

ABSTRACT

Beneath the Surface: Psychological Perception in Jane Austen's Narration

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This thesis argues that Jane Austen's novels are more psychologically sophisticated than they have been given credit for and that the psychological depth of her heroines is revealed by Austen's unique narration. First, I examine episodes in which the characters exhibit behavior that evinces psychological realism. As a basis of comparison, I juxtapose Erik Erikson's theories of psychosocial developmental stages as evidence of Austen's intuitive understanding of human behavior. Next, I examine the narratological means by which Austen reveals her characters' psychological realism. I investigate Austen's use of subjective phrases and pragmatic signals to reveal the narrator's presence and her employment of free indirect discourse to reveal her heroines' psyches.

Beneath the Surface: Psychological Perception in Jane Austen's Narration

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Acknowledgments	iv
2. Dedication	v
3. Chapter One	1
Introduction	
<i>Psychological Background</i>	5
<i>Narratological Background</i>	11
4. Chapter Two	19
The Effects of Childhood on Later Life: Catherine Morland and Fanny Price	
5. Chapter Three	50
The Effects of Adolescence on Later Life: Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennett versus Elinor Dashwood	
6. Chapter Four	77
The Psychologically Mature Adult: Anne Elliot	
7. Bibliography	92

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To Mom and Dad, Lauren and Amber, Zachary and Lillian

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

From almost the first moment of their publication, Jane Austen's novels have been praised for their charm, wit, and optimism. However, for almost as long, perhaps because her novels are widely enjoyed by popular audiences, Austen has been undervalued as a serious writer. Henry James, himself a fan of Austen's work, attributes her art to accident, not design. In *A Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth quotes James as saying that Austen's effects are "part of her unconsciousness" (243) and that while "Jane Austen was instinctive and charming,...for signal examples of what composition, distribution, arrangement can do, of how they intensify the life of a work of art, we have to go elsewhere" (242). Furthermore, James criticizes her for her intrusive narrator and the narrow range that led her to end each book with at least one marriage. The limited scope of action and the focus on domestic concerns rather than on history, politics, or philosophical ideas contribute to the charges of Austen's limited abilities. Austen herself worried about the "lightness" of the novels; of *Pride and Prejudice*, she said,

The work is rather too light & bright & sparkling; - it wants shade; - it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter - of sense if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense - about something unconnected with the story; an Essay on Writing, a

critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparté [sic] - or anything that would form a contrast & bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness & Epigrammatism of the general stile [sic]. (Selected 134)

Most readers, however, would likely agree that, though the “light & bright & sparkling” nature of her writing is a major part of what draws them to her novels again and again, it is not the only defining characteristic of Austen’s work. Austen’s novels may be lighthearted, but they are not lightweight. The novels show a perceptive understanding of human nature, human development, and psychological motivation. Austen is particularly adept at clearly, concisely, and accurately portraying and developing the psychology of her characters. However, critics and scholars have too often overlooked this capacity of Austen’s. For example, Booth states that Austen “goes relatively deep morally but scarcely skims the surface psychologically” (163). Pelham Edgar, in *The Art of the Novel: From 1700 to the Present Time*, is even more misguided. He bestows a backhanded compliment, saying of Austen, “She has nothing to give the epic-minded novelist who works for breadth rather than for intensity of effect, but she is a model of almost unapproachable perfection for the writer who is content to limit his material, to work like herself with a delicate brush on a miniature disk of ivory” (93). It would seem that Edgar’s famous “delicate brush on...ivory” comment on Austen’s art (a play on Austen’s own self-deprecatory remark)

overshadows his criticism that Austen's characters are psychologically shallow.

He contrasts Austen with later novelists:

Miss Austen is not prone to analysis, and here again as in the element of description the divergence of method in modern fiction has been extreme. Even before the fashion of psycho-analysis had introduced such disturbing elements into our mental processes novelists had been widening and deepening the channels in which the thoughts of their creatures flowed. Dickens and Thackeray were perfunctory in their analysis, but George Eliot, Meredith, and James extended its possibilities so far that but for the advent of the Freudian psychology the limits of advance would seem to have been reached. (101)

P. J. M. Scott, author of *Jane Austen: A Reassessment*, though extraordinarily warm in praise of Austen, also faults her for "skim[ming] the surface psychologically": "That Jane Austen was aware of other aspects or possibilities of consciousness we can see [in her letters]. But this sort of thing she suppresses on the whole in her fiction" (28-29).

Though there is no doubt that in-depth analysis was less "the fashion" of Austen's time than it was during the time when Edgar wrote the above, it may be supposed that her credit in engaging in any psychological analysis, and her success in representing it realistically, are that much more to be praised. I believe that Austen's awareness of the "aspects or possibilities" of psychology is evident in her portrayal of her characters. By thoroughly and often objectively revealing her characters' thoughts and motivations, Austen demonstrates her intuitive understanding of human psychological development and successfully

creates characters who conform remarkably well to our current knowledge of psychological norms and their recognized stages of psychological development. Though psychological analysis was not her primary aim, it is evident that she possessed an ability to closely observe and thoroughly understand human nature and behavior, which allowed her to represent it accurately. This ability is valuable in any author, but it is especially impressive when one considers that Austen could only have intuited psychological categories and stages of development that would later be identified and explained by Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and others. Thus, she did not simply draw her characters around these norms, but rather drew on her own instinctive knowledge of human nature and behavioral patterns when creating these true-to-life heroes and heroines. Readers may have noted the realism of her characters but overlooked the instinctive awareness of psychology that fostered it. For example, though E. M. Forster, in his *Aspects of the Novel*, expresses a sense of the pleasure derived from the realism of Austen's characters, he does not credit them with psychological complexity as such:

Why do the characters in Jane Austen give us a slightly new pleasure each time they come in, as opposed to the merely repetitive pleasure that is caused by a character in Dickens? [. . .] The answer to this question can be put in several ways; that, unlike Dickens, she was a real artist, that she never stooped to caricature, etc. But the best reply is that her characters, though smaller than his, are more highly organized. They function all round, and even if her plot made greater demands on them than it does they would

still be adequate. [. . .] All the Jane Austen characters are ready for an extended life which the scheme of her books seldom requires them to lead, and that is why they lead their actual lives so satisfactorily. (75-76)

While I agree with Forster's assessment of Austen's characters, the argument that they "are more highly organized" does not fully account for why they appear ready for "an extended life" or to "function all round." I believe that this level of realism is due to the skill with which Austen perceptively reveals her characters' psychological states. The realistic nature of Austen's characters lies not solely in their actions, but also in the credibility of Austen's presentation of the psychological motivations behind those actions. By carefully examining what Austen reveals about her heroines' thoughts, feelings, and motivations, we see more than just the charming, witty characters that generations of readers have loved; we see their psychological depth and their three-dimensional realism, which in turn gives new life to the events in the novels.

