Sir Thomas' "little harangue"] from the agreeable fancies she had been previously indulging on the strength of her brother's description, no longer able, in

> the picture she had been forming of a future Thornton, to shut out the church, sink the clergyman, and see only the respectable, elegant, modernized, and occasional residence of a man of independent fortune - [she] was considering Sir Thomas, with decided ill-will, as the destroyer of all this. (248)

If Mary resents inconvenient reality, Maria Bertram resists it, as is shown by her reflections on her father's approaching return:

> It was a gloomy prospect, and all that she could do was to throw a mist over it, and hope when the mist cleared away, she should see something else. It would hardly be early in November, there were generally delays, a bad passage or something; that favouring something which every body who shuts their eyes while they look, or their understandings while they reason, feels the comfort of. (107)

The two passages constitute almost a metaphor of that defiance of moral truths, similar in kind but differing in degree, which characterises Mary and Maria.

The simple mechanics of looking are frequently referred to in Mansfield Park, but they are less prominent here than in Pride and Prejudice; for while, in the earlier novel, the act of seeing has a part to play in the development of relationships, it is incidental to the purpose of observation in Mansfield Park. Much of the vocabulary of this novel reflects the importance of the spectator. Sir Thomas Bertram first notices Henry's admiration of his niece when he becomes "a looker-on" at the round table (246). Fanny describes herself as a "by-stander" during the theatricals (350), and Edmund, in Portsmouth, is "a witness - but that he saw nothing - of the tranquil manner in which the daughters were parted with" (445). Henry Crawford, "silently

observing" Fanny and William, is "himself . . . observed by Sir Thomas" (249). Sir Thomas watches Fanny for signs of missing Henry Crawford (366), and though he does not see what he expects he still goes on "with his own hopes, and his own observations" (368).

Fanny herself is generally the spectator in Mansfield Park. An exchange of looks between Mary and Edmund is "sorrowful food for Fanny's observation" (214). "In watching [Edmund and Mary] she forgot herself" (170), and she is "not able to refrain entirely from observing them" at the ball (279). "Her ill opinion of [Henry] was founded chiefly on observations, which, for her cousins' sake, she could scarcely dare mention to their father" (317-318); but she does mention them to Henry's sister. "I had not, Miss Crawford," she says, "been an inattentive observer of what was passing between him and some part of this family in the summer and autumn" (363). Fanny aligns vision and judgment by comparing past and present observations; the words "she recollected and observed" (366) aptly describe her habitual mental processes.

Where the language takes on a more metaphorical cast the same tendency to make deliberate use of vision as a means to judgment is discernible. Sir Thomas Bertram "eyed [Fanny] fixedly" (316) after her refusal to marry Henry Crawford, in order to ascertain the cause of her reluctance. Fanny herself restrains her eyes as she gauges Edmund's disappointment in Mary by listening; "how Fanny listened, with what

curiosity and concern, what pain and what delight, how the agitation of his voice was watched, and how carefully her own eyes were fixed on any object but himself, may be imagined" (454). It is interesting to note that although Fanny's physical vision is curtailed, what is audible is described in visual terms.

The interplay of looks which is, in Pride and Prejudice, a feature of developing mutual awareness, is transposed in Mansfield Park into the sign of a relationship that can never progress satisfactorily. The courtship of Mary and Edmund is characterised by looks of consciousness on both sides (214), for, although they do not realise it, the gulf between them is too wide for the necessary adjustments to be made. In Henry's courtship of Fanny Price the interplay of looks is still more markedly a sign of the futility of any attempt to bring the two together, for through the movements of their eyes Fanny's resistance is as evident as Henry's pursuit. Mary's laughing reference to the day at Sotherton evokes this response; "Fanny's eyes were turned on Crawford for a moment with an expression more than grave, even reproachful; but on catching his were instantly withdrawn" (244-245). And Edmund sees, when Crawford takes advantage of an opportunity to press Fanny, "that it was to be a very thorough attack, that looks and undertones were to be well tried" (342). Sir Thomas' unwitting blunder about Fanny's loss of appetite after the news of William's promotion causes severe mortification to his niece; "she was

ready to sink with shame, from the dread of Mr. Crawford's interpretation; for though nothing could have tempted her to turn her eyes to the right hand where he sat, she felt that his were immediately directed towards her" (304). By the time he visits Fanny in Portsmouth, Henry's rationally founded attachment has produced greater delicacy in his dealings with its object:

> Their visitor, who had at first approached her with as animated a countenance as ever, was wisely and kindly keeping his eyes away, and giving her time to recover, while he devoted himself entirely to her mother. . . . By the time he had given all this information [about William, and the ostensible reason for his visit], it was not unreasonable to suppose, that Fanny might be looked at and spoken to; and she was tolerably able to bear his eye. (399-400)

But though Henry's manner has changed, Fanny's attitude has not fundamentally altered.[6] In general the eye movements of Henry and Fanny indicate a heightened awareness of each other, but an awareness that is never likely to lead to mutual harmony.

Where Fanny reveals her feelings through visual activity, her looks are sometimes used as a technical device to direct the reader's attention as well as to apprise him of her sentiments. The riding scene in Dr. Grant's field, for example, indicates the hold Mary swiftly obtains over Edmund's affections, and the significance of the episode for the plot of the novel, as well as its impact on Fanny's immediate feelings, is underlined by the fact that Fanny "could not turn her eyes from the meadow" (67). Similarly, after her cousin's discovery that Lovers' Vows is the play

to be acted, "Fanny's eyes followed Edmund, and her heart beat for him" (139) - a reaction very different from the consciousness without sympathy shown in Mary's "glancing half fearfully, half slily, beyond Fanny to Edmund" (143).

In all this Jane Austen is skilfully making use of the language of the eyes to convey nuances of feeling too subtle to be expressed in dialogue, even if decorum did not forbid such personal revelations. Character is defined by such means; Fanny, for example, can often be closely identified with the narrator in the range and accuracy of her vision, but her emotional responses can hardly be ascribed to an omniscient author. But these visual interchanges are much less frequent and less prominent in Mansfield Park than in Pride and Prejudice, where they call attention to the fact that the heroine's vision, in particular, needs adjustment.

Minor and Intermediate Characters

The moral purpose of Mansfield Park is less personally related to the central figure than is that of Pride and Prejudice, for it concerns ethical stands which, while she certainly sees them, are independent of her vision. Besides, Fanny Price, as an observer heroine, is bound to attract less attention than the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet. But if Fanny's stature is deflated in comparison with that of Elizabeth, who dominates Pride and Prejudice, the stature of other, lesser characters in Mansfield

Park - characters who are frequently the subjects of Fanny's observation - is correspondingly raised; and a whole community of personalities, ranging from the major to the almost negligible, is detailed with a minuteness and a variety of technique found in none of the other novels on such a scale. The quality of vision in the minor and intermediate characters of Mansfield Park therefore merits consideration, and I shall now examine some of these characters in the light of the concepts of vision and judgment which are instrumental in defining them.

In Mansfield Park, as in Pride and Prejudice, characters are to a large extent defined in terms of what they see or fail to see; but now the discriminations to be made are more subtle, the range of vision in the novels is wider and the play of viewpoints more complex. There is no-one who, like Mr. Collins in Pride and Prejudice, is essentially a caricature; even characters less substantial than he have, within their own frames of reference, greater "solidity of specification."[7] Lady Bertram is a good example. She has less variety, and far less impact, than Mr. Collins; at one point she is described as "the picture of health, wealth, ease, and tranquillity" (126), an image which suggests the flatness of the artist's canvas. Henry Crawford regards her as only a trifling impediment to his wooing of Fanny, "for she might always be considered as only half awake" (343); and her simplicity is so generally recognised that Edmund does

not baulk at confronting his mother with the proposition "you can have no reason I imagine madam . . . for wishing Fanny not to be of the party, but as it relates to yourself, to your own comfort" (78).

Under the pressure of a strong stimulus, however, the "disk" of Lady Bertram can extend and become "a little globe."[8] A first tentative move in this direction - a move originating with Lady Bertram herself, and involving the use of her perceptions - is foiled by Mrs. Norris, who functions as a blinding agent as well as a blind force in the novel. The theatricals come under discussion in the drawing-room, and Lady Bertram volunteers the remark that, when she is a little more at leisure, she intends to look in at the rehearsals. "What is the play about, Fanny, you have never told me?" she adds, expressing her habitual need of guidance in any sphere other than that of her own comfort. Mrs. Norris, however, interposes, first to stop the questioner and then to distract her by giving an evasive and misleading reply: "It is about Lovers' Vows." But Fanny, who is emerging as an agent of truth as well as a clear observer, tries to encourage Lady Bertram's feeble initiative. Unlike Mrs. Norris she does not manipulate Lady Bertram's mind, even by giving a more accurate impression of the play; she encourages her aunt to see for herself. "I believe . . . there will be three acts rehearsed to-morrow evening, and that will give you an opportunity of seeing all the actors at once." But

Lady Bertram's impulse towards discovery is a very faint one, depending on a condition most unlikely to be fulfilled - her being "a little more at leisure" - and Fanny has not the authority of Sir Thomas with her supine aunt. Mrs. Norris finds, therefore, little difficulty in inducing the impending globe to remain a disk at this point; "you had better stay till the curtain is hung . . . the curtain will be hung in a day or two, - there is very little sense in a play without a curtain - and I am much mistaken if you do not find it draw up into very handsome festoons." On the surface this episode seems purely comic, but it has serious undertones; Mrs. Norris' undue preoccupation with appearance is emphasised in the context of a struggle with Fanny for what might be termed Lady Bertram's "soul." Yet, since Jane Austen does not want to stress the implications of such a struggle too much at this point, she introduces a note of farce at the close of the incident (with Mrs. Norris' "handsome festoons"). And "Lady Bertram seemed quite resigned to waiting" (167).

An independent effort is too much for Lady Bertram; she can only exercise her faculty of perception in the wake of her husband, the one person in the world who commands her respect. Edmund's earlier effort to dissuade Maria from acting only catches Lady Bertram's attention because he evokes the idea of his father's disapproval, and this stimulates his mother so far as to make her remark, "do not act any thing improper, my dear . . . Sir Thomas would not like it" (140). An absent Sir Thomas, however, can have no more than

a transient effect on Lady Bertram, and her thoughts immediately switch to a subject that, involving her own comfort, is much nearer her heart: "Fanny, ring the bell; I must have my dinner" (140-141). Edmund, trying like Fanny to encourage Lady Bertram's moral impulse, plays on Sir Thomas' probable opinion; but, again like Fanny, he is thwarted by Aunt Norris, whose rapid change of topic is too much for the tenuous concentration of her sister (141-142).

When her husband is at home, however, things are more promising, for if Lady Bertram cannot lead, she can follow. Left to herself, her opinion of Fanny would always remain on its earliest level of "she saw no harm in the poor little thing - and always found her very handy and quick in carrying messages, and fetching what she wanted" (20). The surprise of Crawford's proposal, however, not only elevates her feelings almost to normal intensity - "she really had known something like impatience" to be alone with Fanny (332-333) - but, by showing her Fanny's importance in the eyes of so considerable a personage as a rich young gentleman, causes her to raise her own view of her niece. In Lady Bertram's estimation, beauty and wealth are the factors which induce a young man to think of matrimony, and as Fanny has no independent fortune her aunt is convinced "that Fanny <u>was</u> very pretty, which she had been doubting about before" (332). In this instance Lady Bertram's interest (which is really extended self-admiration)[9] leads her to unprecedented lengths.

She braves Sir Thomas in order to speak of the matter to Fanny, and the glimmerings of generosity which prompted her to send Chapman to her niece before the ball now rise into something warmer - the promise of one of Pug's puppies (333).

The promise of a puppy, which closes the scene, is a useful device. Like Mrs. Norris' festoons, it strikes a farcical note; and it reminds us that the development in Lady Bertram is in the direction of purely superficial vision and purely material generosity. Not until Maria's fall, which acts as a strong stimulus to a mind already conditioned by Sir Thomas to the right responses on "important points," is there any enlargement of Lady Bertram's moral vision; "she saw . . . in all its enormity, what had happened. . . . She could see it only in one light, as comprehending the loss of a daughter, and a disgrace never to be wiped off" (449). It is necessary that Lady Bertram, as a fixture in a group which ultimately gains in stature, should develop <u>in crescendo</u>; the peak she attains must be inconsiderable and ephemeral, but still it must be a peak.

But if Lady Bertram is more "capable of rotundity"[10] than the minor characters of <u>Pride and Prejudice</u>, she in her turn is outstripped in this respect by most of the minor characters of <u>Mansfield Park</u>. With the exception of Dr. Grant and Mr. Yates,[11] everyone is more fully drawn than Lady Bertram, and even Tom, though a less interesting character than his mother, has a greater potential for judgment.

During the whole process of the theatricals it is clear that Tom Bertram, "engrossed by the concerns of his theatre . . . , saw nothing that did not immediately relate to it" (163), and this squares with the consistent impression of his "cheerful selfishness" (24). His thoughtless blindness is stressed by the irony of such words as this remark to Edmund: "Don't imagine that nobody in this house can see or judge but yourself" (128). Despite his limited vision, however, Tom's consciousness is used to render his father's discovery of the theatre. At first the sight of Sir Thomas on the stage evokes a characteristic light-hearted response - "the house would close with the greatest eclat." But so great is the pressure of surprise, so striking the force of what his father stands for, suddenly renewed in a household that has been losing its grip on his standards, that Tom's perceptions broaden to include partial comprehension of another viewpoint:

> Tom understood his father's thoughts, and . . . began to see more clearly than he had ever done before that there might be some ground of offence - that there might be some reason for the glance his father gave towards the ceiling and stucco of the room; and that when he enquired with mild gravity after the fate of the billiard table, he was not proceeding beyond a very allowable curiosity.

Consistency, however, matters as much as development. The change must not be too sudden, and an element of "cheerful selfishness," of wilful blindness, is therefore to be found in this very passage; Tom wishes heartily that Sir Thomas were "always as well disposed to give . . . [his thoughts]

but partial expression" (183). It is not until the double shock of his own illness and his sister's elopement that Tom is able to judge of "all the dangerous intimacy of his unjustifiable theatre" (462), but the earlier scene opens the possibility of such improved judgment.

Tom's deficiencies of perception are of functional use in affording a comparison with his brother's inadequacies in this sphere. Their blindness to Julia's misery, for example, differs in kind and in origin. Tom sees only what relates to the theatre; "Edmund, between his theatrical and his real part, between Miss Crawford's claims and his own conduct, between love and consistency, was equally unobservant" (163). But the causes of his blindness are much more complex, and he is at least trying to bring his perceptions to bear on matters of greater importance than entertainment.

Julia and Maria Bertram set off each other's vision in the same sort of way. At first their attitudes to the Crawfords are not differentiated.[12] Their initial response to Henry evolves into admiration in both sisters as follows:

> [Mary's] brother was not handsome; no, when they first saw him, he was absolutely plain, black and plain; but still he was the gentleman, with a pleasing address. The second meeting proved him not so very plain; he was plain, to be sure, but then he had so much countenance, and his teeth were so good, and he was so well made, that one soon forgot he was plain; and after a third interview, after dining in company with him at the parsonage, he was no longer allowed to be called so by any body. He was, in fact, the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known, and they were equally delighted with him. (44)

Here the sisters judge simply by the criteria of superficial

appearance, but the rendering of their early impressions of Henry Crawford shows their capacity for objective vision and therefore their culpability in allowing their perception of facts to be progressively modified. Fanny's observations are useful here, for she maintains a standard of accuracy against which the wilful errors of Maria and Julia can be measured; "she still continued to think Mr. Crawford very plain, in spite of her two cousins having repeatedly proved the contrary" (48). A little later Jane Austen underscores the blindness of Maria and Julia through their joint assessment of the value of certain qualities:

> [Mary Crawford's] merit in being gifted by nature with strength and courage was fully appreciated by the Miss Bertrams; her delight in riding was like their own; her early excellence in it was like their own, and they had great pleasure in praising it. (69)

By the end of the sentence the Miss Bertrams have not only shown the moral deficiency of an attitude totally opposed to what is acclaimed at the end of the novel - "the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (473) - they have also revealed that their judgments are self-centered as well as their perceptions superficial.

Differences between Julia and Maria begin to emerge when they become rivals for Henry Crawford. Julia's relatively simple errors of wilful blindness and wishful thinking are sustained by similar faults in others; she "might be justified" in believing herself Henry's favourite by "the

hints of Mrs. Grant, inclined to credit what she wished" (115). As long as her "dear, though irrational hope" persists (162), she cannot separate observation from emotion; and even when the truth has been forced upon her, her view of the relationship between Henry and Maria is coloured by feelings of self rather than by considerations of principle.

The interval between Julia's first acquaintance with Crawford and her rupture with him constitutes a "plateau" in her development as a character, for there is no change but only a logical realisation of the potential with which she has been endowed. Not until after Henry's snub (133-136) does Julia's situation allow her more scope for complexity. Until now she has only been motivated by her attraction to Henry Crawford and the self-fostered conviction of his preference for her, but from this point onwards she ceases to be a protagonist in the intrigue and is relegated to the role of observer. She sees that Crawford has never cared about her, and that Maria cares very much for him. But more than this, she realises the implications of what she sees. Henry's charm of manner now appears "treacherous play" (135), and Maria's conduct is "shameful towards herself, as well as towards Mr. Rushworth" (162). Julia's reactions, however, are emotional, not moral like Fanny's. Although she uses ethical terminology she is not judging by ethical standards. Julia resents the conduct of Henry and her sister because it injures herself, and vengefulness and

spite colour her perceptions for some time after the rebuff; she "could never see Maria distinguished by Henry Crawford, without trusting that it would create jealousy, and bring a public disturbance at last." Neither Maria nor Julia "had . . . affection or principle enough to make them merciful or just, to give them honour or compassion" (163), and their self-centered responses to the situation stand in sharp contrast to the disinterested clarity of Fanny's vision. Fanny, indeed, "since the day at Sotherton . . . could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure" (115). She is the only member of the family to realise Julia's pain and resentment on being slighted by Henry. They are, however, "two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny's consciousness" (163).