Psychological Background

While there are no doubt many psychological theories that could be applied to illuminate Austen's instinctive understanding of psychology in the representation of her characters, the developmental and behavioral theories of 20th century psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson, whose theories are

widely accepted and studied today, are particularly useful.¹ Though rooted in Sigmund Freud's concepts of juvenile developmental stages, Erikson's theories were the first to expand the concept beyond babyhood and study the psychological and behavioral patterns present throughout the entire human lifespan. Because Erikson's theories encompass an entire lifespan, they are helpful in examining the way Austen's heroines progress throughout the course of their lives.

In *Children and Their Development*, author Robert V. Kail explains that Erikson "believed that psychological and social aspects of development were more important than the biological and physical aspects that Freud emphasized. Erikson proposed a psychosocial theory in which development consists of a sequence of stages, each defined by a unique crisis or challenge" (8). According to the theory developed by Erikson, healthy social, emotional, and psychological development can be traced throughout one's lifetime by the achievement of, or failure to achieve, certain goals of progressive developmental stages. Though the titles applied to each stage vary, the age groupings themselves and the behaviors/characteristics associated with each stage have changed little in the years since the publication of Erikson's theories. Erikson organized the life span

¹Major works include *Childhood and Society* (1950), *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959), *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968), and *The Life Cycle Completed* (1987); Erikson remains a major figure in the fields of developmental psychology and psychosocial theory.

into eight categories, each of which is associated with various common behaviors, strengths, weaknesses, struggles, and tasks. These stages are: Infancy, Early Childhood, Play Age, School Age, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Middle Adulthood, and Late Adulthood. He posited that a person who is thwarted in the goals of one stage will fail to develop the strengths associated with that stage and will progress to the next stage in an incomplete state; he believed, in other words, that success or failure in one stage carried over into others. The well-respected Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, himself a pioneer in cognitive psychological development, supported this idea, saying, "The great merit of Erikson's stages [. . .] is precisely that he attempted, by situating the Freudian mechanisms within more general types of conduct (walking, exploring, etc.) to postulate continual integration of previous acquisitions at subsequent levels" (qtd. in Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* 76).

Erikson's stages can be traced through the lives of various major and minor Austen characters of all ages; in other words, all of her characters fall into one of Erikson's stages and the behavior exhibited by her characters generally conforms to the standard behavior associated with each stage. However, the stages I will be juxtaposing against the novels are those of School-Age Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult stages, as these are the age ranges Austen most often focuses on in the lives of her heroines. Erikson described the School-Age

stage as a struggle between **industry and inferiority** (*Identity* 87). During this time, children develop a sense of self-worth by learning and refining skills that allow them to accomplish tasks, thus developing a sense of industry. However, it is also a stage of social integration into peer groups, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among peers can leave children struggling with self-esteem and confidence throughout adolescence and adulthood. Erikson argues that the next stage, that of the Adolescent, is characterized by the struggle between **identity and role confusion** (*Identity* 94). During this time, the adolescent is trying to integrate multiple roles (those of child, sibling, friend, and student, for example) into one comprehensive self-image. The adolescent discovers who she is as an individual separate from her immediate family; she also withdraws from the responsibilities imposed on her at home, preferring to engage in activities and pursuits outside the home and among peers. At this time, the adolescent's most significant relationships are with peer groups. The strengths that should be gained during adolescence are devotion and fidelity. By learning to devote himself or herself to a person or a cause, the adolescent is developing the skills to devote himself or herself to a partner or spouse during adulthood. The third and final stage in which we may observe Austen's heroines is the Young Adult stage, which encompasses ages eighteen to thirty-five. During this stage, individuals struggle between **intimacy and isolation** (*Identity* 100). The strengths ideally

gained during this period are affiliation and love. It is during this period of life that a young adult seeks intimate relationships and companions. If negotiating this stage is successful, he or she experiences intimacy; if it is not, an individual may become isolated and emotionally distant. When satisfying relationships are not created, a person's world may begin to contract as he or she feels superior to others. A more thorough description of the goals and characteristics of each of these stages will be provided as each stage is examined in successive chapters.

Furthermore, though Erikson's theories will provide my primary framework, I will include the theories of another developmental psychologist who built upon Erikson's work: Robert J. Havighurst. Like Erikson, Havighurst mapped out stages in the human lifespan that conformed to the development of certain tasks. From 1948 to 1953, Havighurst developed his highly influential theory of human development and education, culminating in his famous concept of the developmental task. As laid out in his book, *Developmental Tasks and Education*, Havighurst also broke the human lifespan into stages: infancy and early childhood (ages 0-6), middle childhood (6-12), adolescence (13-18), early adulthood (19-30), middle age (30-60), and later maturity (60 and over). Of particular interest to this thesis are his hypotheses on adolescence.

I will also examine a more contemporary cognitive psychological theory, that of deep intersubjectivity, a theory developed by Russian psychologist Lev

Vygotsky. Vygotsky's theories, though written in the early 20th century, are still being discovered, studied, and expanded upon. The theory of deep intersubjectivity is defined in this thesis by George Butte and expanded on by Lisa Zunshine; deep intersubjectivity takes place when one person observes another person and, in doing so, perceives or intuits that person's thoughts. In other words, it is a wordless exchange between individuals, which allows them to interact on a subconscious level. When this sort of exchange appears in the novels, it is based on gestures or expressions and is revealed in the novels by narrator commentary. This complicated psychological phenomenon, though common in life, is rare in literature, and Austen's use of it informs our understanding of both elements of my argument: the psychological depth present in Austen's novels and the narration that reveals it. By incorporating these psychological theories, I hope to do justice to the broad range of psychological realism present in Austen's novels.

As I have suggested, equally important to this study is the examination of the *way* in which Austen reveals the psychological depth of her characters. Only by studying the narration of Austen's novels can we fully grasp the thoroughness of her understanding of human nature. Though dialogue is an essential element of literature, narrative commentary informs the reader who is to be trusted, who suspected, or who pitied. This does not mean that readers

must always strictly adhere to the narrator's guidance. (Indeed, if they did, there could be no speculation, no conjecture, no imagination, only adherence to the author's demands.) But Austen's narrative strategy does provide clues to the ways in which she wants her characters to be perceived. Thus, we must examine the way in which Austen reveals the psychological truth of her characters through the narration of the novels.

Narratological Background

Austen's powers as a narrator clearly reveal the psychological depth with which she endows her characters, as well as the insight into the human mind which she herself possessed. To fully understand Austen's narration, however, one must first be aware of some basic principles of narratology.

All novels project a narrative voice to a greater or lesser degree. When exploring the narratology of a work, the reader must ask herself who is telling the story. The narrator is the agent who establishes communication with the reader. As Manfred Jahn explains in "Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative," this narrator, or narrative voice, is distinguished by textual elements, such as "content matter," "subjective expressions," and "pragmatic signals," which Jahn defines as "the expressions that signal the narrator's awareness of an audience and the degree of his or her orientation towards it." Furthermore, the audibility of a narrative voice (or the presence of the narrator-persona) can be

described as covert or overt. Overt narrators, like Austen's, are distinct and well-defined, directly or indirectly address the reader, offer exposition, use imagery, employ evaluative phrases and emotive or subjective expressions, and intrude upon the story in order to offer philosophical or comical comments.

Moreover, third-person narrative, such as the one employed by Austen, can be either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic. In a homodiegetic novel, the narrator is also a character in the story, such as Huck in *Huckleberry Finn*. In a heterodiegetic novel, the narrator is a person aware of the story, but outside of its action. Heterodiegetic narrators are typically fully omniscient, whereas homodiegetic narrators can only be directly aware of the events that take place in their physical presence. The narrator Austen employs is an overt, heterodiegetic narrator, who is highly involved in the telling of the story and who sets up, from the beginning, a relationship of sorts with the reader.

Austen has at least received due credit for innovation in the field of narration. She is known for being one of the first authors to deliberately and thoroughly develop the free indirect style of narration, defined by David Lodge, in *Consciousness and the Novel*, as a style of narratorial rhetoric that "allows the narrative discourse to move freely back and forth between the author's voice and the character's voice without preserving a clear boundary between them" (45). This style of narration does more than simply serve the basic purpose of the

narrator; it allows readers to fully sympathize with both narrator and character. Austen uses free indirect style to occasionally merge her heroine's thoughts with her narrator's voice. Austen's innovative use of free indirect discourse not only contributes to our knowledge of the narrator and the trust we place in her reliability but also helps readers understand her characters' psyches by providing an inside view. Free indirect discourse allows readers to sympathize with characters, such as *Emma's* titular heroine and *Sense and Sensibility's* Marianne, whose behavior would be difficult to justify if the narrator did not provide these interior views and this knowledge of the characters' psyches. As Booth himself states, "If an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, then the psychic vividness of prolonged and deep inside views will help him" (377-378). Since we usually fully trust the narrator of Austen's novels, her choice to blur the lines occasionally between her own thoughts and those of her characters encourages us to trust, understand, and sympathize with the character, as well. It would be easy to grow weary of Marianne's melodramatic reactions to the world around her and Emma's vanity and superciliousness, but Austen circumvents the negative feelings she anticipates in her audience by bringing the reader into each character's consciousness through the narration. While Austen's narrative style

has been both studied and praised, it has yet to be fully explored in light of how it illuminates the psychological realism of her characters.

In this thesis, I will endeavor to combat the charges of insubstantiality in Austen's works and the tendency, all too common among some scholars, to equate optimism and an emphasis on domestic concerns with triviality, which has unfairly led critics to disallow the inclusion of Austen among "serious" writers. This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that Austen's keen powers of observation and her ability to create realistic, three-dimensional characters contribute to the overall psychological complexity and sophistication of her major works. To accomplish this, I will examine the way in which the characters operating within her plots think and behave, as I believe that a knowledge of their psychological makeup can further illuminate these characters and even perhaps explain why they are so widely beloved. Furthermore, as I believe that this psychological sophistication is used effectively to make the characters realistic and that the narratological strategies Austen employs lend depth and irony to the novels and justify multiple readings and in-depth study, I will examine the narratological strategies Austen employs in revealing her characters' psychological complexity. By examining Austen's use of free indirect discourse, as well as the pragmatic signals and subjective expressions she uses to reveal her presence, readers will be able to see the intentionality of Austen's revelation of

her characters; in other words, I intend to show that Austen did not merely stumble upon psychological realism while trying to portray likeable characters, but rather she carefully and intentionally revealed the depth and realism of her characters' psychology through her narration.

I will compare and contrast her heroines, as well as some other major characters and, by juxtaposing them with accepted psychological and developmental blueprints, will show that Austen's characters conform to realistic, standard patterns of human behavior. I will not be working with the novels in the order of their publication but rather in chronological order according to the developmental stages represented: childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. In Chapter Two, I will compare Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey* with Fanny Price of *Mansfield Park*. Though almost the same age, these two heroines differ greatly in their personalities and behavior, and I will examine their behavioral traits in light of their psychological development. I will argue that Catherine, though ignorant and intellectually immature, is more psychologically and emotionally mature than Fanny, as her childhood experiences have better prepared her for the following stages of development than Fanny's have. I will argue that Fanny, though insightful and intelligent, is emotionally and psychologically unprepared for adulthood, due to her inability to successfully navigate previous stages of psychological development.

Therefore, to better understand the behavior of these two heroines, I will compare what Austen reveals about their childhoods with Erikson's theories on developmental stages and childhood's effect on adolescence.

In Chapter Three, I will analyze Emma Woodhouse of *Emma* and Elizabeth Bennett of *Pride and Prejudice* in light of the lack of perception and self-awareness that is evident in both characters. Both Emma and Elizabeth serve as examples of heroines who fail to perceive and understand both the reality of their respective situations and the behavior of others; I will argue that these failings on their part may be accounted for by examining their adolescent experiences in light of Erikson's theories. I will attempt to show that Austen's portrayal of both Emma's and Elizabeth's negative experiences in adolescence reveal the causes of their lack of perception; I will further argue that they are only able to attain perception and maturity once they have achieved the goals associated with their developmental stage.