The case of Maria is very different, in spite of the fact that her viewpoint is closely associated with Julia's at first. Mary Crawford has been regarded as, at least in the author's intention, the anti-heroine of Mansfield Park;[13] but, though neither Mary nor Maria is judged favourably, it is Maria who best qualifies for this dubious position. Fanny, the true heroine, endures much agitation and many internal struggles, but her impulse is always towards the good. Mary Crawford, a protagonist figure preferred by many critics to Fanny herself,[14] experiences a conflict between superior and inferior values. For Maria Bertram, however, the area of decision is not the same.

Theoretically better conduct is possible to her, but the only choice really left open to one of her temperament and upbringing is between greater and lesser degrees of evil. When Henry Crawford appears on the scene Maria has already pledged herself to a marriage of convenience, dispensing with intelligence in Mr. Rushworth for the sake of his fortune. But the potential attraction of physical and social charms for Maria may be inferred even in connection with her fiancé. The deceptively casual, even cynical comment that "as there was nothing disagreeable in his figure or address, the young lady was well pleased with her conquest" (38), already implies that Maria may react more strongly when confronted with someone positively agreeable to her.

The first real differentiation between the viewpoints of Maria and Julia comes at the close of the passage in which the sisters' growing admiration of Mr. Crawford is portrayed through the dramatisation of their unified consciousness. Julia's final response is in a metaphor of mingled morality and materialism similar to that used shortly before to describe Maria's projected marriage (38-39); "Miss Bertram's engagement made him in equity the property of Julia, of which Julia was fully aware, and before he had been at Mansfield a week, she was quite ready to be fallen in love with." Her sister's more complex reaction is expressed in terms of a metaphor of vision; "Maria's notions on the subject were more confused and indistinct. She did

not want to see or understand" (44). Already, then, Maria emerges as more blameworthy than Julia; she deliberately avoids a correct assessment of the situation and of what her behaviour should be.

Now Jane Austen moves into Maria's consciousness, using free indirect speech[15] to preserve a sense of detachment from the ideas Maria expresses; "there could be no harm in her liking an agreeable man - every body knew her situation - Mr. Crawford must take care of himself" (44). Two significant things can be inferred from this snippet of internal monologue. First, it confirms Maria's culpable inclination to evade responsibility, this time by passing it to the very person who, as the event proves, is least willing to take it. Secondly, it shows that her infatuation with Henry Crawford has already begun. The whole future progress of the relationship between Henry and Maria is charted in miniature in the two pages that describe the beginning of their acquaintance. Maria's strong attraction to Henry, not counteracted by any sense of duty or decorum, is shown first. Then we see not only the trifling nature of Henry Crawford's intentions, but the low opinion of Maria's character which is evident in his cynically ironic evaluation of her engagement; "I am sure Miss Bertram is very much attached to Mr. Rushworth. I could see it in her eyes, when he was mentioned. I think too well of Miss Bertram to suppose she would ever give her hand without her heart" (45-46). Maria not only

suspends her own judgment, but thinks that others will do so too. She never seems to entertain the idea that Henry Crawford may (as a man of sense) be evaluating her on moral as well as physical grounds, that he may despise her blatant materialism. Maria has been brought up to think mercenary ambition natural and praiseworthy, and the conviction of her own perfection, of the power of superficial attractions, which Mrs. Norris has nurtured in her niece, is so forceful that she never feels any need to evaluate her conduct in terms of right and wrong.

If her engagement has exposed her to the criticism of the cynical Henry, it also attracts censure in Maria's own family circle. Edmund is "not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large income" (40), and he and his father both think (mistakenly, as it turns out) that her choice indicates a lack of strong feeling in Maria. What it really indicates is a lack of self-knowledge, for though she loves consequence, it is by no means the only thing that can satisfy her; she also has a "high spirit and strong passions" (464) which, unregulated by principle, become imperious in the end.

Just as Maria has no thought of being judged in terms of moral qualities, so she does not attempt to evaluate other people in this way. The rapid growth of her affection for Henry, and its lack of any rational basis (and it is not simply a question of unknown qualities; Henry is guilty of

the gravest impropriety towards Mr. Rushworth) are all part and parcel of infatuation, that "interesting mode of attachment" stigmatised as reprehensible in Pride and Prejudice (PP 279). Julia is blind about Mr. Crawford too, but Maria's blindness goes deeper than her sister's and is far more wilful.

The conflict in Maria is not (as in Mary Crawford) between worldliness and integrity, but between materialism and infatuation. Love of consequence has always been deeply rooted in Maria, and infatuation is a plant of recent growth; but by the time of the expedition to Sotherton it is already strong. The rivalry between the two sisters is now established, and the happiness of each depends largely on the share of Mr. Crawford's attentions meted out to her. But Miss Bertram has "two strings to her bow" (MP 81), and her love of material status, which depends on position and place rather than on any individual, must also be gratified at Sotherton:

> She had Rushworth-feelings, and Crawford-feelings, and in the vicinity of Sotherton, the former had considerable effect. Mr. Rushworth's consequence was hers. She could not tell Miss Crawford that "those woods belonged to Sotherton," she could not carelessly observe that "she believed it was now all Mr. Rushworth's property on each side of the road," without elation of heart; and it was a pleasure to increase with their approach to the capital freehold mansion, and ancient manorial residence of the family, with all its rights of Court-Leet and Court-Baron. (81-82)

One cannot fault the accuracy of Maria's perceptions on a material level. But the complacency which they suggest to her hinges on the fact that she visualises Mr. Rushworth's

possessions, Mr. Rushworth's status, but not Mr. Rushworth himself.

During the day at Sotherton Mr. Crawford's influence over Maria grows perceptibly. Her infatuation, sharpened by jealousy of Julia during the drive there, is fed by Henry's attentions at Sotherton itself. The balance between materialism and infatuation alters in favour of the latter, until the vista of property and consequence that gave Maria so much pleasure in the barouche becomes oppressive. From now onwards Maria abandons the slightest attempt at judgment. Even her early jealousy of Julia is lost sight of in "her conviction of being really the one preferred" (105), and she regards her engagement as nothing more than a formality which must continue until the situation can be clarified to her satisfaction. But just as the balance tips against Mr. Rushworth and his twelve thousand a year, Maria is faced with the very circumstance that must hasten her marriage - that must, at least, resolve a situation which has as yet shown no signs of resolving itself. This does not, however prevent Maria from shelving the problem, for she is one of those who shut "their eyes while they look, or their understanding while they reason" (107). When the parts for Lovers' Vows have been cast she simply deflects Mr. Rushworth's attention from the fact that she will be playing Agatha to Henry's Frederick by encouraging her fiancé to think of the figure he himself will cut:

> Mr. Rushworth liked the idea of his finery very well, though affecting to despise it, and was too much engaged with what his own appearance would be, to think of the others, or draw any of those conclusions, or feel any of that displeasure, which Maria had been half prepared for. (138)

But if Maria (as long as she takes the trouble to do so) can manipulate Mr. Rushworth because his perceptions are more limited than hers, she herself is manipulated by Henry Crawford; for Henry's mind, clouded by no obtrusive hopes or desires, is outside the range of her comprehension.

Maria's vision is so distorted by the influence of passion that not until Henry actually leaves Mansfield does she see the truth about their relationship. Jane Austen presents this moment of realisation obliquely, using Maria's own viewpoint as the medium of vision but maintaining a certain distance from a character with whose views she cannot be in sympathy:

> Maria saw with delight and agitation the introduction of the man she loved to her father. Her sensations were indefinable, and so were they a few minutes afterwards upon hearing Henry Crawford, who had a chair between herself and Tom, ask the latter in an under voice, whether there were any plan for resuming the play after the present happy interruption, (with a courteous glance at Sir Thomas,) because in that case, he should make a point of returning to Mansfield, at any time required by the party; he was going away immediately. (192)

But the unpleasant fact of her desertion by Henry Crawford has no "moral effect on the mind" of Maria (463). Her reaction is to replace it with another fact - the materially splendid alliance with Mr. Rushworth which she has herself recently adjudged the inferior of her two fancied alternatives. But no facts can force Maria to accept a reality

that does not conform to her own desires, and later, in spite of the marriage that makes the separation between Crawford and herself irrevocable, Maria is headstrong enough to sacrifice honour and fortune "under the idea of being really loved by a man who had long ago made his indifference clear" (454). She chooses, therefore, to leave the Mansfield Park circle and the "amiable and innocent enjoyments" which Sir Thomas has envisaged as possible for her within it (201), and the trend of her development is downwards.

In her desire to bend reality to suit herself Maria is matched only by Mrs. Norris, and her responsibility is greater than her aunt's in that she has a greater capacity for vision. In one sense, however, Mrs. Norris' responsibility is the greater, for she is in a position of guardianship. But, in Mansfield Park, all those who are supposed to guide the characters and supervise the behaviour of the young are blind in some degree or other, from Admiral and Mrs. Crawford, who are only talked about, to Sir Thomas Bertram himself. Lady Bertram, of course, is completely oblivious to the characters and conduct of her children, and even Sir Thomas, before leaving for Antigua, "could not think [her] quite equal to supply his place with [Maria and Julia], or rather to perform what should have been her own" (32). Mrs. Rushworth is very little superior to Lady Bertram in this respect. She sees only what concerns Mr. Rushworth, and even here her perceptions are so vitiated as to be quite

without value, for she is blind to all his defects. The narrowness of Mrs. Rushworth's vision is demonstrated by her reaction to what is, in Mrs. Norris' imagination at least, another burgeoning courtship. This is the dialogue between the two:

"It is quite delightful, ma'am, to see young people so properly happy, so well suited, and so much the thing! [as Maria and Mr. Rushworth] I cannot but think of dear Sir Thomas's delight. And what do you say, ma'am, to the chance of another match? Mr. Rushworth has set a good example, and such things are very catching."

Mrs. Rushworth, who saw nothing but her son, was quite at a loss. "The couple above, ma'am. Do you see no symptoms there?"

"Oh! dear - Miss Julia and Mr. Crawford. Yes, indeed, a very pretty match. What is his property?"

"Four thousand a year."

"Very well. - Those who have not more, must be satisfied with what they have. - Four thousand a year is a pretty estate, and he seems a very genteel, steady young man, so I hope Miss Julia will be very happy."

"It is not a settled thing, ma'am, yet. - We only speak of it among friends." (118)

It is notable that on Mrs. Rushworth's side of the dialogue all connections are absent; there is not even the appearance of a logical sequence of events that emerges in Mrs. Norris' words. The distinction between the blindness arising from wishful thinking and the blindness of stupidity and indifference is, in fact, neatly hit off in this conversation.

Mrs. Grant, at the parsonage, is clear-sighted enough about straightforward behavioural patterns. It is obvious that she thinks Maria is marrying for money (45), and her remarks on Sir Thomas Bertram's importance in his family circle - coming, too, not long before his unexpected return - give an extremely perceptive summary of what he has been in

the novel up to this point, and prepare for the stronger sense of his domestic influence that obtains in the rest of the book. But as soon as motives and relationships become more complex Mrs. Grant is in the dark; hence, for example, her certainty that Julia is not in love with Henry, "or she would not have flirted as she did . . . with Mr. Yates" (162).

Mrs. Grant's initial impressions are too little modified by changing circumstances. When the flirtation between Maria and Henry is at its height, she is still convinced that Maria "likes Sotherton too well to be inconstant" (162). Her failure to qualify her original opinion of Henry and Mary - a failure reinforced by her blind partiality towards them - is more serious. At first,

> Mrs. Grant received in those whom she hoped to love better than ever, a young man and woman of very prepossessing appearance. Mary Crawford was remarkably pretty; Henry though not handsome, had air and countenance; the manners of both were lively and pleasant, and Mrs. Grant immediately gave them credit for every thing else. (41-42)

This is very amiable, but not very discriminating; and the fact that Mrs. Grant continues to give Mary and Henry credit for virtues they do not have, and fails to see their actual defects, indicates severely limited powers of perception. Her blindness could not be more clearly expressed than by her warning Henry not to risk <u>his</u> tranquillity by too much admiration of Maria, or by her adjuring Mary not to give her brother a hint that both the Bertram sisters may be in love with him (161). Some responsibility attaches to Mrs.

Grant's inadequate perceptions, for, though Henry's ploys are beyond her discrimination, she cannot be justified in leading Julia astray solely on the basis of her own wishes (115). And when she is forced, by seeing Julia excluded from the play, to abandon this plan for her brother's happiness, she is easily convinced by Henry's "persuasive smile" that the feelings of neither have been wounded. Egoism is discernible here as well as gullibility; Mrs. Grant soon overcomes her disappointment "as it was not a matter which really involved her happiness" (161).

All these more or less defective guardian figures add depth to the theme of responsibility in judgment which is a major motif in Mansfield Park. But their defects pale almost into insignificance beside those of that travesty of a guardian figure, Mrs. Norris. In a sense Mrs. Norris is not a minor character, for she has a major function to perform in the novel. But she does nothing to expand Fanny's vision, and since she is not complex, shows no internal development, and is not portrayed in a complex way, it seems better to consider her along with minor figures of less forceful impact than to group her with major characters on whom the heroine can exercise her powers of vision and judgment.

Jane Austen takes pains to show that Mrs. Norris is genuinely deceived as to her own character:

> It was impossible for her to aim at more than the credit of projecting and arranging so expensive a charity [as the adoption of Fanny]; though perhaps she might so little know herself, as to walk home to the Parsonage after this conversation, in the happy belief of being the most liberal-minded sister and aunt in the world. (8-9)

Mrs. Norris' image of herself is couched in terms which indicate not only the falsity of the image but the inadequacy of her conception of moral qualities. Her opening speeches in particular (for here Jane Austen wants to discount the favourable effect of her having originated Fanny's adoption) are full of threadbare clichés: "I am sure I should be the last person in the world to withhold my mite upon such an occasion"; "I am a woman of few words and professions" (6); "with all my faults I have a warm heart"; "could I bear to see her want, while I had a bit of bread to give her?" (7)[16]

Similar clichés recur when Mrs. Norris is put on the defensive (the nearest she ever comes to attaining self-knowledge). After Mr. Norris' death her self-concept is threatened by the discrepancy between her own intentions and Sir Thomas' expectations in the matter of where Fanny is to live, and her language positively bristles with exaggerated and hackneyed figures of speech:

> "Here am I a poor desolate widow, deprived of the best of husbands, my health gone in attending and nursing him, my spirits still worse, all my peace in this world destroyed, with barely enough to support me in the rank of a gentlewoman, and enable me to live so as not to disgrace the memory of the dear departed."

Her insincerity is transparent. Every word in this speech

has already been, or is subsequently disproved. Yet there is no deliberate attempt to deceive. A remark made soon afterwards - "the most part of my future days will be spent in utter seclusion" (29) - gives the clue to her mental processes, for her obvious relish is not of the situation which her words purport to describe but of the word-picture itself.

If Mrs. Norris has no very clear view of her own duty, however, she can imagine what other people (particularly Sir Thomas, whose opinions she must always accomodate) may conceive this duty to be. She realises that it may be thought appropriate for her to offer Fanny a home after her husband's death, but

> Mrs. Norris had not the smallest intention of taking her. It had never occurred to her, on the present occasion, but as a thing to be carefully avoided. To prevent its being expected, she had fixed on the smallest habitation which could rank as genteel among the buildings of Mansfield parish.

Mrs. Norris' "precautions," including her "display of the importance of a spare-room" (28), are of course intended to create a certain image of the situation for Sir Thomas' benefit. But her anticipation of his probable views constitutes in itself a kind of picture impression which enables Mrs. Norris to evade reality; she is so much occupied in guessing at and circumventing her brother-in-law's expectations that she does not stop to consider their possible reasonableness.

Exaggerated figurative language is not, however, Mrs.

Norris' only resource when the safety of her favourable self-concept is threatened. She is also skilled in the use of another form of evasion - a simple change of subject. This is most evident when Sir Thomas remonstrates with her about the theatricals:

> Mrs. Norris was a little confounded, and as nearly being silenced as ever she had been in her life; for she was ashamed to confess having never seen any of the impropriety which was so glaring to Sir Thomas, and would not have admitted that her influence was insufficient, that she might have talked in vain. Her only resource was to get out of the subject as fast as possible, and turn the current of Sir Thomas's ideas into a happier channel. (188)

Self-centered and shallow as this reaction is, her undefined discontent with self, manifested on this and other occasions, rescues Mrs. Norris from the status of a caricature. A sense of the inadequacy of her own image is revealed in Mrs. Norris' attempts to bring her conduct into alignment with the demands of particular situations; at Maria's wedding, for example, she "tried to cry" (203). But her conception of what such situations demand is so superficial that it cannot lead to any internal change. Until Maria's elopement her comprehension of events is limited to the figure she will make in them, a fact brought out by her eagerness to be first with the news of either Sir Thomas' death or homecoming. Her exclusive concern with surface is aptly expressed in the words "she was vexed by the manner of his return" (180).