In this chapter, I will also compare and contrast Elinor and Marianne Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility*. This novel serves as the only one in which Austen gives almost equal time to two heroines. Elinor, while serving as an example of the insight and perception that Emma and Elizabeth lack, also provides a standard against which to judge the behavior of Marianne. While Marianne's behavior fits easily into the adolescent behavior typified in Erikson's

theories, Elinor is more difficult to understand and must be examined in light of her perception of the other characters in the novel, which allows her to replace much of the narrator's commentary. Therefore, I will argue that Elinor has achieved the goals of her developmental stages, and is psychologically healthy; she has very little to learn or achieve psychologically, and therefore experiences little growth during the novel. Marianne, though emotionally and intellectually immature, is also progressing normally through Erikson's stages of development. Consequently, in observing her growth throughout the novel, readers are able to watch her progress through the developmental stage of adolescence, in preparation for adulthood.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I will examine Austen's representation of Anne Elliot of *Persuasion*. I will argue that Austen's revelation of Anne's cognition and judgment show her to be arguably the most developed, and certainly the most mature, heroine in Austen's novels. Unlike most of the others, Anne does not significantly progress during the course of the novel; as I will argue, she displays little or no behavior that the narrator condemns (even including her submission to the titular persuasion). Therefore, I will argue that Anne's experiences in previous stages of development have successfully prepared her for adulthood and allowed her to serve as a model of psychological maturity in a way none of Austen's other heroines can. In addition to Erikson's developmental theories, I

will also apply cognitive psychological theory to Austen's treatment of Anne in hopes of discovering why Austen presented readers with a character who, seemingly, has so little to learn and so little room for improvement. I will argue that this understanding of cognitive theory helps readers better understand both Anne and her relationship with the hero, Captain Wentworth.

CHAPTER TWO

The Effects of Childhood on Later Life: Catherine Morland and Fanny Price

While Austen concentrates on the adolescence and adulthood of her heroines, focusing on the time in their lives when romances are discovered and pursued, it is important to note that she nevertheless provides information on their childhoods, and what she reveals is often essential in understanding their behavior. Austen carefully reveals certain characteristics--both negative and positive--in her heroines: Emma's intelligence and conceit, Fanny's low self-esteem and gratitude, Catherine's ignorance and sincerity; some of these characteristics will be intensified in their adulthoods and some of them will be overcome. Juxtaposing Erikson's theories on childhood's effect on later life with Austen's revelation of her heroines' backgrounds and development as preparation for their actions as young adults clearly argues for Austen's understanding of human psychology and for the psychological realism of her characters.

In *Northanger Abbey*, we first encounter Catherine Morland at ten years old; she is described as ignorant and rough, preferring cricket and baseball to dolls and books (13-14), which might render her an outcast in more refined

families. However, Catherine is surrounded by a loving family and a peer group of young siblings, many of whom are boys, aiding and abetting Catherine in her tendency to play cricket rather than pursue her education. She is described as “noisy and wild, hat[ing] confinement and cleanliness, and lov[ing] nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house” (14). This is Catherine at ten, as different from Maria and Julia Bertram (thirteen and twelve, respectively) of *Mansfield Park*, perhaps, as it is possible to be. Had she been situated among those whose tastes and pursuits were more refined, she might have been miserable. After all, a healthy childhood, as a period of social development, depends heavily on feelings of acceptance among peers; feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among peers can leave children struggling to adjust throughout adolescence and adulthood. But Catherine’s pursuits and abilities are on a par with those of her peers; thus, Catherine grows up happy and secure. At seventeen, Catherine’s nature is modest but not diffident, demure but not helpless. As her adventure begins, Catherine is healthy, happy, and normal, a solid example of adolescent development, as Erik Erikson defines it.

To better understand the change Catherine undergoes between childhood and adolescence, it is helpful to turn to developmental theories. Building on the framework that Erikson laid out, Robert J. Havighurst mapped out stages in the human lifespan that conformed to the development of certain tasks. In

Developmental Tasks and Education, Havighurst identifies the tasks associated with adolescence. One of these is “achieving a masculine or feminine social role” (37). The “nature of the task,” according to Havighurst, is “to accept and to learn a socially approved adult masculine or feminine social role” (37). We can derive support for this hypothesis from *Northanger Abbey*, when the previously tomboyish Catherine begins to behave in a more traditionally feminine manner. The narrator describes a prepubescent Catherine as noisy, rambunctious, and active, preferring boys’ sports to indoor activities; however, with the onset of adolescence, Catherine undergoes an abrupt change:

Such was Catherine Morland at ten. At fifteen, appearances were mending; she began to curl her hair and long for balls; her complexion improved, her features were softened by plumpness and colour, her eyes gained more animation, and her figure more consequence. Her love of dirt gave way to an inclination for finery, and she grew clean as she grew smart. (14-15)

Obviously, Catherine does not undergo this change overnight; her preferences change with the onset of puberty, which is described as clearly as a respectable Regency-era authoress could describe it. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the narrator acknowledges no external changes to prompt this transformation in Catherine; there is no parent enforcing new restrictions on her, nor is there anyone in particular she wishes to impress, or any physical reason she cannot enjoy the same boyish activities as before. The change

Catherine undergoes is merely a natural psychological occurrence brought on by adolescence and the instinctive recognition and adoption of the “feminine role.”

The action of the novel begins later in Catherine’s adolescence, when she is seventeen. Upon first arriving at Bath, Catherine meets Isabella Thorpe, an obviously deceitful and mercenary twenty-one-year-old whose true nature is instantly clear to readers and completely unsuspected by Catherine. Through their shared love of gothic novels, Catherine and Isabella form an instant and at least superficially intimate friendship:

The progress of the friendship between Catherine and Isabella was quick as its beginning had been warm; and they passed so rapidly through every gradation of increasing tenderness, that there was shortly no fresh proof of it to be given to their friends or themselves. They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm-in-arm when they walked, pinned up each other’s train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set; and, if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up to read novels together. (36-37)

These proofs of intimacy are, of course, exactly as superficial and meaningless as is Isabella’s regard. However, this instant and, on Catherine’s side, devoted friendship supplies readers with some knowledge of Catherine’s developmental status and intellectual maturity. Catherine’s behavior regarding Isabella can be explained by situating her within a framework of developmental psychology. In *The Life Cycle Completed*, Erik Erikson explains that “young adults emerging from the adolescent search for a sense of identity can be eager and willing to fuse their

identities in mutual intimacy and to share them with individuals who, in work, sexuality, and friendship promise to prove complementary" (70). Catherine, at seventeen, is on the cusp of young adulthood, but she is still in the midst of her search for identity; thus, Isabella--older, charming, and attractive--is taken as a sort of role model and kindred spirit.

This blind attachment is part of what makes readers see Catherine as an undeniably faulty character, impressionable, naïve, and occasionally dim. Yet Catherine is nonetheless possessed of the qualities that make for a healthy psyche and a deserving heroine. Henry (whose dialogue often merges seamlessly with the narrator's own thoughts, typical of Austen's frequent use of free indirect style), speaking ironically of the possible marriage of his brother with the unlovable Isabella Thorpe, tells his sister, "prepare for your sister-in-law, Eleanor; and such a sister-in-law as you must delight in. Open, candid, artless, guileless, with affections strong, but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise," to which Eleanor smilingly replies, "Such a sister-in-law, Henry, I should delight in" (206). Though Henry's comments begin as sarcastic raillery against Isabella's character, they end as a just and genuine description of Catherine's; whether this is completely inadvertent or merely unconscious, Eleanor supplies the link between his description and Catherine, expressing her recognition of these qualities in Catherine and her own approbation of Henry's

feelings for her. She gives her opinion in a way that is apparent to Henry but passes unnoticed before the more obtuse Catherine. Austen's narratorial subtlety makes for a pleasant solidarity between narrator and reader; we are invited into the secret of Henry's and Eleanor's feelings while Catherine is left to some suspense.

As with any heroine (or indeed any real person), the mark of Catherine's successful development is her psychological growth and intellectual maturation. In the beginning of the novel, Catherine is unable to fully form or express her own opinions or act on her own judgments. For instance, after her first meeting with John Thorpe, the narrator provides this enlightening passage:

When [. . .] James, as the door was closed on them, said, "Well, Catherine, how do you like my friend Thorpe?" instead of answering, as she probably would have done, had there been no friendship, and no flattery in the case, "I do not like him at all;" she directly replied, "I like him very much; he seems very agreeable."
(50)

Though this quotation makes clear that Catherine is not revealing her true opinion, the narrator explains that it is not merely politeness or insincerity that prompts Catherine's initial statement of approval of Thorpe when speaking to James. The narrator demonstrates that Catherine's actual judgment has been subverted by his superficial attentions:

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

charming girl in the world [. . .]. Had she been older or vainer, such attacks might have done little; but, where youth and diffidence are united, it requires uncommon steadiness of reason to resist the attraction of being called the most charming girl in the world [. . .]. (50)

Thus, it is clear that, while Catherine instinctively feels a just dislike for John Thorpe, she actually suppresses it and convinces herself that she likes him because he flatters her and because he is a member of the social group to which she belongs. Though mature readers might be amused by this exchange and the narrator certainly assumes the reader's response, the passage provides evidence of typical adolescent behavior. However, just a few chapters later, when Catherine has observed the behavior of a true gentleman in Henry Tilney and has made her way into a new and superior social circle, she somewhat reluctantly allows herself to make a true assessment of Thorpe:

Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable. It was a bold surmise, for he was Isabella's brother, and she had been assured by James that his manners would recommend him to all her sex; but in spite of this, the extreme weariness of his company which crept over her before they had been out an hour, and which continued unceasingly to increase till they stopped in Pulteney Street again, induced her in some small degree to resist such high authority, and to distrust his powers of giving universal pleasure (66-67).

Catherine is certainly unduly influenced by outside forces, which is typical of teenagers; however, the confidence she gains by feeling herself accepted and

admired by the Tilneys helps her to continue to improve in self-assurance, and, by the end of the novel, she is able to cast off Isabella's opportunistic friendship at the suggestion of only her own judgment and without seeking the approbation of others. "'So much for Isabella,' she cried, 'and for all our intimacy! She must think me an idiot, or she could not have written so; but perhaps this has served to make her character better known to me than mine is to her'" (218). Catherine has almost always judged rightly, but she has only gradually become capable of acting on that judgment.

Likewise, Catherine's taste and judgment improve with regard to the gothic romances that the novel parodies and that she and Isabella "shut themselves up" (37) together to read early in the novel. In the beginning, Catherine is so enamored of the works of Mrs. Radcliffe and others that she believes the outlandish dramatic events in those books possible; she hopes, in visiting Northanger Abbey, to stumble upon such adventures herself. Upon being invited to the Abbey, Catherine reflects, "Its long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel, were to be within her daily reach, and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun" (141). As ridiculous as these hopes seem to mature readers, they accord perfectly with adolescent behavior. In *Identity and the Life Crisis*, Erikson says of adolescents, "to keep themselves together they

temporarily overidentify, to the point of apparent complete loss of identity, with the heroes of cliques and crowds" (97), or, presumably, with the heroines of gothic novels.

It does indeed become clear upon Catherine's first entering the abbey that she is trying to insert herself into the role of gothic heroine and to create around herself an adventure typical of those novels, no matter how much manipulation of reality and circumstances such a creation requires. When she comes across a trunk that won't easily open, her imagination turns it into an object of great interest: "An immense heavy chest! What can it hold? Why should it be placed here? Pushed back too, as if meant to be out of sight! I will look into it – cost me what it may" (163). Naturally, she discovers that it is just a trunk and that Eleanor has put it there as it might be of use in "holding hats and bonnets" (165). Undeterred, when she discovers a roll of parchment in an old cabinet, she imagines it to be a mysterious manuscript of some sort: "What could it contain?--to whom could it relate?--by what means could it have been so long concealed?" (170); the manuscript, too, turns out to be perfectly commonplace items: a washer's bill and a farrier's bill. After these embarrassing misadventures, Catherine indulges in the most serious flight of fancy yet. She imagines (based on some flimsy circumstantial evidence and a great deal of conjecture) that Henry's and Eleanor's father murdered their mother. When her surmise is

discovered by Henry, Catherine receives a true cure for her overactive imagination in Henry's upbraiding: "Catherine was completely awakened. Henry's address, short as it had been, had more thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies than all their several disappointments had done [. . .] The absurdity of her curiosity and her fears--could they ever be forgotten?" (199).

Some modern readers may take issue with Catherine's most important lesson being taught her by Henry, rather than through her own growth or revelation. However, it is perfectly in keeping with Catherine's age and character, as well as with the confines of the story. Wayne C. Booth, generally an opponent of authorial intrusion, contends that sometimes commentary must be delivered by a character, rather than the narrator, especially to maintain the mood or moral of the story (201). Likewise, it becomes a relief to the reader to have Catherine's morbid notions understood and refuted by Henry, not because a mature reader is fooled into thinking them correct, but because it mitigates our compunctions about Catherine's keeping something so vital from Henry and indulging in a flight of fancy so dangerously unfounded as hers is. And, though it is left to Henry to fully and finally open Catherine's eyes to the dangers of overindulging her imagination, we do see signs of progress along the way: her

shame at being caught opening the trunk in her room, her determination to avoid such ideas as she entertained upon finding the roll of papers in her wardrobe.