Her ignorance of her own character makes it impossible that Mrs. Norris should have an accurate view of other

people or a clear understanding of moral truths. Sir Thomas, indeed, has been gravely mistaken in confusing his sister-in-law's "watchful attention" (32) with judgment and care, for her watchfulness is directed towards trivia. At the time of the theatricals she is

> too busy in contriving and directing the general little matters of the company, superintending their various dresses with economical expedient, for which nobody thanked her, and saving, with delighted integrity, half-a-crown here and there to the absent Sir Thomas, to have leisure for watching the behaviour, or guarding the happiness of his daughters. (163)

Her knowledge of the characters of those daughters is inevitably small. "The blindness of her affection" (463) for her nieces is particularly obvious - and particularly dangerous - in relation to "her first favourite," 'Maria (448). "Maria was indeed the pride and delight of them all - perfectly faultless - an angel," she intimates to Mrs. Rushworth (39), and at the impromptu dance at Mansfield she praises her favourite niece in terms which are deeply ironic in view of subsequent events; "dear Maria has such a strict sense of propriety, so much of that true delicacy which one seldom meets with now-a-days, Mrs. Rushworth, that wish of avoiding particularity!" (117)

Even the empirical facts of situation cannot open Mrs. Norris' eyes to the defects of those around her. "In the blindness of her anger" she blames Fanny for Maria's elopement (448). Maria is simply "unfortunate" (465), and Mrs. Norris' attachment "seemed to augment with the demerits

of her niece" (464). Her refusal to accept Sir Thomas' reasons for excluding Maria from Mansfield shows her failure to grasp the principles that have been violated, and the fact that she "persisted in placing his scruples to [Fanny's] account" (465) indicates something more - that Mrs. Norris is incapable of understanding principles at all, and reacts only (and inaccurately) in terms of personalities.

Blind herself, Mrs. Norris tries to distort reality for others, though she does not always succeed; "no representation of his aunt's could induce [Edmund] to find Mr. Rushworth a desirable companion" (40). But Maria and Julia are deeply affected by their aunt, who "served to strengthen them in believing they had no faults" (35), and Mrs. Norris is a major causal element in the moral catastrophe.[17] Her degree of success in blinding Sir Thomas Bertram to her own deficiencies is more surprising. Mrs. Norris exerts her greatest influence over him, however, in the early chapters, where he is a dignified guardian figure rather than the complex character into which he evolves in the course of the novel. Sir Thomas seems extremely imperceptive at the beginning of Mansfield Park; in retrospect it is hinted that he has always distrusted Mrs. Norris' influence on his children (463), but no suggestion of this appears before his journey to Antigua. On the point of departure he even equates her with Edmund as a substitute for himself; "in Mrs. Norris's watchful attention, and in Edmund's judgment, he had sufficient confidence to make him go without fears for [his

daughters'] conduct" (32). But after his return Sir Thomas begins to view Mrs. Norris less favourably, and by the end of the novel his attitude to her has undergone a complete change. The process of transformation is summed up as follows:

> His opinion of [Mrs. Norris] had been sinking from the day of his return from Antigua; in every transaction together from that period, in their daily intercourse, in business, or in chat, she had been regularly losing ground in his esteem, and convincing him that either time had done her much disservice, or that he had considerably over-rated her sense, and wonderfully borne with her manners before. He had felt her as an hourly evil, which was so much the worse, as there seemed no chance of its ceasing but with life; she seemed a part of himself, that must be borne for ever. (465-466)

His increasing disappointment in his sister-in-law is one measure of the development of Sir Thomas' vision.

Fanny and the Major Characters

It has often been affirmed that the accuracy of Fanny's vision makes it difficult to put her across as a character in her own right.[18] But in fact Fanny's vision develops throughout the novel, for she modifies her manner of seeing and learns to make her vision effective in practical terms. And although her judgments are consistently based on the principles of duty and integrity taught by Edmund to a child already desirous of doing right (17), Fanny becomes progressively more independent of the guidance of others, and her character therefore progressively

stronger, in the course of Mansfield Park. In this section I propose to concentrate on the vision and judgment of Fanny in the roughly chronological order in which they develop; the judgments of other major characters will be considered as they come up in relation to that of the heroine.

The development of Fanny's vision is a gradual, internal process; consistency, always a hallmark of characterisation in Jane Austen, is so much a feature of the heroine of Mansfield Park that only the most delicate discriminations reveal the evolution that is taking place. Her childhood at Mansfield constitutes a preliminary phase of her development, establishing the heroine's early position in the household the influences that operate on her mind. As yet Fanny's viewpoint is given only intermittently, where it has a bearing on our subsequent understanding of her situation and character. Her timidity, for example, is one of the first traits to emerge; "Fanny, whether near or from her cousins, whether in the school-room, the drawing-room, or the shrubbery, was equally forlorn, finding something to fear in every person and place" (14). Where the direction of Fanny's feelings is indicated, of course, this must be through her point of view; "she felt that she had a friend, and the kindness of her cousin Edmund gave her better spirits with every body else" (17). But she is not yet the medium of vision, and in general she passes for insignificant with others:

> Though there might not be much in her first appearance to captivate, there was, at least, nothing to disgust her relations. She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice. (12)

Maria and Julia "could not but hold her cheap on finding that she had but two sashes, and had never learnt French" (14), and as for Sir Thomas Bertram and Mrs. Norris, "it was pretty soon decided between them, that though far from clever, she showed a tractable disposition, and seemed likely to give them little trouble" (18).

There is, nonetheless, a hint of the possibility of something better; "her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke, her countenance was pretty" (12). But among the Bertrams only Edmund, as a result of her confidences (15-17), glimpses her potential; "her cousin began to find her an interesting object. He talked to her more, and from all that she said, was convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right" (16-17). Edmund's counsels assist Fanny to settle down in her new home, and guide the development of her mind (22). Edmund is, furthermore, her confidant in every crisis during this period of Fanny's immaturity, and his frequent service in reconciling her to things she dislikes (25) is of the utmost importance in preparing her to endure difficulties later on. But their discussion of the plan to remove Fanny to the White House, while it defines Edmund's role as mentor to his cousin, indicates for the first time the limitation of vision in Edmund which will

eventually cause a reversal of their roles. He sees his aunt's avarice - "I am glad her love of money does not interfere" - but his conception of her attitude to Fanny can only be termed naive; "I can say nothing for her manner to you as a child; but it was the same with us all, or nearly so. . . . But you are now of an age to be treated better; I think she is behaving better already" (26). Edmund can see how people ought to behave, but his understanding of principles does not give him any insight into character. It is difficult for him to penetrate the simplest kind of façade, for he fails to suspect its existence; even of Fanny, whom he has known since childhood and in whom principles and behaviour coincide, he understands only so much as she chooses to confide in him. One sentence in particular is significant in view of the future course of their relationship. "I cannot see things as you do," says Fanny to Edmund, "but I ought to believe you to be right rather than myself" (27). This divergence from Edmund's view, coupled with a continuing deference for his judgment, is echoed some time later in connection with Mr. Crawford. When her hint of the flirtation between Maria and Henry is brushed aside by her cousin,

> Fanny supposed she must have been mistaken, and meant to think differently in future; but with all that submission to Edmund could do, and all the help of the coinciding looks and hints she occasionally noticed in some of the others . . . she knew not always what to think. (116)

Here the divergence of views is greater, the deference for Edmund's judgment less marked, in spite of her evident admiration for him.

From the time of Sir Thomas' departure for Antigua, Fanny's vision becomes noticeably more independent. This is partly because the absence of a guardian figure allows harmful influences to operate at Mansfield; the Crawfords arrive, and Mrs. Norris is given free play. Fanny, powerless as she is, senses that the situation requires watching - especially as even Edmund appears blind to its dangers. Outwardly there is no change in her position, and her insignificance in the family circle is emphasised by Miss Crawford's inquiry whether she is out or not (48-51). Jane Austen herself draws attention to Fanny's unimportance; "and Fanny, what was she doing and thinking all this while? and what was her opinion of the new-comers? Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called on to speak their opinion than Fanny" (48). The very abruptness of the comment, constituting as it does a complete change of tack, is enough to ensure the impact of the suggestion that, while Fanny's viewpoint goes for nothing at Mansfield, the heroine will be important to author and reader as a medium of observation.

Fanny's emancipation from the tutelage of Edmund occurs early in this phase of her development. In their first conversation about Mary Crawford, Edmund is still guiding his young cousin in the analysis of what ought or ought not to be pleasing in Mary's behaviour. But this is the last time he speaks with an authority that can be respected, except when duty and principle are the topics of conversation. Jane Austen signals the change at the end of

this very interview:

> Having formed [Fanny's] mind and gained her affections, [Edmund] had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject, there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow. (64)

The stress on "this period" marks the point of departure for Fanny, and the phrase "on this subject" does not localise the change, though it appears to do so for the moment; Edmund's vision is obstructed and his judgment vitiated for much of Mansfield Park by the irrational attachment to Mary which is now taking root in him.

Edmund's aberrations, however, give Fanny a chance to demonstrate that her own good judgment does not depend on his continued help:

> She was a little surprised that he could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed, and of which she was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in her company; but so it was. (66)

This passage, and many others like it, show the consistency of Fanny's vision - a consistency which does not preclude development but gives it a more stable basis.

The development soon manifests itself. At first, dependable though Fanny's vision is, it is somewhat limited in scope by the intensity of her personal feelings. Her reservations about Mary's style of conversation are heightened by resentment on William's account (64), for Miss Crawford jokingly disparages brotherly letters (59). Edmund

sets Fanny right here, but the same tendency persists when he has ceased to be her advisor. There are several indications that Fanny's pleasure in doing and seeing things depends to a considerable degree on whether or not her cousin participates in them, and this is an effective way of making her love for Edmund carry conviction. "If Edmund were not there to mix the wine and water for her, [she] would rather go without it than not" (66); "her own satisfaction in seeing Sotherton would be nothing without him" (79); "in observing the appearance of the country . . . she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt" (80). At this early stage feeling and imagination have much to do with Fanny's vision of Edmund. This is very clear when she watches him teaching Mary to ride:

> She could not turn her eyes from the meadow, she could not help watching all that passed. At first Miss Crawford and her companion made the circuit of the field, which was not small, at a foot's pace; then, at her apparent suggestion, they rose into a canter; and to Fanny's timid nature it was most astonishing to see how well she sat. After a few minutes, they stopt entirely, Edmund was close to her, he was speaking to her, he was evidently directing her management of the bridle, he had hold of her hand; she saw it, or the imagination supplied what the eye could not reach. She must not wonder at all this; what could be more natural than that Edmund should be making himself useful, and proving his good-nature by any one? She could not but think indeed that Mr. Crawford might as well have saved him the trouble; that it would have been particularly proper and becoming in a brother to have done it himself; but Mr. Crawford, with all his boasted good-nature, and all his coachmanship, probably knew nothing of the matter, and had no active kindness in comparison of Edmund. She began to think it rather hard upon the mare to have such double duty; if she were forgotten the poor mare should be remembered. (67-68)

All the observations necessary to an understanding of the burgeoning infatuation between Mary and Edmund are here, but they are not neutral in character - and they are all the more convincing for not being neutral. Fanny's emotional reaction gives intensity to what she sees; the very pace of the narrative speeds up when she watches Edmund guiding Mary, and notices, or imagines, that he is holding her hand. In the second half of the passage observation tails off entirely as Fanny tries (not altogether successfully) to organise her emotions, and towards the end her judgment is obviously impaired by her personal interest in what she has seen; it is highly unlikely, for example, that Jane Austen endorses or even believes in Fanny's solicitude about the mare.

This is all part of an identity crisis for Fanny. Her jealous feelings, and her rationalisations of them, are very human, and must dispel any notion that she is a characterless heroine. But if her vision and judgment were to remain on this level she would be useless as a medium of observation later on, and incapable of the gradual but significant engagement in the action of the novel which begins during the theatricals and steadily increases from that time onwards. The issue at the moment is whether or not Fanny can stand on her own feet after Edmund's support has virtually been withdrawn,[19] and here it is worth pausing to consider Fanny's situation in the Bertram family up to this

point. As a child she was just as insignificant as she is now, but "she felt that she had a friend" (17), and a friend to whom she could look for guidance. But when the Crawfords arrive Fanny not only loses much of Edmund's attention but is forced to recognise the shortcomings of his judgment, vitiated by his infatuation for Mary. Yet she proves able to gain objectivity of vision without becoming embittered, and thus she can achieve the purpose which she defines for herself later in the novel; "she would endeavour to be rational, and to reserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford's character and the privilege of true solicitude for [Edmund] by a sound intellect and an honest heart" (265).

Mary Crawford represents the supreme threat to Fanny, a threat in comparison with which Henry's courtship is a mere annoyance; "if she could have believed Mary's future fate as unconnected with Mansfield, as she was determined the brother's should be . . . she would have been light of heart indeed" (366). She sees Miss Crawford as a danger to Edmund's integrity; "God grant that her influence do not make him cease to be respectable!" (424) And, although Fanny tries "to overcome all that was excessive" in her love for Edmund (264), there can be little doubt that, consciously or otherwise, she is afraid of losing him to Mary and therefore watches her rival closely.

In another respect, too, Mary has an important bearing on Fanny's vision, for a comparison is instituted between

them which helps define the attitudes of both. At first Edmund is involved in the comparison, and on Fanny's side. When improvements are under discussion at Mansfield, Edmund, Mary and Fanny take up their own branch of the conversation. Edmund begins:

> "Had I a place to new fashion, I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired progressively. I would rather abide by my own blunders than by his." (56)

Fanny, too, feels that it would be "delightful . . . to see the progress of it all," though she does not endorse her cousin's willingness to accept, if necessary, "an inferior degree of beauty." But Mary Crawford is not interested in growth and development,[20] and the superficiality of her approach is brought out the more strongly because she talks in terms of buying, not building:

> "I have no eye or ingenuity for such matters, but as they are before me; and had I a place of my own in the country, I should be most thankful to any Mr. Repton who would undertake it, and give me as much beauty as he could for my money; and I should never look at it, till it was complete." (57)

During the drive to Sotherton the comparison between Fanny and Mary is continued on a different level, and this time Edmund is not directly involved:

> [Fanny's] own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt. That was the only point of resemblance between her and the lady who sat by her; in every thing but a value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature,

> inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively. In looking back after Edmund, however, when there was any stretch of road behind them, or when he gained on them in ascending a considerable hill, they were united, and a "there he is" broke at the same moment from them both, more than once. (80-81)

The use of omniscient narration makes it very evident that the comparison is weighted in Fanny's favour, and at first sight the assumption that an interest in inanimate nature is inherently superior to a preference for men and women seems a very clumsy attempt to establish Fanny's superiority.[21] But Jane Austen is using the comparison to demonstrate Fanny's intense inward life as contrasted with the superficiality of Mary Crawford, who requires entertainment, not opportunities for observation or reflection.[22] If she is aware of the risks she runs, Jane Austen may feel that time will in any case prove Fanny to be a far more astute, interested observer of men and women than Mary Crawford.

The resemblance between Fanny and Mary in the object of their affection, and in their outward behaviour, does not draw the two together. They have been so clearly differentiated before that the final likeness comes as a shock, and only serves to accentuate the different means by which they have arrived (temporarily) at unison. And as they approach Sotherton a more striking point of contrast between Mary and Fanny emerges, for Mary brings her sympathy to bear on another's thoughts and feelings in a manner which demonstrates beyond a doubt the warped basis of her judgment;

"Miss Crawford was not slow to admire [Mr. Rushworth's property]; she pretty well guessed Miss Bertram's feelings, and made it a point of honour to promote her enjoyment to the utmost" (82). Once arrived at Sotherton still more radical differences between the heroine and Mary Crawford become apparent. The discussions of the clergy which begin in the chapel at Sotherton reveal the moral gulf between Edmund and Fanny on one hand and Mary Crawford on the other; and though Fanny gradually fades out of the conversation we are conscious that her opinion accords with Edmund's. The accent, however, is no longer on a comparison between Fanny and Mary. The disparity of views between Mary and Edmund is much more the point at issue, and though over the whole series of discussions it is impossible not to be struck by the differences of attitude between Mary and the heroine, it is Fanny's cognisance of the moral impasse that exists between her cousin and Miss Crawford which is stressed as far as she is concerned.

The trip to Sotherton is Fanny's first social engagement. Yet paradoxically she is most isolated at this time, for even Edmund virtually ignores her as the day wears on. At Sotherton Fanny is relegated by the other characters to a more passive role than she has ever occupied before, or will ever occupy again. Her efforts to influence others are unsuccessful except in the case of the weakest character,

Mr. Rushworth; "she [is] more successful in sending away, than in retaining a companion" (103). Fanny is, furthermore, excluded from all the developing relationships she observes, except for the "connection [of] imaginative sympathy"[23] that comes from her alone.

But, if the other characters ignore Fanny, the reader is never allowed to lose sight of her feelings, from her "anxious desire" to hear Edmund and Mary coming back (97) to her general dissatisfaction with the day (104). Sometimes, indeed, the reader knows more about Fanny's feelings than she does herself; "the sort of curiosity she felt, to know what [Edmund and Mary] had been conversing about" (103) can easily be interpreted as jealousy. But Fanny's emotions do not affect the reader's judgment of the episode, though she is the medium of observation. The reader senses, for example, her disapproval of Maria's escape round the iron gate, but he is impressed by the situation rather than by Fanny's emotional response to it. The heroine's field of vision has never been so wide, nor her judgment, in spite of intense private feelings, so detached - and far from being guided by Edmund in her observations, Fanny has seen things to which he is blind, and which she will not be able to discuss with him afterwards. The posture of affairs between the two Miss Bertrams, Mr. Crawford and Mr. Rushworth, when the expedition is almost over, is clearly rendered through Fanny's eyes:

> It was late before the Miss Bertrams and the two gentlemen came in, and their ramble did not appear to have been more than partially agreeable, or at all productive of any thing useful with regard to the object of the day. By their own accounts they had been all walking after each other, and the junction which had taken place at last seemed, to Fanny's observation, to have been as much too late for re-establishing harmony, as it confessedly had been for determining on any alteration. She felt, as she looked at Julia and Mr. Rushworth, that her's was not the only dissatisfied bosom amongst them; there was gloom on the face of each. Mr. Crawford and Miss Bertram were much more gay, and she thought that he was taking particular pains, during dinner, to do away any little resentment of the other two, and restore general good humour. (104)

In spite of Fanny's growing independence of vision she is still not entirely free of her attitude of discipleship towards Edmund. The habit of going to him for guidance has still to be broken:

> Had her confidence in her own judgment been equal to her exercise of it in every other respect, had she been sure that she was seeing clearly, and judging candidly, she would probably have made some important communications to her usual confidant. As it was, however, she only hazarded a hint, and the hint was lost. (115)

But, though "Fanny supposed she must have been mistaken, and meant to think differently in future" (116), her autonomy of vision is now too marked for her to be able to cling to former habits of dependence. She is, in short, growing towards maturity through the exercise of her own vision and judgment.