Catherine's psychological maturation is only one of the important elements in *Northanger Abbey*. In this novel, more than any of Austen's others, the narrator is overtly authorial. She refers to Catherine as "my heroine," directly addresses the reader, and even breaks from the action of the story to defend the novel as a genre. In *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, Franz Stanzel explains this type of narrator:

In the authorial novel the separation between the authorial realm and fictional reality is retained in the guise of the act of narration. Henry Fielding's novel *Tom Jones*, which is a typical authorial novel, clearly displays these relationships. The narrator of *Tom Jones* rises far above the fictional reality in his essayistic sections, only to appear again immediately thereafter in the role of a chronicler who must assemble the facts of his history. (41)

We know that Austen read *Tom Jones*, as she mentions it in a letter to her sister Cassandra (*Selected* 5). And indeed there are similarities between Fielding's narration in *Tom Jones* and Austen's in *Northanger Abbey*. She does, for example, seem to appear in the role of a chronicler near the end of the book when she says, "I leave it to my reader's sagacity to determine how much of all this it was possible for Henry to communicate at this time" [. . .] — "I have united for their ease what they must divide for mine" (247) and "the anxiety which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine [. . .] can hardly

extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (250).

Moreover, as a satire of gothic novels, this novel functions slightly differently from Austen's others. The narrator is constantly contrasting her story with the popular stories of its day. It is important to note the narrator's use of subjective expressions and pragmatic signals, which Manfred Jahn designates in "Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative" as a clear way of identifying the narrative voice. Pragmatic signals, as I explained in Chapter One, are expressions that indicate the narrator's awareness of an audience and the degree of his or her orientation towards it. In *Northanger Abbey*, these expressions are abundant; for instance, the narrator repeatedly refers to Catherine as "my heroine" and alludes to both the narrator's and our own awareness that we are reading a novel. In Chapter Two, the narrator begins a description of Catherine by saying, "it may be stated, for the reader's more certain information, lest the following pages should otherwise fail of giving any idea of what her character is meant to be, that her heart was affectionate [. . .]" (18). The use of the words "reader" and "pages," and the likely pun on the word "character" are pragmatic signals which both indicate the narrator's acknowledgment of her audience, and alert the audience to the fact that we are known to her. In other words, these

signals place narrator and audience on the same plane, slightly removed from the characters; we are allowed to share in the omniscience of the narrator.

While Catherine's many faults and foibles actually serve to reveal her psychological and developmental normalcy, those of Fanny Price, of *Mansfield Park*, serve to highlight her failure to successfully maneuver through the developmental stages she has undergone thus far. Fanny has long held a place of distinction as Austen's most annoyingly "perfect" heroine. While *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine, *Emma's* Emma Woodhouse, and *Pride and Prejudice's* Elizabeth Bennett get into one silly scrape after another, Fanny is almost always right, well-judging, and moral. While the novel's hero sees much to praise in such a woman, readers have often found her perfection boring and her behavior insipid. C.S. Lewis said, "into Fanny, Jane Austen, to counterbalance her apparent insignificance, has put really nothing except rectitude of mind; neither passion, nor physical courage, nor wit, nor resource" (qtd. in Scott 123). Though Lewis's assessment of what is missing in Fanny's character is a bit harsh, there are many who would agree, and some readers find even her mental rectitude galling and hypocritical. However, I do not believe Austen ever intended Fanny to be perfect or perfectly boring. Fanny has good judgment and a good heart, but she is psychologically and psychosocially underdeveloped and is, therefore, less whole and less perfect than many of Austen's other heroines.

Fanny Price is a young girl thrown into a rather unfortunate situation. At ten years old, she is sent to live with rich relations who are distant in every sense of the word. She is thrust into a peer group of refined (and slightly older) cousins: two girls as anxious as they are able to find her ignorant and inferior, and two boys at least initially uninterested in taking the trouble of getting to know her. At this crucial juncture in Fanny's development, she struggles with constant feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among her peers. Austen's narrator draws clear pictures of Fanny's surroundings; the girls, Maria and Julia Bertram, though not intentionally cruel to her, treat her with disdain and neglect: "They could not but hold her cheap on finding that she had but two sashes, and had never learned French; and when they perceived her to be little struck with the duet they were so good as to play, they could do no more than make her a generous present of some of their least valued toys, and leave her to herself" (14). Likewise, the eldest boy, Tom's, "kindness to his little cousin was consistent with his situation and rights: he made her some very pretty presents, and laughed at her" (17-18). The other boy, Edmund, is soon very kind to her, but his fair treatment of her fails to counteract the ill treatment or neglect of the others. As Austen succinctly puts it, "Kept back as she was by everybody else, his single support could not bring her forward" (22); she further explains, "Her feelings were very acute, and too little understood to be properly attended to. Nobody

meant to be unkind, but nobody put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort" (14). The acuteness of her feelings, the reticence of her nature, and the drawbacks of her situation combine to make Fanny a character that lives almost entirely in her own mind. Her thoughts, feelings, and opinions are shared with few other characters and therefore must be revealed to us almost entirely by the narrator's commentary.

It is important to remember that children of this age are struggling with two developmental challenges: they are learning and refining basic skills, which leads to a sense of industry and competence, but they are also surrounded by peers, from whom they seek acceptance and equality or superiority (Identity 91). On the one hand, there can be no doubt that Fanny is industrious; she becomes the handmaiden of her cruel Aunt Norris and the right hand of her oblivious Aunt Bertram. In addition, there is no doubt that Fanny acquires new skills and new knowledge, under the tutelage of the governess employed by Sir Thomas and with the periodic mentoring of Edmund. She becomes well-informed, helpful, and capable; however, these skills cannot make her feel valuable, as they are never praised but rather, at best, taken for granted. She occupies a place above servant but below a Bertram, the equal of nobody at Mansfield Park.

While her humility and upright morality are clearly virtues, they are also the elements of Fanny's character that are often most off-putting to readers, and

they are directly correlated to her second-class status at Mansfield. In *Jane Austen: A Reassessment*, P.J.M. Scott sees this as the novel's principal insight and explains,

We are fashioned by our sufferings and deprivations (or lack of them); but being significantly deprived, while it may confer important virtues and strengths, will also seriously cramp the personality. What gives Fanny a supreme virtue – ‘constancy,’ consistency of outlook and behaviour, and thereby *the possession of an identity itself* – is the bullied role which makes her a stick. Her attention to moral issues is likewise most important...But Fanny's alertness to issues of behaviour and responsibility at Mansfield evolves from the humiliated nature of the part she has to play there. (154-155)

Neither can her newly acquired knowledge make up for the negligence or outright hostility of her treatment at the hands of her peers. It is true that Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park a timid girl, but it is chiefly the timidity of a very young person among strangers. Had she stayed at home, it is likely that she would have outgrown her diffidence because she would have felt herself among equals. On her second day in the house, when Maria and Julia have given up on finding her interesting and have left her alone, the narrator insightfully observes, “when to these sorrows was added the idea of the brothers and sisters among whom she had always been important as playfellow, instructress, and nurse, the despondence that sunk her little heart was severe” (14). As is evidenced by her visit to Portsmouth later in the novel, there would have been innumerable hardships to be faced in her parents' home, but it must be imagined that she

would have learned to speak up and to defend herself; she would have been less elegant but more self-assured. For evidence of this, we may turn to her sister Susan; though she has faults of temper and manner, she is blessed with a “more fearless disposition and happier nerves” (472) than Fanny and “no natural timidity” (472) to restrain her in the presence of her relatives when she, in turn, comes to Mansfield Park. While the difference between the two sisters no doubt has some roots in their different natural dispositions, some of the disparity is doubtless due to the influence of their environments on their feelings, as will be discussed later, in relation to developmental psychological theory. Had Fanny felt herself among equals, she might have gained the confidence and self-esteem that comprise half of the goals of this stage of development. However, Fanny learns to value herself, in some ways, as little as the others value her; in fact, when Fanny is invited to dinner at a neighbor’s house and her Aunt Norris informs her that even if it rains, she will have to walk, the narrator says, “Her niece thought it perfectly reasonable. She rated her own claims to comfort as low even as Mrs. Norris could” (221). This low sense of self-worth follows Fanny into adolescence and adulthood.

Clearly, Fanny’s relationships with every member of the Mansfield family and neighborhood, excepting Edmund, are highly formal and stilted. This is caused, as discussed, by her inability to connect with them in her youth

and by her feelings of inferiority. Erikson's psychological theories support this reading of the novel:

Where a youth does not accomplish such intimate relation with others – and, I would add, with his own inner resources – in late adolescence or early adulthood, he may either isolate himself and find, at best, highly stereotyped and formal interpersonal relations (formal in the sense of lacking in spontaneity, warmth, and real exchange of fellowship), or he must seek them in repeated attempts and repeated failures (*Identity* 101).

When most of the novel takes place, while Fanny is eighteen, she is at exactly this point of which Erikson writes, isolated, in late adolescence or early adulthood.

Nearly all of Fanny's relationships are lacking in one or more of those characteristics: with Lady Bertram, there is no spontaneity, with Sir Thomas, no warmth, and even with Mary Crawford, who generally treats her with kindness and respect, there is no true exchange of fellowship, as Mary is rarely, if ever, truly receptive to Fanny's thoughts and ideas. After a long speech from Fanny about the wonders of nature and memory, the narrator says, "Miss Crawford, untouched and inattentive, had nothing to say" (209).

This is not to suggest that Fanny does not get her happy ending. In spite of her hardships and few intimate relationships, Fanny, like all of Austen's heroines, marries the man she loves, and, by and large, he is a man worthy of winning her heart. However, the union of Fanny and her kindly cousin Edmund is, for many readers, the least satisfying of Austen's endings, and for a few very

simple reasons. Fanny's unsuccessful navigation of the stage of childhood development has, as previously discussed, left her incapable of the self-esteem that a healthy psyche acquires during that time. Thus, her happiness from that point forward is entirely of Edmund's making. She depends on Edmund to take care of her, to guide her, and to value her, because she is incapable of doing so herself. The narrator illustrates his value to her in the great things--"his attentions were [. . .] of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures" (22)--as well as in the small--"if Edmund were not there to mix the wine and water for her, [she] would rather go without it than not" (66).

In fact, due to her dependence on Edmund, one of her two major triumphs of the novel comes dangerously close to being a failure. After the arrival of Mary Crawford, Fanny's rival for Edmund's affection, the young people decide to stage a play at Mansfield Park for their own amusement. When this idea is first suggested, Fanny is as genuinely horrified as Edmund. She believes it is disrespectful to stage it while Sir Thomas is away, and she believes the play itself is inappropriate. Like Edmund, she is determined to take no part in it. She refuses to act and holds out just long enough to be praised by Edmund and Sir Thomas upon the latter's return for abstaining. However, the narrator makes readers privy to the breakdown of Fanny's resolve. She is, in chapter

fifteen, asked to take a small part, and refuses, with the help of Edmund and Mary, who prevent the others from urging her too strongly. Later, however, Edmund is eventually convinced to take part, whether to avoid the embarrassing inclusion of a stranger in their midst or to spare the discomfort such an inclusion would cause Mary, we may not be entirely certain. However, he agrees to act opposite her, and Fanny is heartbroken over the decision and the appearance of inconsistency it gives him. Shortly thereafter, she is again asked to take a small part in the play and, though she is prevented from doing so by Sir Thomas's return, the narrator shows us that she has internally given in:

The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her, and which had all slept while she listened to him, were become of little consequence now. This deeper anxiety swallowed them up. Things should take their course; she cared not how it ended. Her cousins might attack, but could hardly tease her. She was beyond their reach; and if at last obliged to yield--no matter--it was all misery now (156-157).

These "doubts and alarms" of her own conduct are important characteristics in Fanny; they show the self-knowledge and self-awareness that most of Austen's heroines (eventually) possess (or at least the *desire* to have and act on that knowledge and awareness). Fanny wonders if she is right in refusing and if she is motivated by the right reasons: "It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples" (153). These doubts are not weaknesses but evidence of a very admirable state of awareness.

Still, as the narrator reveals, it is not strength of will or character that prevent Fanny from eventually giving in; it is not the disapproval she feels or the admittedly less pure motive of stage fright that she has suspected in herself. It is merely the lucky circumstance of Sir Thomas's returning early. After Edmund gives in, Fanny no longer cares about her initial reserves or even her terror of acting. If she must be disappointed in Edmund, she does not care about being disappointed in herself. We here see the great weakness in her character; she is entirely dependent on Edmund. She never acquires the agency to take care of herself; in this way, Fanny is, to her detriment, unlike *Pride and Prejudice's* Elizabeth, unlike the titular Emma, and unlike *Sense and Sensibility's* Elinor or Marianne. Even *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine is not, at her worst and weakest, so painfully dependent on Henry, as Fanny is on Edmund; she cannot be whole or happy without the care and protection of the man she loves. This, again, makes sense in light of Erikson's theories; he believed that "adolescents who do not meet the challenge of developing an identity will not establish truly intimate relationships; instead, they will become overly dependent on their partners as a source of identity" (Kail 9).

Still, some readers may see Fanny's refusal to join in the play as a staunch display of integrity; this reading of Fanny may be explained by another developmental theory. In another study of psychological development,

Adolescent Character and Personality, Robert J. Havighurst and others analyzed different common personality types among adolescents; one of those personalities was the submissive person. The submissive person is characterized by passive acceptance, little or no self-confidence, little or no desire to lead, a desire to avoid conflict, and a tendency to withdraw (155). However, “the Submissive Person is not submissive to everybody he meets. He has standards and a strong sense of duty. Often his conscience is extremely severe. Therefore, he may exhibit a moral stubbornness that appears surprising in one whose behavior is usually meek and mild” (156). This description strongly brings *Mansfield Park*’s Fanny Price to mind. It is no coincidence that Austen’s most meek and submissive heroine is also her most rigidly moral; her recognition of these two united traits reinforces my assertion of Austen’s highly developed intuitive understanding of psychology.