Once Fanny has been established as a reliable and independent observer she gradually becomes more closely integrated into the action of the novel. Her personal feelings now come more fully into play, though they neither blind her to the feelings of others nor distort the

impressions transmitted to the reader through her means. The "her's was not the only dissatisfied bosom amongst them" pattern found at Sotherton (104) occurs again in her observation of Julia; "Fanny's heart was not absolutely the only saddened one amongst them, as she soon began to acknowledge herself. - Julia was a sufferer too, though not quite so blamelessly" (160).

While Lovers' Vows is being rehearsed Fanny has, at least temporarily or partially, the concurrence of Edmund in her feelings and judgments, so that she is not alone as she was at Sotherton. It is during this period, nevertheless, that Fanny first achieves independence of vision. To begin with, the defence of good judgment devolves on Edmund; Fanny's position in relation to him is her childhood one of submissive agreement. "She could hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in; and longed to have them roused as soon as possible by the remonstrance which Edmund would certainly make" (137). When Edmund does express his disapproval (139-141) Fanny takes no part in the scene beyond extending her silent sympathy to her cousin.

Fanny's first positive engagement in the action of the novel comes when she is asked to take the part of Cottager's wife. She is needed for visual effect, and a metaphor of vision is used to suggest her reluctance to enter the limelight:

"It is a nothing of a part, a mere nothing, not above half a dozen speeches altogether, and it will not much signify if nobody hears a word you say, so you may be as creepmouse as you like, but we must have you to look at."

"If you are afraid of half a dozen speeches," cried Mr. Rushworth, "what would you do with such a part as mine? I have forty-two to learn."

"It is not that I am afraid of learning by heart," said Fanny, shocked to find herself at that moment the only speaker in the room, and to feel that almost every eye was upon her; "but I really cannot act." (145-146)

Edmund, on this occasion, lends her no more than tacit support:

"You must excuse me, indeed you must excuse me," cried Fanny, growing more and more red from excessive agitation, and looking distressfully at Edmund, who was kindly observing her, but unwilling to exasperate his brother by interference, gave her only an encouraging smile. (146)

When he does intervene to protect her from Mrs. Norris his words reinforce the idea of Fanny's independence; "let her choose for herself as well as the rest of us. - Her judgment may be quite as safely trusted" (147).

In the next chapter Edmund concedes that Fanny's judgment is more to be trusted than his own, for he comes to ask her advice. The significance of this action is brought out the more strongly because Fanny has just been going over the matter in her own mind. Again she begins with a sense of reliance on her cousin's opinion, but now her attitude is gently ironised by the author to show that it has less foundation in reality than before; her retreat to the east room[24] is not only "to see if by looking at Edmund's profile she could catch any of his counsel," but "to see if . . . by giving air to her geraniums she might inhale a breeze of

mental strength herself" (152). In the interior monologue that follows Fanny's increasing independence is marked, in spite or perhaps because of the acute anxiety which permeates her thinking:

> She had more than fears of her own perseverance to remove; she had begun to feel undecided as to what she ought to do; and as she walked round the room her doubts were increasing. Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for? what might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance, had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature - selfishness - and a fear of exposing herself? And would Edmund's judgment, would his persuasion of Sir Thomas's disapprobation of the whole, be enough to justify her in a determined denial in spite of all the rest? It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples. (152-153)

Of course Fanny is over-reacting here, but she is nevertheless trying to apply the principles that regulate her life to the problem with which she is confronted.

At the conclusion of this passage Fanny's emancipation from Edmund is completed by the final, ironic reversal of their roles:

> A tap at the door roused her in the midst of this attempt to find her way to her duty, and her gentle "come in," was answered by the appearance of one, before whom all her doubts were wont to be laid. Her eyes brightened at the sight of Edmund.
>
> "Can I speak with you, Fanny, for a few minutes?" said he. "I want to consult. I want your opinion." (153)

From this time onwards it is Fanny who receives confidences and dispenses counsel, but Edmund does not attend to her advice as she has hitherto attended to his. Edmund, at this stage of the novel, is in the difficult position of trying to reconcile irrational impulses (stemming largely from his

infatuation for Mary Crawford) with the dictates of principle. What he wants is not so much guidance as endorsement; "I see your judgment is not with me. Think it a little over" (154). And then he talks himself, if not Fanny, into agreeing with his plan to act. But though he says he is not comfortable without Fanny's approbabion (155) he makes do with something less; his natural imperceptiveness is heightened by his emotional involvement with Mary, so that he can ignore a disapproval which is not made explicit. Throughout their subsequent relationship, in fact, Edmund's respect for Fanny's judgment never leads to any illumination of his own errors - and indeed it is impossible for her to disillusion him about Mary Crawford. Fanny herself says much later, "he is blinded, and nothing will open his eyes, nothing can, after having had truths before him so long in vain" (424); it takes the irrefutable evidence of Mary's cynical reaction to the elopement to convince Edmund that "it had been the creature of [his] own imagination, not Miss Crawford, that [he] had been too apt to dwell on for many months past" (458).

Edmund's formative influence on Fanny ends with her childhood. As a young woman, her self-reliance is confirmed as she learns not to depend on her cousin's help, and her vision becomes more objective as she is forced to recognise Edmund's deficiencies. Edmund consults Fanny as a direct result of that recognition of her strength of character

induced by her refusal to take part in Lover's Vows. Fanny's stand over the play involves what Walcutt describes as the key area of character development, decision-making.[25] But this is only one stage (though an important one) in the achievement of that firmness which will later enable her to resist the pressure to marry Henry Crawford. Immediately after her refusal to act Fanny feels threatened and uncertain of her ability to hold out (150, 157), and her self-doubts are only submerged in the greater anguish resulting from Edmund's unsteady behaviour. In any case she does not reject the theatre entirely; she watches the actors, listens to their complaints, prompts them in their speeches and helps sew their costumes. These are minor matters, but only the accident of Sir Thomas' unexpected return saves her from the more serious compromise of reading a part, and thereby forfeiting some of the increased strength she has developed through adhering to her principles.[26] Fanny still needs the support of her uncle's standards and her uncle's firmness of character, inadequate as these props may prove to be in the long run.

Maria and Julia leave home soon after their father's return from Antigua, and Fanny,

> becoming as she then did, the only young woman in the drawing-room, the only occupier of that interesting division of a family in which she had hitherto held so humble a third, it was impossible for her not to be more looked at, more thought of and attended to, than she had ever been before; and "where

is Fanny?" became no uncommon question, even without her being wanted for any one's convenience. (205)

Fanny's new prominence results from the absence of her cousins, but it is nevertheless part of the steady progress to the forefront that began with her refusal to act. Another landmark in Fanny's advancement at Mansfield is her dinner engagement at the Parsonage. From being "so humble a third" (205) she has now graduated to being "the principal lady in company," with "all the little distinctions consequent thereon" (223). The occasion is made all the more significant by the unexpected presence of Henry Crawford, who, like Sir Thomas, is to play a part in establishing Fanny as a character of interest in her own right.[27] In the course of this engagement Fanny, as "principal lady," receives her first attentions from Mr. Crawford. She also gives her first reproof - tangible evidence that vision and responsibility are now actively joined in her. The reproof (for wishing Sir Thomas' return had been delayed) so strikes Henry that he begins to find Fanny a fascinating person, and he tells his sister so next morning:

"I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her, I could not tell what she would be at yesterday. What is her character? - Is she solemn? - Is she queer? - Is she prudish? - Why did she draw back and look so grave at me? I could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my life - trying to entertain her - and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, 'I will not like you, I am determined not to like you,' and I say, she shall." (230)

But Henry's plan for a casual flirtation is modified by his observation of Fanny, for there is more to perceive in her than he has expected. The love between Fanny and William, in particular, constitutes "a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value" (235), and he becomes so interested in the heroine that he prolongs his stay at Mansfield.

Henry, "thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example" (115), has always exercised his perceptions within the narrow range necessary for dalliance and pleasure, and not until he begins to watch Fanny does he develop an appreciation of moral qualities. The progress he makes is indicated by his praise of Fanny to Mary, when interest has turned into love:

> Fanny's beauty of face and figure, Fanny's graces of manner and goodness of heart were the exhaustless theme. The gentleness, modesty, and sweetness of her character were warmly expatiated on. . . . Her temper he had good reason to depend on and praise. He had often seen it tried. . . . Her affections were evidently strong. To see her with her brother! . . . Then, her understanding was beyond every suspicion, quick and clear; and her manners were the mirror of her own modest and elegant mind. Nor was this all. Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of [the] good principles [he had discerned in Fanny], though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name. (294)

It is notable that Henry works up from beauty to high principles in ascending order of importance, advancing proofs of Fanny's good qualities where possible.

Fanny unwittingly promotes the development of Henry's vision, but Henry cannot be said to influence hers, except

in the sense that he enlarges its scope by providing her with unusual material to observe. He does, however, modify the reader's view of Fanny, for his observations help to establish her as a character worth looking at as well as listening to, a character who cannot be considered a mere embodiment of the authorial consciousness. The following passage, in which commentary on Fanny's appearance blends with commentary on her character, illustrates this clearly:

> "Had you seen her this morning . . . attending with such ineffable sweetness and patience, to all the demands of her aunt's stupidity, working with her, and for her, her colour beautifully heightened as she leant over the work, then returning to her seat to finish a note which she was previously engaged in writing for that stupid woman's service, and all this with such unpretending gentleness, so much as if it were a matter of course that she was not to have a moment at her own command, her hair arranged as neatly as it always is, and one little curl falling forward as she wrote, which she now and then shook back, and in the midst of all this, still speaking at intervals to me, or listening, and as if she liked to listen to what I said. Had you seen her so . . . you would not have implied the possibility of her power over my heart ever ceasing." (296-297)

Henry not only gives the reader a more vivid impression of Fanny but stimulates Sir Thomas Bertram's observation of his niece, for Sir Thomas quickly becomes aware that Henry admires her. From the time of his return from Antigua Sir Thomas has taken greater notice of Fanny, and his attention in looking at her under the light on the evening of his arrival is one of the incidents which mark Fanny's rise to prominence at Mansfield. Fanny, in her turn, observes her uncle; and when after discovering the theatre, Sir Thomas uses the language of the eyes to reproach his children,

Fanny is so intensely concerned with what passes that his reproofs are interpreted partly through her means:

> screened from notice herself, [Fanny] saw all that was passing before her. Such a look of reproach at Edmund from his father she could never have expected to witness; and to feel that it was in any degree deserved, was an aggravation indeed. . . . She knelt in spirit to her uncle, and her bosom swelled to utter, "Oh! not to <u>him</u>. Look so to all the others, but not to <u>him</u>!" (185)

The extravagance of the last sentence may well be due to the fact that Fanny is as yet exercising observation without responsibility (her decision not to act affects no-one but herself, and cuts her off from any real involvement with the people she is watching), and so her sensibility is often forced into emotion disproportionate to its cause. The effect of this scene derives principally from Sir Thomas Bertram, who (under cover, amusingly enough, of the imperceptive Mr. Yates) makes a more eloquent use of nonverbal communication than any other character in Mansfield Park:

> Mr. Yates . . . immediately gave Sir Thomas an account of what they had done and were doing . . . relating every thing with so blind an interest as made him not only totally unconscious of the uneasy movements of many of his friends as they sat, the change of countenance, the fidget, the hem! of unquietness, but prevented him even from seeing the expression of the face on which his own eyes were fixed - from seeing Sir Thomas's dark brow contract as he looked with inquiring earnestness at his daughters and Edmund, dwelling particularly on the latter, and speaking a language, a remonstrance, a reproof, which <u>he</u> felt at his heart. (184-185)

This occasion marks a development of Sir Thomas' vision, for it is now that he is first disillusioned by his family; and, "try to lose the disagreeable impression" as he will, Sir Thomas has at least been warned that all may not be well at

Mansfield. The incident has also a bearing on his opinion of Fanny, for Edmund later informs him that she is "the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent" (187).

The departure of Maria and Julia contributes to Sir Thomas' increased awareness of Fanny, and when William Price comes to Mansfield Sir Thomas, like Edmund and Henry, remarks the affectionate relationship between brother and sister with satisfaction. But his increasingly close observation of Fanny from this point onwards depends on his perception of Henry's interest in her. The idea that Henry admires his niece is confirmed at the Mansfield ball, scene of an interplay of looks that eclipses even the memorable night at Netherfield, in Pride and Prejudice, when much was communicated by means of the eyes. The Mansfield ball is pivotal in the presentation of Fanny, for it establishes her importance in the eyes of other characters and confirms her as protagonist as well as observer in the novel. "An interesting object" to Sir Thomas before the dancing begins (272), she is generally admired in the ballroom:

> Young, pretty, and gentle . . . she had no awkwardnesses that were not as good as graces, and there were few persons present that were not disposed to praise her. She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas's niece, and she was soon said to be admired by Mr. Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour. (276)

Mr. Crawford pays her attention of a more particular kind. His request for a dance is opportune, but

there was a pointedness in his manner of asking her, which she did not like, and she saw his eye glancing for a moment at her necklace - with a smile - she thought there was a smile - which made her blush and feel wretched. And though there was no second glance to disturb her, though his object seemed then to be only quietly agreeable, she could not get the better of her embarrassment, heightened as it was by the idea of his perceiving it, and had no composure till he turned away to some one else. (274)

Fanny's distress is increased by Mary:

She found herself . . . near Miss Crawford, whose eyes and smiles were immediately and more unequivocally directed as her brother's had been, and who was beginning to speak on the subject, when Fanny, anxious to get the story over, hastened to give the explanation of the second necklace - the real chain. Miss Crawford listened; and all her intended compliments and insinuations to Fanny were forgotten; she felt only one thing; and her eyes, bright as they had been before, shewing they could yet be brighter, she exclaimed with eager pleasure, "Did he? Did Edmund? That was like himself. No other man would have thought of it. I honour him beyond expression." And she looked around as if longing to tell him so. (274-275)

On the whole, however, the ball would have begun well for Fanny, "could she have kept her eyes from wandering between Edmund and Mary Crawford. She looked all loveliness - and what might not be the end of it?" (273-274) But later she is reassured even on this score, for Edmund and Mary argue about the church, and Fanny, "not able to refrain entirely from observing them, had seen enough to be tolerably satisfied" (279).

The most agreeable, if not the most accurate observations are undoubtedly those made by Sir Thomas, who instigated the ball. Proud of Fanny, he watches her progress down the dance "with much complacency" (276), and feels still greater pleasure on being convinced that "the suspicions

whence, he must confess to himself, this very ball had in great measure sprung, were well founded. Mr. Crawford was in love with Fanny" (280).

But Sir Thomas, in his "pleasing anticipation of what would be" (280), has made the mistake of taking Fanny's response for granted. From the time of his return to Mansfield he has gained new insights into those around him; he regards Fanny with heightened interest and esteem, and perceives hitherto unsuspected defects in Maria and Mrs. Norris. Sir Thomas has seen nothing, however, which cannot be reconciled with the views on morals and on human nature which he has always held. He is able to "rest satisfied with the conviction that where the present pleasure of those [Mrs. Norris] loved was at stake, her kindness did sometimes overpower her judgment" (190), and he not only finds arguments to support Maria's marriage but is "very happy to think any thing of his daughter's disposition that was most favorable for the purpose" (201). But Fanny's refusal of Henry Crawford (a refusal which closely follows the ball) presents a direct challenge to Sir Thomas' outlook on life. His concept of the suitable marriage (315 - 316, 319) is disputed, and his idea of Fanny revolutionised. The conclusions he now draws about her are largely erroneous, but nevertheless he has been forced to reappraise a person whose character he has always believed himself to understand.

Fanny, too, has adjustments to make, for she has to

grasp not only her uncle's feelings about the marriage but his probable opinion of her. The arguments he advances in favour of the match are all secondary; Mr. Crawford's fortune is emphasised as strongly as the merits Sir Thomas believes him to have (319), and the possible advantage to Fanny's family is invoked as an important consideration, irrespective of her own feelings (318). Sir Thomas' idea of the qualities desirable in a husband is therefore inaccurate, and the consideration it gains from Fanny is due not to its justice but to the general respect in which she holds her uncle; "she did feel <u>almost</u> ashamed of herself, after such a picture as her uncle had drawn, for not liking Mr. Crawford" (316).[28] She is driven to comprehend Sir Thomas' response as fully as possible, even, when his back is towards her, visualising the frown which is the physical manifestation of his displeasure (317). By the time Sir Thomas has concluded his comments on her character,

> her heart was almost broke by such a picture of what she appeared to him; by such accusations, so heavy, so multiplied, so rising in dreadful gradation! Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had deceived his expectations; she had lost his good opinion. What was to become of her? (319)

Phrases such as "what she appeared to him" and "he thought her all this" suggest strongly, however, that although Fanny understands her uncle's opinion she does not accept the premises on which it is based.

Sir Thomas' complacent belief in his own discernment has been shaken, but he still feels " a right, by all his

knowledge of human nature, to expect to see the effect of the loss of power and consequence, on his niece's spirits, and the past attentions of the lover producing a craving for their return" (368). His plan of sending Fanny to Portsmouth shows his continuing propensity to evaluate Fanny's motives and feelings in conventional materialistic terms:

> He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he as certainly wished her to be heartily sick of home before her visit ended; and that a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she had the offer. . . . A residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging. (369)

By sending her to Portsmouth, Sir Thomas is unwittingly furthering the development in Fanny of that "independence of spirit" which he deprecates so much (318). For the first time, she will be in a situation for which, given her false, idealised view of Portsmouth, she is totally unprepared, without the guidance of any judgment but her own.

The episode at Portsmouth is seen almost entirely from Fanny's point of view, so that, although she continues to acquire the qualities of a protagonist heroine, she is more fully an observer than she has ever been before. From the very first she is struck by the sheer sordidness of her name; before Fanny enters the Prices' home "a trollopy-looking maid-servant" appears to give an unfavourable idea of what will be found within (377). The cramped little dwelling, standing in complete contrast to the dignified

spaciousness of Mansfield, is a disappointment, and the cumulative effects of noise and dirt all indicate the "abode of noise, disorder and impropriety" (388). The physical details of life at Portsmouth - the "half-cleaned plates, and not half-cleaned knives and forks" which Fanny thinks of when Mr. Crawford visits the family (413) - figure largely in Fanny's observations, and they are described with especial particularity just before the end of her visit:

> Her eyes could only wander from the walls marked by her father's head, to the table cut and knotched by her brothers, where stood the tea-board never thoroughly cleaned, the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands had first produced it. (439)

The sordidness of life in the Price family sets off the elegancies of Mansfield, so that Jane Austen shows the value of decorum before demonstrating its inadequacy as a total standard. Before she develops even the smallest sense of unity with or usefulness to the Price family, the comparisons that are thrust on Fanny cause her to reaffirm her commitment to the Bertrams.[29] She is thus fitted to help reshape Mansfield from within when the aftermath of the catastrophe has swept away all that is superficial or otherwise unworthy in the values of the Park.

The most interesting of the Portsmouth chapters are those in which Henry Crawford is present, for Fanny has to adopt a fresh angle of vision; Henry is now the newcomer, and Fanny must try to comprehend his response to what he sees. Mr. Crawford's first visit is a mortifying episode on

the whole for "to [Fanny's] many other sources of uneasiness was added the severe one of shame for the home in which he found her" (400). When they meet her father, "she could not have a doubt of the manner in which Mr. Crawford must be struck. He must be ashamed and disgusted altogether" (402). Things are a little more promising when Henry finds the Prices setting off for church:

> The family were now seen to advantage. Nature had given them no inconsiderable share of beauty, and every Sunday dressed them in their cleanest skins and best attire. Sunday always brought this comfort to Fanny, and on this Sunday she felt it more than ever. Her poor mother now did not look so very unworthy of being Lady Bertram's sister as she was but too apt to look. . . . Sunday made her a very creditable and tolerably cheerful looking Mrs. Price, coming abroad with a fine family of children. (408)

Fanny's effort to see through the eyes of another person (in keeping with her attempt to understand her uncle's feelings when she refuses Henry's proposal) has the interesting effect of giving her a sense of identification, however incomplete and temporary, with the Price family, even while her sense of the deficiencies of Portsmouth is intensified. This is necessary to her developing awareness of her own identity, for Fanny's return to Mansfield must be a deliberate, if not a difficult choice; at the end of the novel she must adopt Mansfield Park as once it adopted her.

The Portsmouth episode is the setting for the fullest development of responsible vision in Fanny, for it is at Portsmouth that, entirely unsupported for the first time, she feels the need to take positive action to make her judgments effective. William's hope that she will set

the whole family to rights is rather farfetched (372), for most of the Prices are beyond the reach of Fanny's influence. But she removes a "source of domestic alteration" (397) by buying a new silver knife for Betsey; she begins the practice of sitting upstairs to teach and talk to Susan, and she takes out a subscription to a circulating library (398). The very terms in which Fanny's relationship with Susan is described emphasise her assumption of responsibility, for the lines "Fanny's explanations and remarks were a most important addition to every essay, or every chapter of history. What Fanny had told [Susan] of former times, dwelt more on her mind than the pages of Goldsmith" (419), are reminiscent of an early passage about Edmund in his role of mentor:

> Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History; but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (22)

But if Fanny's judgment has become more effective, her vision never attains perfect clarity. During the Portsmouth episode Fanny reaches her highest point of growth, yet it is demonstrated, if further demonstration be needed, that the heroine's vision is not identical with the author's. Fanny's estimate of Henry Crawford, for example, is usually correct at Mansfield, and if she is biased in thinking that "when [Henry] talked of William, he was really not unagreeable, and shewed even a warmth of heart which did him

credit" (278), she is right in considering that, before his departure for London, "he really seemed to feel" (365). In the Mansfield setting, however, her more favourable impressions of Henry are always qualified. At the ball Henry's words about William inspire a momentary warmth in Fanny, "but still his attentions made no part of her satisfaction" (278). She pities his oppression of spirits before he leaves for London, but nevertheless bears in mind that he is "quite unlike his usual self" (365). But at Portsmouth Fanny's perspective has become somewhat distorted, for the total absence of decorum in the Prices' home leads her, through force of contrast, to exaggerate the value of Henry Crawford's genuine improvement in manners. The qualification now comes from Jane Austen, not from Fanny herself: "not considering in how different a circle she had been just seeing him, nor how much might be owing to contrast, she was quite persuaded of his being astonishingly more gentle, and regardful of others, than formerly" (413-414). Fanny must realise that her first judgments may not always be conclusive, and her encounter with Henry Crawford in Portsmouth helps her to do this; but nevertheless she needs to return to Mansfield Park to correct what is inaccurate in her new angle of vision. The error, however, is not serious, for the next words (which come from Fanny's consciousness) show that her steadiness of principle has not wavered; "so anxious for her health and comfort, so very feeling as he now expressed himself, and really seemed, might not it be fairly

supposed, that he would not much longer persevere in a suit so distressing to her?" (414)

By the time the news of Maria's elopement breaks, Fanny has learnt all she has to learn at Portsmouth and accomplished all that she can accomplish there. She is now ready to return to her chosen habitat of Mansfield, and the Bertrams, who realise her worth, look forward to her coming.

In the last chapters of the novel Fanny is no longer the principal medium of vision. Her understanding of the catastrophe and its implications marks the peak of her internal development; from the time of her return onwards the emphasis, as far as Fanny is concerned, is on the vindication of her judgment, and this precludes the possibility of rendering much of the final section through her consciousness.

The vindication of Fanny is documented in many ways. Henry and Maria, trapped in the consequences of their own misdeeds, are living proof of the validity of the principles to which Fanny subscribes, and so, in a different way, is the invincibly blind Mrs. Norris. Mary's vision, which has often been compared to Fanny's, is discredited chiefly through her mistaken view of her brother, and her misjudgment of him is even pathetic: "I know how he is likely to be influenced [she tells Edmund]. Let Sir Thomas trust to his honour and compassion, and it may all end well; but if he get his daughter away, it will be destroying the chief

hold" (456). Yet these words reveal "faults of principle . . . of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind" (456), for the terms "honour" and "compassion" are completely misused. In essentials Mary has never changed; the moral development implied in her appreciation of Edmund's sincerity, steadiness and integrity (65), and of the trust inspired by the Bertrams in general (359), is not deep-rooted enough to fit her for a permanent place at Mansfield Park.

The contrast between Fanny and Mary places the heroine in a favourable light; and Fanny's judgment is further endorsed by Edmund's realisation, first of the true character of Mary Crawford, and then of his cousin's real worth. But Jane Austen is most preoccupied with the reflections of Sir Thomas Bertram in the concluding chapters of Mansfield Park. The baronet's realisation of his errors of judgment enables her to adopt a serious, even solemn tone without the unpleasant didacticism that would be inevitable if Fanny were to pronounce on the events of the book; and Sir Thomas' regrets are the more convincing and the more poignant because he himself is partly responsible for the "anguish" he feels (463). The rapprochement between Sir Thomas and Fanny at the close of the novel gives Mansfield Park a better and more carefully prepared conclusion than it has generally been admitted to have, for their reconciliation has symbolic as well as personal meaning. It marks the

fullest development of both characters, but it also suggests an improved Mansfield in which the good but inadequate principles of Sir Thomas are elevated to the level of the higher principles held by Fanny.

Fanny is the principal observer in the novel, the only character whose views are generally accurate. But Jane Austen chooses to dramatise her theme through a wide range of significantly developing characters whose vision and blindness bear on the material she treats. Although the most minor figures, such as Mr. Rushworth and Lady Bertram, never hold the stage, Tom, Maria, Julia, Henry, Mary, Edmund and Sir Thomas all become the central consciousness at some point in the book (and even Mr. Yates, an almost negligible figure, has his moment). Their viewpoints serve to illuminate the character of Fanny through the comparison unavoidably instituted between her vision and judgment and their own. But their viewpoints also serve to define them, for they unwittingly measure themselves against the standards by which Fanny tries to live. And as the novel advances it transpires that the main purpose of Mansfield Park is to clarify these standards and reveal the means by which they may be attained.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCIPLES OF JUDGMENT IN MANSFIELD PARK

In Pride and Prejudice judgment is exercised on social, moral and personal levels,[1] and it is the synthesis of these values in a personality that is of prime importance (Elizabeth's greatest achievement, therefore, is not to see through those who do not live up to her original opinion of them, but to develop knowledge of herself and a rational love for Darcy). These three levels of judgment are also important in Mansfield Park. But the personal gives ground, and so the growth of love between hero and heroine is not a key source of interest in the novel - Fanny's tortured feelings on this subject are caused at least in part by her anxious moral evaluations of Miss Crawford. The moral element, however, assumes a whole new dimension; it is allied to an element taken for granted in previous novels, and now for the first time given serious consideration - that of religious principle.[2] And since character is defined in relation to standards of judgment, it will be appropriate to examine the principles on which moral judgments in Mansfield Park are based.

Mansfield Park is not the only one of Jane Austen's

works to contain references to Christianity. Among the early novels, Northanger Abbey does not go beyond Henry Tilney's exhortation to Catherine to "remember that we are English, that we are Christians" (NA 197); but Sense and Sensibility is rich in religious allusion. Ethical vocabulary in this novel does not, however, necessarily have metaphysical significance; sometimes, indeed, it is no more than dead metaphor. Mrs. Dashwood feels that "to quit the neighbourhood of Norland was no longer an evil; it was an object of desire; it was a blessing, in comparison of the misery of continuing her daughter-in-law's guest" (SS 24). Marianne describes the chance to come to town with Mrs. Jennings as "a temptation we could not resist" (187); and there are numerous instances of this manner of using religious vocabulary as dead metaphor. Sometimes religious terms appear in the form of cliché, indicating some fault of judgment on the part of the speaker. John Dashwood declares with unconscious irony that his wife has borne the news of Edward's engagement with "the fortitude of an angel" (265), and the remorse-stricken Willoughby, describing Marianne as "beautiful as an angel," and Sophia as "jealous as the devil" (327), implies a polarity between them which must outstep accuracy. This hints at the faulty judgment which is the partial cause of his misfortunes, and later Willoughby's exaggerated diction shows in a more serious context his tendency to extremes of action and thought. Discussing with Elinor his treatment

of Eliza Williams, he says "I do not mean to justify myself, but at the same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have nothing to urge - that because she was injured she was irreproachable, and because I was a libertine, she must be a saint." (322)

Religious allusion in Sense and Sensibility centres, at its most serious, on passages to do with seduction. Colonel Brandon's cousin left her first lover "only to sink deeper in a life of sin," and was eventually discovered in such a state that "life could do nothing for her, beyond giving time for a better preparation for death" (207).[3] Willoughby's desertion of Marianne, and, more particularly, his seduction of Eliza Williams, are fertile sources of religious metaphor. At the time of the rupture Elinor is so shocked by Willoughby's letter that she regards the separation "not as a loss to [Marianne] of any possible good but as an escape from the worst and most irremediable of all evils, a connection, for life, with an unprincipled man, as a deliverance the most real, a blessing the most important" (184). Religious ideas in the novel culminate in Marianne's desire to have time for atonement to God (346), and in her resolution that religion will be one of the principal means of checking the memory of Willoughby (347). The tone of religious allusion in Sense and Sensibility, in spite of its underlay of conventional dead metaphor, is almost as serious as that of Mansfield Park, although such allusion is less

frequent, less central (none of the seductions and desertions affect the heroine directly) and less fully assimilated into the fabric of the novel's style.

In Pride and Prejudice this seriousness of tone is much less apparent, and specifically religious ideas are rarely brought forward. Reappraising Darcy after reading his letter, Elizabeth is forced to acknowledge that "she had never, in the whole course of their acquaintance . . . seen any thing that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust - any thing that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits" (PP 207). Her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, represents to Lydia the wickedness of which she has been guilty in eloping and living with Wickham (325). But in general, terms indicating right and wrong in Pride and Prejudice have ethical rather than religious connotations. Elizabeth admits it is shocking that Lydia's "sense of decency and virtue" (283) should be at all in doubt, and when the marriage of Lydia and Wickham has been arranged she reflects "how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue" (312).[4]

Religious terminology in Pride and Prejudice has a much more conventional, a much more purely metaphorical cast than it has in Sense and Sensibility. Darcy believes that every character has a tendency to "some particular evil" (58), but it is clear from the subsequent conversation that defects of a morally serious nature are not in question.

He later justifies his interference on Lydia's behalf on the grounds that it is his duty to remedy the evil of not having made Wickham's character more generally known (322), but this evil is an error of judgment; the moral evil here belongs to Wickham. Bingley cannot imagine "an angel more beautiful" than Miss Bennet (17), and Mr. Gardiner says that Wickham's temptation to seduce Lydia is too small to outweigh the risks he would incur (282). But it is in connection with Elizabeth, and through Elizabeth's consciousness, that most such metaphors are used. No-one can know, she thinks "how lasting an evil" Mr. Darcy may have inflicted on Jane through his interference with Bingley's courtship (186), and her reflections on other people and situations are often couched in similar terms. Her mother is "entirely insensible of the evil" of her two youngest daughters' manners (213), and "greater evil might be apprehended" from Lydia than from Kitty (237). Elizabeth's musings on Darcy at Pemberley give rise to the idea that, as brother, landlord and master, much good or evil must be done by him (250-251). When the bustle of Lydia's elopement has died down Elizabeth has time to regret having confided in Darcy and to realise the nature of her own feelings for him, and her thoughts now find a quasi-religious expression; "she was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she scarcely knew of what" (311).

The use of terms with religious associations often

verges on, or actually attains, the flippant in Pride and Prejudice. When Elizabeth asks Charlotte not to wish her such an evil as to like someone she is determined not to like (90) the flippancy is in tone rather than meaning, for the word "evil" is practically devoid of metaphysical significance in such a context. Flippancy in the use of religious metaphors is not, in any case, a characteristic of Elizabeth's language. But the conscious irony of Mr. Bennet occasionally betrays what can only be called levity in the application of religious or ethical terms. At an early stage of the novel Mr. Bennet mocks his wife's failure to understand an entail by saying "it certainly is a most iniquitous affair . . . and nothing can clear Mr. Collins from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn" (62). Later, when he has realised his mistakes as a father, Mr. Bennet forgoes this undesirable wit and uses a similar term in a more simply conventional, though still cynical manner. "You may well warn me against such an evil [as excessive self-reproach]," he says to Elizabeth. "Human nature is so prone to fall into it!" (299) Even Charlotte Lucas' use of metaphor of this type, however apparently conventional and dead, sheds an unpleasant light on her character. She assures Elizabeth that her satisfaction in being useful through engaging Mr. Collins' attention repays her for "the little sacrifice of her time" (121), and this gives a hint of the smugness which can reconcile her to the idea of marriage

with Mr. Collins as something suitable, if not romantic. It is the qualification "little," however, which makes the "sacrifice" seem smug; everything is apparently so exactly measured that the shock of finding it is not a sacrifice at all makes the falsehood seem even greater.

The possibility of general seriousness of tone as regards religious associations in Pride and Prejudice is precluded because those who insist most on such ideas, or who express most interest in ethical concepts, are unworthy exponents of them. Mary Bennet, the amateur philosopher of Longbourn, consoles herself for Lydia's fall by "moral extractions from the evil before them" (289). Wickham, who has not even Mr. Collins' advantage of respectability to recommend him, persists in saying that the church is his true vocation. He talks of the living of Kympton to Elizabeth even when fresh from the seduction of her sister and under new obligations to the man he attempts to criticise:

> "A most delightful place! - Excellent Parsonage House! It would have suited me in every respect."
>
> "How should you have liked making sermons?"
>
> "Exceedingly well. I should have considered it as part of my duty, and the exertion would soon have been nothing. One ought not to repine; - but, to be sure, it would have been such a thing for me! The quiet, the retirement of such a life, would have answered all my ideas of happiness!" (328)

Mr. Collins, who is, in his own eyes at least, the bulwark of religion among his acquaintance, is not a hyprocite like Wickham; but, because he actually wears the clerical collar, the divergence between the man and what he is supposed to represent is far more striking. He often uses religious or

ethical vocabulary in such a manner as to demonstrate the hollowness of his moral judgments. Darcy's material advantages are regarded as "temptations" to Elizabeth (362) because they would appear so to Mr. Collins, and the "evils" he thinks Mr. Bennet and his daughter may incur from agreeing to the match (363) are what his own mind would suggest as most terrifying - the disapproval and opposition of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. "Sanction" is a term which, as used by Mr. Collins, derives its force largely from the personal application he gives it; its religious connotations are simply borrowed for the sake of greater weight. He suggests coercion by telling Elizabeth his proposal will be acceptable when "sanctioned by the express authority" of her parents (109), and later his habit of cringing to Lady Catherine leads him, even in the face of possible gain from those who offend her, to caution Elizabeth and Darcy against running hastily into a marriage "which has not been properly sanctioned" (363).

Nowhere is Mr. Collins' subjective use of conceptual terms more strikingly exemplified than in his speech on resignation. "Resignation to inevitable evils is the duty of us all" merely sounds characteristically pompous, but when Mr. Collins applies this idea to his own situation his very imperfect understanding of the concepts he is dealing with becomes apparent:

"I trust I am resigned. Perhaps not the less so from feeling a doubt of my positive happiness had my fair cousin

honoured me with her hand; for I have often observed that resignation is never so perfect as when the blessing denied begins to lose somewhat of its value in our estimation." (114)

His pronouncements on Lydia's disgrace are in much the same style - indeed, Mr. Collins' style varies only in acquiring a little extra density where the situation becomes more demanding. At such moments the reader and the principal characters are acutely conscious of the inadequacy of his response to the fundamental questions at issue. "The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this," he writes to Mr. Bennet after hearing of the elopement (296-297), and his concluding advice is so harsh, and yet so full of clichés, as to introduce a note of black comedy into the situation; "let me advise you then, my dear Sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence" (297). Mr. Collins' insensitivity has never been more marked, and this impression is reinforced by the persistence, in misfortune as in prosperity, of his habitual formulae; "my situation in life" (296) is a phrase that follows him around like "humble abode" or "fair cousin(s)."

In his final letter Mr. Collins' moralising seems more widely divorced from religious principle than before, for he talks explicitly of Christian duty. "It was an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously have opposed it,"[5] he says

of Mr. Bennet's reception of Wickham and Lydia; and continues "you ought certainly to forgive them as a christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing." Mr. Bennet fully expresses the contemptibility of such views in his comment, "that is his notion of christian forgiveness!" (364)

Jane Austen does not identify religious principles with those who profess to live by them. But the frequency of association, compared with the much smaller emphasis placed on religious principles by the major characters - Elizabeth has never seen anything that speaks Darcy to be irreligious (207), Darcy knows that Wickham ought not to be a clergyman (200-201) - makes it possible to regard virtue and vice in the novel on a social rather than a religious level.[6] Jane Austen is, in fact, concerned principally with their social implications in Pride and Prejudice; thus Wickham's crimes are chiefly against the gentleman's code of honour, and Lydia's elopement, though strictly speaking a sin, is patched up in social terms. Judgment is based on moral and religious principles in the novel, but these principles are assumed rather than examined.

In novels later than Mansfield Park emphasis on specifically religious ideas diminishes. Emma again shows the unsatisfactory clergyman of Pride and Prejudice, only somewhat more complex and less ridiculous; vice is safely distanced to Harriet's parentage; and the only overt

reference to God is Emma's desperate exclamation of "Oh God! that I had never seen her!" (E 411) In Persuasion religious associations again become more frequent. Mrs. Smith's "power of turning readily from evil to good" is, Anne Elliot thinks, "the choicest gift of Heaven," given to her by "merciful appointment" (P 154). Her reflections about Mr. Elliot show that Anne's ideas of right and wrong are firmly based on Christian principle; "he certainly knew what was right, nor could she fix on any one article of moral duty evidently transgressed; but yet she would have been afraid to answer for his conduct" (160). Her thoughts continue in a strain that seems odd to modern minds, but there is no mistaking their evangelical, or at any rate their religious tinge; "she saw that there had been bad habits; that Sunday-travelling had been a common thing." Her conclusion - that Mr. Elliot may just be "grown old enough to appreciate a fair character" (161) - turns out to be correct.

The aftermath of Louisa's fall provokes religious allusion of the most earnest and evident kind. The whole company is relieved by hearing that Louisa's case is not hopeless; "the ecstasy of such a reprieve, the rejoicing, deep and silent, after a few fervent ejaculations of gratitude to Heaven had been offered, may be conceived." Captain Wentworth's personal reaction is all the more vivid for being rendered through Anne's consciousness:

> The tone, the look, with which "Thank God!" was uttered by Captain Wentworth, Anne was sure could never be forgotten

by her; nor the sight of him afterwards, as he sat near a table, leaning over it with folded arms, and face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul, and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them. (112)

Sincere, however, as all these allusions are, they are not central to the purpose of the novel; the ideas they suggest are, as in Pride and Prejudice, accepted rather than considered. It is only in Manfield Park that the religious basis of morality is defined.

To do justice to the moral theme it is necessary to examine the nature and incidence of religious and ethical terminology in Mansfield Park.[7] Terms with positive significance are comparatively rare, and this is natural in a novel in which ideals are threatened;[8] vocabulary that mirrors the threat must be pervasive. The word "evil," for instance, is widely used in all the novels without any metaphysical significance,[9] but the perpetual recurrence of the term in Mansfield Park, associated as it is with situations of increasing moral weight, gives it a meaning beyond inconvenience or undesirability and perhaps explains the "darkening landscape" which Mary Lascelles attributes to the "gradual withdrawal of the author."[10] The usage and frequency of the word "evil" vary considerably from volume to volume of Mansfield Park.[11] In the first volume the word occurs fairly seldom, and when it does it is used either in the sense of something simply unpleasant - "Edmund was absent at this time, or the evil [of Fanny's being without a horse] would

have been earlier remedied" (MP 36)-or as part of a cliché denoting some fault in the thinker or speaker. Thus Mrs. Norris imagines Sir Thomas Bertram to be "under the influence of a foreboding of evil" in sending Tom home ahead of him (38), and Henry Crawford remarks, more characteristically than he realises, that to be deprived of the judgments of the party at Sotherton would be "an evil even beyond the loss of present pleasure" (84). Towards the close of the first volume the theatricals absorb the attention of many characters and the term "evil" comes to be used more soberly. Edmund speaks of family squabbling as "the greatest evil of all" (128), and considers the proposed introduction of Charles Maddox into the acting circle "an evil of such magnitude" (154) that he feels justified in acting himself to prevent it.[12]

The term "evil" appears somewhat less often in the second volume, but it is nevertheless more prominent here than in the first. Although occasionally used in ways not sanctioned by the author, it is no longer employed simply for humorous effect. In the opening chapters of the second volume the word "evil" is particularly allied to Maria Bertram and her concerns. We hear of "the sort of evil" (192) experienced by Maria in the two days following her father's return; Edmund refers to the "evil" of Sir Thomas' impending disappointment in Mr. Rushworth (199); and Sir Thomas himself is described as "happy to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture" between Maria and her fiancé

(201). Finally, with a strong undertone of implicit condemnation, Jane Austen reverts to Maria's own attitude; "delay, even the delay of much preparation [for the wedding], would have been an evil" (202). After this follows some more conventional usage of the word, until, later in the novel, we again find Edmund trying to grapple with its more serious implications; "she does not <u>think</u> evil, but she speaks it," he says of Mary Crawford (269). It will be some time, however, before Edmund understands the real application of the term to the Crawfords' attitudes.

Just before the end of the second volume there is evidence of the more solemn meaning of the word "evil" which characterises Volume III. Henry's proposal, coming straight after the news of William's promotion, provokes Fanny to think that "he could do nothing without a mixture of evil" (302) - an observation the justice of which is more than borne out by succeeding events.

With the third volume the term "evil" appears more often and with increasingly grim connotations. Used to describe Henry's attitude in refusing to abandon the courtship of Fanny, it is still on the level of lighhearted metaphor; "a little difficulty to be overcome, was no evil to Henry Crawford" (327). Just after the proposal it is associated with Fanny's private irritation and anxiety, as Sir Thomas is aware; "he entertained great hope that his niece would find a blank in the loss of those attentions which at the

time she had felt, or fancied an evil" (366). The transition to Portsmouth brings much more frequent repetition of the term, now used in a less subjective manner. There are only two instances of its appearing with any but a metaphysical sense in this part of the novel. One is Fanny's "felicity [at] escaping so horrible an evil" as Mr. Crawford's dining with the family (406) - and here Jane Austen sympathises with Fanny's feelings, though they are given exaggerated expression. The other is the comfortable cliché with which Mrs. Price dismisses the death of little Mary; "well, she was taken away from evil to come" (387). And though Mrs. Price speaks placidly, this remark, with all that it implies of her character and attitude to her children, does much to explain the basis of the "evils of home" (395) which perpetually obtrude on Fanny's consciousness (385, 391, 396).

The Portsmouth episode is of the greatest importance in preparing the heroine for the new moral insights of the last part of the novel. The evils of Portsmouth eventually turn out to be less serious than those of Mansfield, but, as Fanny soon realises, they are far more pervasive.[13] As yet the term "evil" does not have strictly metaphysical connotations, although the sense of the word at Portsmouth is generally so sombre as to approach this level of meaning. Its force gradually increases, and Henry Crawford's temporary involvement with Portsmouth adds weight to the

symbolical role of the Prices' house as a preparing-ground (as far as Fanny is concerned) for the moral disaster to come. Tom's illness, too, off-stage as it is, brings the Bertrams (whom she greatly misses) even more poignantly into Fanny's thoughts, and also foreshadows the greater disaster of Maria's elopement. Through Tom's suffering the association of the term "evil" with Mansfield Park is re-established even while Fanny is at Portsmouth, whether ironically, in Mrs. Price's incapacity to sympathise with "so remote an evil as illness, in a family above an hundred miles off" (428), or through Fanny's conception of Lady Bertram as being exposed to "the evil of solitude, or the still greater evil of a restless, officious companion" (432). Gradually the two sets of associations - those of Mansfield and those of Portsmouth - are developed and blend until the news of the disaster bursts.

When the catastrophe is known the word "evil" occurs far more often and with more purely metaphysical significance. "Every moment was quickening [Fanny's] perception of the horrible evil" (440), yet the elopement still seems "too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil" to be believed in (441). Lady Bertram's silence is an "evil omen" (442), and Edmund, who finally confirms the news, writes "there is no end of the evil let loose upon us" (443).

After Fanny's return to Mansfield, the application of the word "evil" shifts from description of the terrible event to analysis of actions and characters. Even in Mary

Crawford's praise of Fanny there was, it seems, "a dash of evil" (455), and Edmund, for once more perceptive than his cousin, sees that "the evil [of Mary's nature] lies yet deeper" than cruelty (456). Sir Thomas' thoughts on the upbringing of his daughters supply yet further variety in the application of the term. "He had but increased the evil" of Mrs. Norris' indulgence to Maria and Julia by taking the opposite course (463), and his final assessment of Mrs. Norris herself as a force rather than as a character of normal complexity - "he had felt her as an hourly evil" (465) - is in full accordance with her real function in the novel.

The term "evil" is the basis of the vocabulary of moral and religious abstracts to be found in Mansfield Park. It has, too, the most consistent and the most easily observable pattern of development in the novel, although other terms are used in a similar way. After the news of the elopement has burst, the word "evil" is reinforced by terms of such particular moral meaning as to emphasise its metaphysical connotations. Like the more pervasive "evil," these words begin as metaphor (dead or otherwise) and evolve into descriptive terms as the moral theme of the novel develops. At first this more vivid terminology is used in either a light or playful sense, in order to prevents its serious implications from

becoming apparent too early. Mrs. Norris, therefore, says that even if the child to be adopted proves to have "the beauty of an angel" (7), Tom and Edmund will not fall in love with her.[15] Fanny herself, on her arrival, is oppressed by a sense of its being "a wicked thing for her not to be happy" (13), and the idea of guilt occurs in a jocular way in connection with Miss Crawford's riding lessons - "the second day's trial was not so guiltless" (66). Sir Thomas Bertram's impending return, with the events contingent on it, makes Mary think of "some of the old heathen heroes, who after performing great exploits in a foreign land, offered sacrifices to the gods on their safe return" (108). The word "sacrifice," as widely accepted a dead metaphor as "evil," occurs in many contexts; trivial, conventional or negative during most of the novel - Mrs. Price has "carelessly sacrificed" her friends (5), Henry Crawford thinks that two sermons a year will be "the sum total of sacrifice" for Edmund (226) - but becoming more and more imbued with moral and metaphysical meaning in the later chapters; Henry has a mind "unused to make any sacrifice to right" (467).

In the early and middle parts of Mansfield Park the word "temptation" is used in its most positive metaphorical sense of a desirable inducement. Edmund speaks of the "temptation and reward to the soldier and sailor in their choice of a profession" (110), and Sir Thomas, caught in the toils of self-deception and self-justification, reflects that "the nearness of Sotherton to Mansfield must

naturally hold out the greatest temptation" to Maria. This idea is fraught with dramatic irony, for the "amiable and innocent enjoyments" he envisages for his daughter (201) prove instead to be "guilt and misery" (461); the almost exact inversion of terms is surely no coincidence, and constitutes a clear indictment of the baronet's faulty judgment. Henry Crawford makes a statement similarly replete with irony directed towards himself. "I never do wrong without gaining by it," he boasts lightheartedly to Edmund (241) - yet in the end a serious wrong leads to "the ruin of all his happiness in Fanny" (464).

The ideas of penance and punishment are at first associated with Julia Bertram. In contrast to her happiness during the drive to Sotherton, the events of the day put her "in a state of complete penance" (91), and she complains about this to Fanny (100). At this stage it is necessary to the plot that penance should be connected with Julia rather than Maria, but the device remains potent symbolically, in spite of Julia's eventually proving by far the lesser sinner of the two, because the Bertram sisters are only partially differentiated until the casting of the parts for Lovers' Vows. One directly prophetic remark Julia does make; "I am not obliged to punish myself for [Maria's] sins," she replies to Fanny's proposal that she should wait for Mr. Rushworth and the key (101). When the news of the catastrophe breaks, she elopes to avoid what she imagines will be

the unfortunate consequences of Maria's sin for herself (466-467). As is usual in Jane Austen, however, the prophetic pattern is not consistent at all points, for at Sotherton, instead of avoiding Mr. Crawford's company as she does later (466), Julia sets off in pursuit of Henry and her sister (101).

Fanny herself has feelings which, "unlike those of any other character, are securely moored in conscience,"[16] and this conscience in its turn is securely moored in religious principles. There is no ironic recoiling of religious symbolism on the heroine, and certainly no hyperbolical or jocular use of terminology on her part. Fanny is occasionally associated with the metaphorical sense of the term "evil," and its meaning is exaggerated when Jane Austen wishes to show a disproportionate intensity of response in the central figure; thus Fanny thinks of her approaching interview with Mary Crawford as "the evil ready to burst on her" (357). But this is not a misuse of the term in the sense that the idea of "moral obligation," for instance, is misused in connection with Maria's decision to marry Mr. Rushworth if she can (38); and even in the sphere of dead metaphor Fanny is favourably contrasted with Mary Crawford. Mary sustains her habitually flippant use of language (with its implied levity of mind) when she refers to the purpose of a letter as "conveying necessary information, which could not be delayed without risk of evil" (415) - the "necessary

information" being an offer of transport from Portsmouth to Mansfield, which promptly gets forgotten and deferred until a postscript.

Just as Fanny's own use of religious or ethical terminology is generally not of a figurative kind, so, when such terms are applied to her, they have metaphysical rather than metaphorical meaning. Her reaction to Henry Crawford's departure from Mansfield is given as follows; "with a purer spirit [than Julia's] did Fanny rejoice in the intelligence. - She heard it at dinner and felt it a blessing" (194). While the blessing of promotion (234) is regarded as a purely material good, and the blessing of Susan's resilient disposition is seen as a matter of good fortune (449), the term takes on spiritual overtones through the medium of Fanny's consciousness. Thus the "combination of blessings" (443) she feels in being summoned back to Mansfield goes some way to counterbalance the "complication of evil" which has previously filled her mind (441), and the indulgent laugh contained in the description of Edmund as being "earnest in the pursuit of the blessing" of Fanny's hand (471) is directed at Edmund, not the heroine. Even Henry Crawford is drawn to Fanny by "his proper estimation of the blessing of domestic happiness, and pure attachment" (350), and the "bustle of the intrigue" teaches him "by the force of contrast, to place a yet higher value on the sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, and the excellence

of her principles" (468).

It is possible for the ideas of good and evil to be divorced from religious concepts, and the other novels can be read on a purely ethical level; but Mansfield Park cannot. Guilt is not simply psychological, evil not merely convenient, good not simply acceptable and desirable; and these terms are, furthermore, linked with others which, though following the same pattern of development from metaphor to description, have a more definite metaphysical sense and therefore a more vivid figurative meaning. Words like "temptation" and "sin" are used lightheartedly in the early chapters, but in great earnest by the end of the novel. From Julia's petulant refusal, at Sotherton, to punish herself for her sister's sins, the tone deepens and darkens until the fault of Henry and Maria is described as "this sin of the first magnitude" (441). In the concluding chapters of Mansfield Park such grim echoes of lightly-spoken words are so frequent and so insistent that their retrospective force, coupled with their increased weight of connotation, makes them both symbolic and descriptive. So we read of "those who had sinned" and "those who were sorrowing" (444); of Edmund's refusal to acquiesce in any plan that promotes "the continuance of the sin" (458); of Sir Thomas Bertram's refusal to "be affording his sanction to vice" (465). The idea of punishment, too - so lightly touched on by Julia at Sotherton - now recurs with solemn

frequency. Fanny is shocked that Miss Crawford should hope it can be dispensed with (441); Mr. Rushworth's "punishment followed his conduct, as did a deeper punishment, the deeper guilt of his wife" (464); "it may be reasonably supposed" that the tempers of Maria and Mrs. Norris become "their mutual punishment" (465). All this culminates in a passage which expresses with unmistakable clarity the religious basis of the novel's ethics:

> That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend his share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret. (468)

Jane Austen does not dwell on the idea of another world, but it is quite clear that she believes in its existence and power.

An examination of ethical and religious vocabulary in Mansfield Park, therefore, reveals a steady deepening of significance which is unique in Jane Austen's novels. Against this complex background the discussions of the clerical profession, at Sotherton and at Mansfield, function as direct expressions of the truth, the more necessary because religious vocabulary (as distinct from terms relating simply to ethics) is at this stage functioning only on the metaphorical level. The discussions have, of course, symbolic associations too; the fact that the first such conversation takes

place at Sotherton (the setting of worldly attitudes and deceitful actions), and begins in the chapel there, has far-reaching implications. One might say that Sotherton (the stupidity of its owners apart) has as great a claim to stand for wordliness in Mansfield Park as London, and here the locale of Sotherton is combined with a representative of London in the shape of Mary Crawford. Now there begins a battle between the values of Fanny and Edmund on one hand and those of Mary and Sotherton on the other. The recurrence of such arguments lends them increasing symbolic significance in the struggle between opposing standards. But on the level of dialogue the discussions are quite straightforward, except that Mary's wit conceals (from Edmund) and reveals (to Fanny and the reader) more of her character and outlook than is apparent from the surface meaning of her words. Edmund and Fanny, however, as the upholders of moral integrity, equate their words exactly with the feelings and ideas those words express.

Although Fanny is at first disappointed in the chapel's lack of romantic and historical associations, there is no confusion in her mind as to the prime purpose of a chapel and no doubt as to the soundness of this purpose. It is interesting that in the first phase of the discussion (in which she plays an unusually vocal part) Fanny emphasises the value not simply of worship but of corporate worship in particular; "there is something in a chapel and chaplain so

much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer, is fine!" (86) She, then, has a higher idea of the family and the family's responsibilities than even Sir Thomas, with all his stress on group respectability and worth (3-4, 20-21, 318, 473). Mary Crawford, however, immediately sets to work to break down Fanny's vision with her cynical wit; "it must do the heads of the family a great deal of good to force all the poor housemaids and footmen to leave business and pleasure, and say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away" (86-87). She thus breaks down the group Fanny has conjured up and invalidates its purpose on the grounds that it is too idealistic. But her comment, though witty, is inadequate, and Edmund steps in to defend the ideal: "<u>that</u> is hardly Fanny's idea of a family assembling. . . . If the master and mistress do <u>not</u> attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom" (87). Mary replies in a speech which, bypassing the purpose of worship and enumerating only its inconveniences, demonstrates that she is "unused to endure" (285). The preliminary sentence, "every body likes to go their own way - to choose their own time and manner of devotion," is obviously an empty formula when compared to the much greater emphasis on "the obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time," which are mentioned

immediately afterwards. Her attack on formal worship is an attack on the idea of worship itself; one comes to "kneel and gape." While she claims to show things as they are, Mary's answer is really designed to make vanity appear acceptable; and so, not prepared to argue on the level of religion, she dismisses the subject with an idea entirely irrelevant to the one with which Fanny began:

> "Cannot you imagine with what unwilling feelings the former belles of the house of Rushworth did many a time repair to this chapel? The young Mrs. Eleanors and Mrs. Bridgets - starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different - especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at - and, in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now." (87)

The vulgarity which emerges in Mary's glancing reference to sex out of context, and the tactlessness of such words in view of the serious opinions Edmund and Fanny have expressed, is as nothing beside the flippant attitude to religion which Mary proposes as not merely probable but natural.[18] But Edmund, though he continues to disapprove, qualifies his opinion in deference to Mary's vivacity and his regard for her, as he often does; "I have not yet left Oxford long enough to forget what chapel prayers are" (88).

Mary's confusion on finding that Edmund is himself to take orders does not damp her spirits for long. Once in the wilderness she takes up the subject again. When Fanny began the discussion, religious worship was the topic; in Mary's hands a more peripheral branch of this subject - the profession that derives from it - is attempted. Fanny contributes little, and the discussion between Edmund and Mary

sets forth the basic points of dissension between them and establishes the pattern of their relationship for some time to come. Mary wants to consider the clerical profession as a career, but Edmund gently insists on treating it as a vocation:

"I cannot call that situation nothing, which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally - which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence." (92)

His definition of the purpose of the priestly vocation might almost be taken as a statement of the moral purpose of Mansfield Park, notions of guardianship apart; and this impression is heightened when Mary Crawford, forced to consider Edmund's speech, and uncomfortable with its implications (in so far as she is able to understand them), tries to put the clerical calling on a more superficial level:

"How can two sermons a week, even supposing them worth hearing, supposing the preacher to have the sense to prefer Blair's to his own, do all that you speak of? govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation for the rest of the week?" (92-93)

But Edmund will not let her get away with this specious argument, for however his judgment of personality and behaviour may be overborne by his feelings, it does not waver in matters of principle. He therefore defines the difference between Miss Crawford's concept of manners and his own:

"With regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call [preachers] the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The manners I speak of, might rather be called conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in

short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend." (93)

Here again Edmund's remarks might well be applied to the theme of the novel as a whole, for the prime distinction that has to be made (especially by Sir Thomas Bertram, the presiding spirit of the Park) is that between the conduct dictated by good breeding and the conduct motivated by religious and moral principles.

Miss Crawford, however, proves obdurate; here, as in the subsequent argument about the wood, she repudiates logic. "I am just as much surprised now as I was at first," she says, "that you should intend to take orders"; and she concludes by bringing the argument full circle with an exhortation to take up another career: "Come, do change your mind. It is not too late. Go into the law" (93). The implication of this, of course, is that the clergy have no special value. Edmund terminates the discussion with a half-symbolic joke; "go into the law! with as much ease as I was told to go into this wilderness" (94). But the argument does not rest here. Mary takes it up again at the same point in the drawing-room of the Park, this time making a facetious attack on the purity of Edmund's motives in taking orders with a living. Now Edmund forces her to acknowledge (tacitly at least) that the positions she advances are illogical; "shall I ask you how the church is to be filled, if a man is neither to take orders with a living, nor without? No, for you certainly would not know what to say" (109). Mary might well reply

that she does not care whether the church is filled or not, for Edmund has already mistaken her views in his earlier assumption that "no one here can call the office nothing" (92). Courtesy, however, restrains her, though Edmund cannot make Mary amenable to reason on the subject. She still tries to class the clerical profession as a secular career, and Edmund fails to spot the incompatibility of her admiration for a military life involving "heroism, danger, bustle, fashion" (109) with her original preference for the younger son's being a man of fortune and leisure (92) - a preference which is itself inconsistent with Mary's condemnation of the "indolence and love of ease," the "want of all laudable ambition," which she says make men clergymen (110).

Fashion is the common denominator of the life styles that meet Mary's approval, as is shown by a remark she makes on military careers; "soldiers and sailors are always acceptable in society. Nobody can wonder that men are soldiers and sailors"(109). Lack of fashion, however, is not enough to explain her animus against the clerical profession, and her personal observation of the clergy is confined to one subject and cannot be a basis for an adverse opinion. The argumentum ad hominem which Mary applies to the church does not disqualify the navy from being a desirable profession in her eyes, though it could certainly be applied with greater force to that line. The law, which she recommends to Edmund (93), cannot be called "its own justification" (109) on any

grounds that Mary would think acceptable; it has fashion on its side only when a mere pretence of practice is being made.[19] Mary has not, of course, a logical turn of mind; but the inference must be that she has little value for the principles the dedicated (and therefore unfashionable) clergyman is supposed to recommend. As before, the discussion ends on a flippant remark by Mary; and when, at the beginning of the acting episode, she takes it up again, the level of conversation on her side is more flippant still. In the same arch manner (the similarity of her style during the different discussions shows a lack of discrimination between degrees of seriousness) Miss Crawford recommends the part of Anhalt to Edmund on the grounds that Anhalt is a clergyman. But the earnestness of Edmund's reply forms a contrast with the levity of Mary's address:

> "I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be very difficult to keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer; and the man who chooses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage." (145)

Mary feels severely rebuffed, not only because her gaiety is rebuked by his seriousness but also because Edmund has rejected her attempt to reduce the clerical calling to triviality.

Mild altercations of this type continue to occur sporadically between Mary and Edmund, reaching perhaps their lowest ebb in a brief talk about money (213-214). Here the church is not actually named, but Mary is evidently

attacking, and Edmund defending, another aspect of the clerical profession. Mary's greatest indignation, however, is roused by a conversation in which she has no direct share:

> The assurance of Edmund's being so soon to take orders, coming upon her like a blow that had been suspended, and still hoped uncertain and at a distance, was felt with resentment and mortification. She was very angry with him. She had thought her influence more. She had begun to think of him - she felt that she had - with great regard, - with almost decided intentions; but she would now meet him with his own cool feelings. It was plain that he could have no serious views, no true attachment, by fixing himself in a situation which he must know she would never stoop to. She would learn to match him in his indifference. She would henceforth admit his intentions without any idea beyond immediate amusement. If he could so command his affections, her's should do her no harm. (227-228)

A subsequent argument is reported through Edmund's consciousness:

> She had absolutely pained him by her manner of speaking of the profession to which he was now on the point of belonging. They had talked - and they had been silent - he had reasoned - she had ridiculed - and they had parted at last with mutual vexation. (279)

This summary is particularly skilful in that, without going over any old ground, it shows that Edmund and Mary have been doing so: and the contrast between reason on Edmund's part and ridicule on Mary's, exerted on such a serious subject as the church, confirms the moral gulf that separates them.

From the beginning of the theatrical episode onwards the clerical profession is frequently associated with acting. By capitulating and agreeing to take the part of Anhalt, Edmund tacitly accepts Mary's contention that this calling is a role like any other. The symbolism of acting comes

strongly into play here, for Mary Crawford, like Henry, has her own special brand of confusion between art and life; he uses art to explore new attitudes for himself, she as a means of controlling reality. But the symbolic significance of the theatrical episode does not end with this. Lovers' Vows never gets beyond the rehearsal stage, and so Edmund, though "descended from that moral elevation which he had maintained before" (158), does not seriously compromise his integrity as an aspirant to the priestly vocation.

Henry Crawford's misconception of the clerical calling reveals just as superficial an attitude towards it as Mary's. The carelessness of his opinion shows a worldly concept of organised religion extremely damaging to him in the context of the novel's values:

> "I am glad to hear Bertram will be so well off [he says after dinner at the parsonage]. He will have a very pretty income to make ducks and drakes with, and earned without much trouble. I apprehend he will not have less than seven hundred a year. Seven hundred a year is a fine thing for a younger brother; and as of course he will still live at home, it will be all for his menus plaisirs; and a sermon at Christmas and Easter, I suppose, will be the sum total of sacrifice." (226)

The refutation of this idea which later comes from Sir Thomas and from Edmund reduces Henry to a series of silent bows (248), but does not enlarge his concept of priestly duty. As Henry, like his sister, only responds to principle as it is embodied in personality, it is likely that, instead of gaining any new appreciation of the clerical calling, he thinks only that Sir Thomas and Edmund take the role of

clergyman more seriously than he does.

One evening at the Park, after his proposal to Fanny and Edmund's ordination, Henry reads out some passages from Shakespeare to the assembled group. His delivery is so effective that a discussion on reading aloud begins, progressing naturally to preaching. Although Henry has just denied any intention of fitting up a theatre in his own house, and although he talks about the church service "without any touch of that spirit of banter or air of levity which Edmund knew to be most offensive to Fanny" (340), it does not appear that his attitude to church or clergy has fundamentally changed. "A thoroughly good sermon, thoroughly well delivered, is a capital gratification," says he (341); and though his tone is respectful, it is clear that he envisages the sermon as a species of dramatic representation. The word he uses recalls his earlier enthusiasm for acting; "in all the riot of his gratifications, it was yet an untasted pleasure" (123).[20] And a subsequent speech, in which Henry imagines himself in the pulpit, proves that he regards the preacher as a virtuoso artist to be honoured "in his public capacity":

> "I should like to be such a man. . . . I never listened to a distinguished preacher in my life, without a sort of envy. But then, I must have a London audience. I could not preach, but to the educated; to those who were capable of estimating my composition. And, I do not know that I should be fond of preaching often; now and then, perhaps, once or twice in the spring, after being anxiously expected for half a dozen Sundays together; but not for a constancy; it would not do for a constancy." (341)

We have now run the gamut of Henry's plans, through flirting, acting, the navy, courting and preaching,[22] and it can be seen that every idea, good or bad, which Henry tries to assimilate to himself has the same origin in vanity and the same pattern of development as his first one of flirtation with Maria and Julia. All, too, end with the same withdrawal, and Fanny herself points out the moral of this (343). The passage above demonstrates conclusively that Henry has no conception of the religious principles which underlie the preacher's calling; his interest is only in outward effects and applause.

This is the last allusion to the priesthood and its duties, if we except Mary's jarringly light-hearted reference to "some old woman at Thornton Lacey to be converted" (394)[23] and her still more ill-timed prophecy that Edmund, after reforming everyone in his parish, may become a Methodist preacher or a missionary (458). After Maria's elopement the novel itself becomes a dramatised sermon, at its bleakest and most didactic in the passage on punishment discussed above; and for those characters who fail, the failure is a religious one. Maria and Julia have been "instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice" (463), with the result that the one is ultimately convicted of guilt and the other of folly (467). Julia, however, is "humble and wishing to be forgiven" (462) - penitent now in the true sense of the word,

in contrast to the state of her feelings at Sotherton (91) - whereas Maria, although her father hopes she is penitent (465), is doomed to a "retirement and reproach, which could allow no second spring of hope or character" (464). Mary Crawford's "faults of principle" (456) are similar to those of Maria and Julia, but her failure is less serious and is therefore not translated into uncompromising fact. Penitence, for her, comes earlier, on the heels of an argument with Edmund at the ball; but is is on the score of decorum, not principle:

> She wished she had not spoken so warmly in their last conversation. She was afraid she had used some strong - some contemptuous expressions in speaking of the clergy, and that should not have been. It was ill-bred - it was wrong. She wished such words unsaid with all her heart. (286)

The objection "it was ill-bred" comes before "it was wrong" - a fair representation of Mary's scale of values, and one which leaves the moral weight of the word "wrong," when it does come, rather in doubt. Mary's regret has, however, yet another cause, more potent for her than decorum - she fears her lapse may weaken the favourable impression her personality has made on Edmund. But in any case Mary's repentance does not last long. It is prompted more by Edmund's absence at a critical time than by conscientious scruples, and its lack of depth or durability is proved by her flippant remarks to him in the course of their last conversation. At the end of the novel Maria is cast out and Julia penitent, but Mary is divorced equally from the good and the bad:

> Mary, though perfectly resolved against ever attaching herself to a younger brother again, was long in finding among the dashing representatives, or idle heir apparents, who were at the command of her beauty, and her 20,000l. any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learnt to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head. (469)

Mary's connection with good fortune, a morally neutral element, also helps to separate her from both good and evil. Even Fanny is not proof against a superstitious dread of the power of "the child of good luck" (430), but Jane Austen wishes to show that luck, ungovernable by rational or moral considerations, cannot ultimately prevail over the consistent practice of virtue.[24]

There is a certain pathos about the fate of the Crawfords, for both, in their different ways, are uncertain of themselves; both look for someone they can trust (294, 359), however little they themselves may aspire to being trustworthy. Yet Mary is left bruised but unenlightened, and Henry has a future of regret and remorse; for though Jane Austen refrains from speculating about the day of judgment she gives a pungent analysis of the workings of conscience:

> We may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret - vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness - in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved. (468-469)

The key sin is not mentioned here, but Jane Austen has

already announced her intention of letting other pens dwell on guilt and misery (461), and certainly the adulterous liaison has received emphasis enough. The ramifications of the sin, and in particular its group ramifications, are concentrated on in this list; it is necessary to analyse the disintegration of the existing group in order to build it up again on a more secure basis.

Jane Austen discriminates finely between the degrees of punishment suffered. Maria's sentence is irrevocable, and Mrs. Norris, too, chooses, though without realising it, irremediable perdition. Henry's punishment is not quite hopeless, though Jane Austen herself questions the justice of this; if the analogy of Catholic theology may be introduced, he is in for a stiff spell of purgatory. Mary Crawford, less guilty but with less capacity as well as less cause for penitence, is consigned to limbo. Tom Bertram, who reforms through suffering and repentance,[25] is finally redeemed, as are Julia and Mr. Yates.

Punishment is not confined to those who are guilty of different degrees of deliberate sin. Sir Thomas Bertram has generally meant well, but errors of judgment have earned him "anguish . . . never to be entirely done away" (463), though time softens some of his misery and compensations arise. Even Lady Bertram, though insensible of her deficiencies as a mother, can for a short time feel and lament what has happened (449). Edmund and Fanny, though

guiltless themselves, suffer almost as much as Sir Thomas; only Mrs. Norris, the chief author of the mischief, refuses to admit conviction of the truth even from the event. With glaring inaccuracy she regards Fanny as "the daemon of the piece" (448). Her perversion of religious terminology reveals a lack of moral judgment which is later allied to deficiency of principle; "Mrs. Norris, whose attachment seemed to augment with the demerits of her niece, would have had her received at home, and countenanced by them all" (464-465).

Edmund Bertram has not sinned, but he has been deficient in one of the spheres of judgment the novel poses as important - the personal sphere. Although gifted with sense and discrimination on moral and religious questions in the abstract, he cannot, when faced with the individual personality, distinguish between charm and merit. He stands in complete contrast to his sisters, who function only on the personal level, and in partial contrast to the Crawfords, who function predominantly on the personal level and whose moral taste is vitiated by their lack of religious principle. In Mary's case the distinction between character and personality is finally made for Edmund by the brute force of circumstance, but there is no indication that his powers of judgment have been permanently improved; he has simply been undeceived in this instance. Edmund is, in fact, Fanny's inferior in understanding, for Fanny is pre-eminently gifted

in the play of personal judgment.

From "let other pens dwell on guilt and misery" onwards (461), the viewpoint in Mansfield Park is not Fanny's. One person cannot be adequate to focus all the implications of the moral theme, as Anne Elliot, for example, can consistently focus the more individual romantic theme of Persuasion, and the assumption of control by the omniscient voice gives Jane Austen the opportunity to draw Fanny into her place in the re-structured group at Mansfield. The final establishment of Fanny as Edmund's wife and Sir Thomas' "daughter" (472) is ushered in by terms which, though superficially ethical, rise almost to religious meaning; Edmund's regard is "founded on the most endearing claims of innocence and helplessness, and completed by every recommendation of growing worth" (470). After a brief, implied comparison between Fanny's integrity and the intentional and unintentional deceits of the Crawfords, who even in disgrace are still useful as foils, Jane Austen goes on to describe Edmund's eagerness "in the pursuit of the blessing" of someone who "was of course only too good for him" (471). The union itself is described in terms which, while embracing matters of worldly importance, have the most positive religious connotations; "with so much merit and true love, and no want of fortune or friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be" (473).

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If, as D. H. Lawrence contends, "morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance,"[26] Mansfield Park cannot be termed a moral work, for Jane Austen has not hesitated to put her thumb in the pan on the side of a moral code based on religious principle. As Lodge remarks, it is necessary to forgo "the luxury of neutrality"[27] when reading this novel; but the vocabulary Jane Austen uses amply prepares us to do this.

The force of religious terminology in Manfield Park builds up gradually throughout the book, accelerating at Portsmouth, just before Maria's elopement, and reaching a magnificent, measured climax when the causes and effects of the catastrophe are analysed and Mansfield itself is being moulded to fit a superior ideal. The deliberate nature of the increase in significance of words with religious meaning makes it clear that judgment in Mansfield Park is itself judged by its degree of accordance with religious principle.

CONCLUSION

The importance of vision in Jane Austen's works is attested by her frequent use of metaphors of sight and blindness. The eyes themselves are also active, and we are made particularly conscious of this activity (as distinct from vision) in the case of protagonist heroines. Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse all have to reappraise themselves and their worlds, and we are often reminded, by mention of their eyes, that we are concerned with their manner of seeing as well as with what they see.

The eye-dialogues that sometimes take place between heroine and hero not only underline the importance of vision but, in allowing the expression of attitudes and feelings which cannot be verbalised, help to build relationships in which tenderness and reason both play a part. Such eye-dialogues are not the special province of either category of heroine. In some novels, indeed, they are of small importance; they have little part to play in Sense and Sensibility, as Edward Ferrars is seldom on the scene, and in Mansfield Park, where Edmund takes only a fraternal interest in the heroine until the final chapter, eye-dialogues between Edmund and Fanny do not promote mutual awareness. But eye-dialogues have a vital part to play in building the

magnetic attraction between Elizabeth and Darcy in Pride and Prejudice; while the tenderness of Anne Elliot's feeling for Captain Wentworth, and the warmth of his love for her, are brought out in Persuasion by means of the looks they exchange.

Vision in all its forms is inextricably connected with the judgment that must proceed from it (judgment which, in Mansfield Park, is shown to be regulated by principles not only rational and moral but religious in nature). The ideas of vision and judgment may both be comprehended in the term "understanding," which in Jane Austen can imply just principles of judgment and tenderness of feeling as well as a keen intelligence.

Most characters, minor as well as major, are evaluated according to the degree of understanding they possess. The special importance of the heroine derives largely from the fact that her consciousness - whether we see through her eyes or notice how as well as what she perceives - is central, and her mode of seeing and judging can be defined largely from within. Change must of course be a factor in the central consciousness, where this is distinct from the omniscient authorial voice. But change is not the principal criterion of heroic stature in Jane Austen's works; if it were, Sir Thomas Bertram, who changes more radically than any other character in Mansfield Park, would have a fair claim to be the dominant figure in the novel. And Marianne

Dashwood, sometimes regarded as co-heroine of Sense and Sensibility, cannot really rank with her sister in importance. Although she changes more, and more obviously, than does Elinor, we are moved less by the changes that take place in Marianne than by the effect they have on her sister.

But if change is not the chief criterion of heroic stature in the novels, it is of course inherent in the internal growth of both observer and protagonist heroines. The protagonists develop a more accurate vision and qualify the premises on which their judgment is based; the observers make their vision more effective in practical terms, and therefore become more directly involved in the action of the novels. A comparison of development in Elizabeth Bennet with that in Fanny Price will illustrate the direction of change in each kind of heroine. Elizabeth, the protagonist, modifies her judgment under the influence of Darcy's stronger understanding; Fanny, the observer, attains maturity and responsibility as she becomes independent of the guidance of Edmund.

Protagonist heroines assume the characteristics of observers, and observers those of protagonists, as the novels unfold; for all the heroines are trying to attain the accurate vision and the well-grounded, rational, yet feeling and responsible judgment necessary to true understanding.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

[1]Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 242-243.

[2]See Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art, 112; Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 116, 120.

[3]Marianne Dashwood is a major character in Sense and Sensibility, but I cannot class her as a co-heroine with Elinor because it seems to me that the emphasis as regards Marianne is not so much on her feelings as on Elinor's reaction to them.

[4]This sequence is based on the information given by Chapman in Jane Austen: Facts and Problems, 175-182. I am using as a yardstick not the dates when first draughts were begun but the probable or actual dates of revision and the dates of publication. Thus it is reasonable to assume that Northanger Abbey, although begun after Elinor and Marianne and First Impressions, contains more early work than any other novel.

[5]Northanger Abbey, 35. All quotations from Jane Austen's works are taken from Chapman's edition of The Novels of Jane Austen, and Chapman's abbreviations for the novels will be used throughout.

[6]The basis of a similar, earlier mistake in judging the character of John Thorpe is discussed in detail (see NA 50), and the slowness of Catherine's perception, unaided, of her own errors, is evinced by the fact that her disillusionment about John Thorpe does not lead her to question the basis on which her original opinion of him was formed.

[7]See Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 117 and elsewhere.

[8]It is interesting to note that Jane Austen's handling of point of view in Emma has sometimes been compared with the technique of the central intelligence in Henry James. See Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 245; Q. D. Leavis, "'Lady Susan' into 'Mansfield Park' (Concluded)," 289.

[9]Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 288.

[10]The word "sensibility" is used in the sense of "exceptional openness to emotional impressions" (the title of Jane Austen's novel is cited as an example of this sense of the word in the Concise Oxford Dictionary).

[11]Rubinstein, "Jane Austen's Novels," 198-200.

[12]This conclusion is based on the dates given by Chapman in Jane Austen: Facts and Problems, 179.

[13]Thematic contrasts between the two have been pointed out by Trilling in "Mansfield Park," 211, and by Litz in Jane Austen, 112-115. The novels have also been compared by Donovan in "Mansfield Park and Jane Austen's Moral Universe," 141. Rubinstein, in Jane Austen's Novels, has made out an interesting case for regarding the two books as companion pieces (102-104).

Chapter II

[1]This does not rule out the progressive assumption of some of the characteristics associated with observer heroines, as will be shown later.

[2]One assumes that the animation of the face must have said much in its favour; after all, Darcy was handsome too.

[3]See also Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 95-104.

[4]See PP 279, and see also Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 105.

[5]My italics.

[6]My italics.

[7]My italics.

[8]These words hark back (I believe intentionally) to Marianne Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility, who, although "sensible and clever" (SS 6), neglects reason even more seriously than usual when Willoughby is in question; "when he was present she had no eyes for any one else. Every thing he did, was right. Every thing he said, was clever" (53-54).

[9]See also Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 130.

[10]See Brower, "The Controlling Hand," 108 ff; Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 119-120. Lascelles also has reservations, though less serious ones; see Jane Austen and her Art, 161-163. But cf. Litz, Jane Austen, 110, and Wiesenfarth, The Errand of Form, 65 ff.

[11]Cf. Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art, 162; Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 118.

[12]My italics.

[13]See PP 266, 279.

[14]Aspects of the Novel, 102.

[15]See Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 118, 122; Q. D. Leavis, "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings," 71. But cf. Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 113-118, 124-128, 131-132.

[16]Jane Austen's awareness of the importance of avoiding too radical a change is indicated by her defence of Elizabeth's consistency as a character. "If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty," she remarks (279; my italics).

[17]To some extent this is true of other protagonist heroines, but nowhere else does it occupy so large a proportion of the book. Emma, for example, only begins to undergo this process in the final chapters of Emma.

[18]To take only one minor example, Elizabeth's flippancy on the subject of Jane (a flippancy of speech rather than of mind) comes home to roost later in the novel. "Is not general incivility the very essence of love?" she asks her aunt (141). When Darcy and Bingley come to Longbourn she unwittingly proves at least the partial truth of this; "anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the gentlemen came, was wearisome and dull to a degree, that almost made her uncivil. . . . She . . . had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee" (341).

[19]Even the ridiculous strictures of Mr. Collins are turned to account here; see PP 296-297.

[20]Letters, 299.

Chapter III

[1]See Trilling, "Mansfield Park," 213; Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 169.

[2]In the context of Mansfield Park, however, they also suggest a certain superficiality, for Jane Austen, as Mudrick notes with bitterness, has shifted her approach (Irony as Defense and Discovery, 173). Qualities that are attractive in Elizabeth Bennet have pejorative connotations for Mary. Such a switch is, however, perfectly allowable if it furthers the novel's artistic purpose and does not unduly strain the reader's suspension of disbelief, and both conditions are met here.

[3]See MP 44, 230, 470.

[4]The only other character (apart from Fanny) whose eyes are in any degree emphasised is Maria Bertram. Maria resembles Mary Crawford in some respects (it is improbable, for instance, that the similarity between their names is accidental); and she is like her in having expressive eyes (see MP 117,139).

[5]These incidents are reminiscent of the way Marianne Dashwood behaves in Sense and Sensibility, when the selfish and unreasonable aspects of her infatuation for Willoughby are brought out by her inability to concentrate on the strange behaviour of Elinor's suitor (SS 87).

[6]Jane Austen intimates that it would have changed in the right circumstances (MP 467).

[7]James, "The Art of Fiction," 12.

[8]Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 113.

[9]See MP 333.

[10]Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 113.

[11]It may be noted that even Mr. Yates, although "not very solid" (462), develops in crescendo. By the end of the novel he has attached himself to a member of the Bertram family; characteristically he chooses the weakest one available and effects the alliance in a clandestine way, but "there was a hope of his becoming less trifling - of his being at least tolerably domestic and quiet," and he is "disposed to look up to" Sir Thomas, the head of the family, "as the friend best worth attending to" (462).

[12]Earlier, when they are discussing Fanny's stupidity, Jane Austen does not even specify which sister is talking - though it is not hard to guess, in the light of subsequent events, that Maria is the one with the most to say.

[13]See Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 170.

[14]See, e.g., Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 165-169.

[15]For a full discussion of free indirect speech in another of Jane Austen's novels, see Page, "Categories of Speech in 'Persuasion'," 734-741.

[16]See also Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art, 112.

[17]See MP 463.

[18]See Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 145-147; Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 157.

[19]Wiesenfarth, in The Errand of Form, contends that Fanny reaches this stage at Portsmouth (105), but Fanny has been judging and acting without recourse to Edmund for some time when she revisits her childhood home.

[20]Monaghan, in "The Theme of Initiation," says Mary cannot grasp the fact that the present is built out of the past (167).

[21]Jane Austen's attitude to her heroine's enthusiasm for natural beauty has often been found puzzling, and has given rise to a variety of interpretations. See, for example, Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 162; Murrah, "The Background of Mansfield Park," 26; Farrer, "Jane Austen," 10; Cecil, "Jane Austen," 12.

[22]This is borne out by Mary's inattentiveness, as compared with Fanny's eager interest, when being shown over Sotherton by Mrs. Rushworth (85). The same sort of comparison is made much later in the novel, when Fanny, rhapsodising about memory and evergreens, finds Miss Crawford "untouched and inattentive" (209).

[23]Fleishman, A Reading of Mansfield Park, 53.

[24]The significance of the east room is discussed fully by Schneider in "The Little White Attic and the East Room," 229-235.

[25]Man's Changing Mask, 50 ff.

[26]Monaghan argues that this compromise is actually a vital step in Fanny's development towards maturity ("The Theme of Initiation," 176).

[27]There is a resemblance between Fanny's entry into the drawing-rooms of Mansfield Park and Mansfield Parsonage, on the returns of Sir Thomas and of Henry Crawford respectively, which seems to mark the importance of the two occasions in the heroine's development. When Sir Thomas comes back from Antigua Fanny has to perform "the dreadful duty of appearing before her uncle," and "too soon did she find herself at the drawing-room door" (177). Fanny is made equally nervous by Henry Crawford's unexpected return to the Parsonage on the night of her dinner engagement there; "the idea of having such another to observe her, was a great increase of the trepidation with which she performed the very aweful ceremony of walking into the drawing-room" (223).

[28]My italics.

[29]See MP 382, 383, 391-392.

[30]Moler, Jane Austen's Art of Allusion, 151-154.

Chapter IV

[1]The personal level comprises those aspects of the individual - charm, vivacity, magnetism and so forth - which are distinct from moral character; see Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask, 36-37. The terms "personal" and "personality" will be used in this sense throughout the chapter.

[2]This aspect of Mansfield Park has both fascinated and irritated critics. Garrod, writing on all the novels, comments that there is no God in Jane Austen's works, but then deplores the doctrine of "soul" he finds there ("Jane Austen: A Depreciation," 40). Mudrick, in Irony as Defense and Discovery, describes religion in Mansfield Park as an apology for the code of the Bertrams (177), but it is significant that he uses religious terminology in writing of the novel, it is Jane Austen's "grand . . . apostasy from irony;"(1). Litz, in Jane Austen, notes that the author was in some degree influenced by the Evangelical movement when Mansfield Park was being written (114, 191n). Trilling states that Fanny is a Christian heroine ("Mansfield Park," 213), and Wiesenfarth, in The Errand of Form, agrees, though he stresses the education of the Christian heroine rather than her Christianity as such (103). But Brower is unusual in stating that "the novel is inconceivable apart from a morality based on Christian belief." (Introduction to Mansfield Park, xxv).

[3]This passage has been objected to, but generally on the grounds that the Colonel's story harks back to an inferior convention of the novel. See Litz, Jane Austen, 82; Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, 89-90; Wiesenfarth, The Errand of Form, 41-44.

[4]This opposition between passion and virtue is similar to the antithesis Willoughby makes in Sense and Sensibility; "the violence of her passions, the weakness of her understanding" (SS 322).

[5]The first part of this sentence bears an interesting resemblance in form, though not in tone, to a reported remark of Sir Thomas Bertram's at the close of Mansfield Park; "he would not . . . be affording his sanction to vice" (MP 465).

[6]See Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask, 72-75.

[7]Ethical terms often have, or acquire, religious meaning in Mansfield Park, and this is why the two types of terminology are sometimes bracketed together in this chapter. Distinctions between them will, I hope, be apparent from the context.

[8]For an analysis of more positive terms in the novel relating, for the most part, to purely ethical concepts, see Lodge, "The Vocabulary of 'Mansfield Park'," 104 and elsewhere.

[9]The word "evil" was used in Jane Austen's time with varying degrees of metaphorical and metaphysical significance. Dr. Johnson, in his Dictionary of the English Language, defines the term as follows; Evil (adjective): 1. Having bad qualities of any kind; not good. 2. Wicked; bad; corrupt. 3. Unhappy; miserable; calamitous. 4. Mischievous; destructive; ravenous [as an example of the last usage he instances a boy's being eaten by an evil beast]. Evil (noun): 1. Wickedness; a crime. 2. Injury; mischief. 3. Malignity; corruption. 4. Misfortune; calamity. 5. Malady; disease. Evil (adverb): 1. Not well in whatever respect. 2. Not well; not virtuously; not innocently. 3. Not well; not happily; not fortunately. 4. Injuriously; not kindly. 5. It is often used in composition to give a bad meaning to a word [Johnson adds that "evil" is generally contracted to "ill"; the word "ill" is frequently to be found in Jane Austen's novels, but does not have the force of "evil"].

[10]Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art, 78. See also Q. D. Leavis, "'Lady Susan' into 'Mansfield Park'," 122.

[11]A note on the frequency of occurrence of the term may be helpful. The word "evil" is to be found eleven times in the first volume, nine in the second and twenty-eight in the third. Fleishman touches briefly on the use of the term, but without any analysis of the developing verbal pattern; see A Reading of Mansfield Park, 51-52.

[12]Edmund's phrase perhaps anticipates Fanny's later consideration of the elopement as "this sin of the first magnitude" (MP 441).

[13]See Lodge, "The Vocabulary of 'Mansfield Park'," 95-97.

[14]Much of this supporting imagery is of so vivid a nature as to call into question the conventional view of Jane Austen's distrust of figurative language, or at least to cast some doubt on the absolute stand often taken on this point; see Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art, 111-115; Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 20.

[15]This remark is doubly ironic. Not only is Mrs. Norris' prophecy ultimately proved incorrect, but it is notable that only Mrs. Norris and Henry Crawford use the term "angel" in connection with Fanny (7, 344); and although Jane Austen's dislike of figurative language has been overstated, it is fair to conclude that the association of hyperbole with a particular character often marks a lack of discrimination in that character's judgment.

[16]Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, 146.

[17]See, e.g., MP 234,267.

[18]The close of this speech, in fact, is the best preparation we are given for the letter in which Mary says that her hopes of Tom's death are not only natural, but philanthropic and virtuous (434).

[19]See Edward Ferrars' description of the "less abstruse study" of the law which his family approved for him (SS 103).

[20]My italics.

[21]See also Litz, Jane Austen, 127.

[22]See MP 44-45, 114-115, 123, 229-231, 236-237, 291-292.

[23]The previous sentence contains a fascinating verbal reflection of Pride and Prejudice, one among several which suggest how much the earlier novel influenced Jane Austen as she wrote. "Your cousin Edmund moves slowly" (MP 394) is surely an echo of "time and her aunt moved slowly" (PP 257).

[24]See Donoghue, "A View of 'Mansfield Park'," 56-57.

[25]The former ingredient in this transformation is a little too much of a cliché to be quite convincing in view of the fact that his suffering and spiritual growth are not directly presented like Fanny's.

[26]"Morality and the Novel," 110. For a discussion of moral responsibility on the novelist's part, see Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 377-398.

[27]"The Vocabulary of 'Mansfield Park'," 99.

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