To truly understand Fanny, we must look at what Austen tells us of her childhood, both before and after her removal to Mansfield. In addition, Erikson’s theories of childhood provide a context for understanding what Austen tell us of Fanny during this time. The ages encompassed by Erikson’s School-Age Child stage are approximately six to twelve years. Erikson identified this stage as a struggle between **industry and inferiority** (*Identity* 87). During this time, children try to develop a sense of self-worth by attempting new tasks and

refining skills. Children of this age are capable of learning numerous new skills and quickly acquiring new knowledge, thus developing a sense of industry (91). However, it is also a stage of social development and, whether among classmates or between siblings, competition is inevitable; therefore, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among peers can leave children struggling with self-esteem and confidence throughout adolescence and adulthood (91, 96).

I previously mentioned that Fanny has two major triumphs in the novel; Fanny's second strong point in the novel is when she steadfastly refuses Henry Crawford's proposal. His eligibility as a suitor, his wealth and situation are more than Fanny's relatives could have hoped for her and, moreover, his personality and manners are charming enough to endear him to almost everyone. However, Fanny is able not only to refuse Mr. Crawford in person, but also to refuse the entreaties and reasoning of Sir Thomas and Edmund on the subject. Nevertheless, despite all of Fanny's objections to his character--reasonable, just objections that she alone is privy to--Austen's narrator makes clear to us that Fanny's refusal is not as absolute as she herself believes it to be; after Mary has half-heartedly tried to sway Henry from his selfish goal of making Fanny fall in love with him, the narrator says,

And without attempting any further remonstrance, she left Fanny to her fate--a fate which, had not Fanny's heart been guarded in a way unsuspected by Miss Crawford, might have been a little harder than she deserved; for although there doubtless are such

unconquerable young ladies of eighteen (or one should not read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgment by all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do, I have no inclination to believe Fanny one of them, or to think that with so much tenderness of disposition, and so much taste as belonged to her, she could have escaped heart-whole from the courtship [. . .] of such a man as Crawford. (231)

And this is not the only time the narrator gives us reason to believe that Fanny could have changed her mind about Henry. During his visit to Portsmouth, Fanny is struck by how much more pleasant and correct Henry's behavior is: "The wonderful improvement which she still fancied in Mr. Crawford was the nearest to administering comfort of anything within the current of her thoughts" (413). But the following sentence reveals the narrator's more clear-sighted opinion on the matter: "*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; italics mine). And while Fanny is, at this time, still hoping that Henry will cease to pay her his addresses, this passage shows how much headway he has already made into her good graces; by giving us a more objective view of the matter, the narrator reveals that Fanny is giving Henry credit for more improvement than the narrator is willing to acknowledge in him. Only a few pages later, Fanny seems almost to wish she could love him in order to relieve her sister of the misery of their parents' home:

Were *she* likely to have a home to invite her to, what a blessing it would be! And had it been possible for her to return Mr. Crawford's regard, the probability of his being very far from objecting to such a measure would have been the greatest increase of all her own comforts. She thought he was really good-tempered, and could fancy his entering into a plan of that sort most pleasantly. (419)

This passage brilliantly highlights Austen's revelation of her character's psychology. Though Fanny still maintains that she could never marry Mr. Crawford without returning his regard, the wish of doing so, the consideration of what it might be like if she could, illustrates just how much progress Henry has made in his pursuit of her; she is certainly no longer repulsed by the idea of a marriage with Henry Crawford, and the narrator has subtly but unmistakably revealed that which Fanny herself is unaware of. Finally, the narrator reveals outright the certainty of his winning her if he had not seduced Maria:

Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of [. . .] felicity for him. His affection had already done something. Her influence over him had already given him some influence over her. Would he have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained, especially when that marriage had taken place, which would have given him the assistance of her conscience in subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward, and a reward very voluntarily bestowed, within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary. (467)

Though Fanny is right all along about Henry's character (and is finally proven and acknowledged to be so); and though her assessment of him and her judgment about him show a maturity and awareness that no other character in the novel possesses, it is not her judgment of his character that prevents her from marrying Henry; it is only her love of Edmund and the circumstances *resulting from* Henry's character. Had he not seduced Maria, Edmund would almost certainly have married Mary, and Henry would – in time – have won Fanny's heart.

Returning to the matter of the ending, the second reason Edmund's and Fanny's marriage is not entirely satisfying is that Edmund himself is for many readers less appealing than most of Austen's other heroes. C.S. Lewis derides Fanny's "schoolgirl...hero-worship for a man who...is the least attractive of all Jane Austen's heroes" (qtd. in Scott 123). Though kind and uprightly moral, Edmund is a character whom readers do not know much better at the end of the novel than they do at the beginning. For nearly the entire novel, he regards Fanny with a warm, brotherly, and completely chaste affection. He is, for most of the novel, smitten with her rival. Still, his initial attraction to Mary is tempered; he is aware of her faults of character and breaches of propriety. After dining with the Crawfords at the Parsonage, Edmund asks Fanny, "was there nothing in her conversation that struck you, Fanny, as not quite right?" "Oh,

yes! She ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did," to which Edmund replies, "I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong; very indecorous" (63). And though, even then, he makes allowances for her and defends her against Fanny's charge of ingratitude, he is not blind to her faults. Neither is he initially blind to the problematic nature of her feelings for his chosen profession.

However, as the story progresses, his awareness of Mary's faults diminishes. It might not be surprising for a person in love to intentionally overlook or seek to amend the faults of his partner, but it is disheartening to see Edmund completely fail to recognize those faults. For Fanny, this is, of course, a matter of utmost concern: "Could she believe Miss Crawford to deserve him, it would be – oh, how different would it be – how far more tolerable! But he was deceived in her; he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had ever been, but he saw them no longer" (264). And Edmund's lack of clear-sightedness and self-awareness is not merely directed toward Mary; he begins to misunderstand and even occasionally neglect Fanny, once Mary comes on the scene.

Edmund recognizes and regrets his neglect in the matter of the horse in chapter seven; allowing Mary to monopolize Fanny's horse was putting Mary's pleasure above Fanny's health. However, there are other instances of mild hypocrisy in his treatment of Fanny. Despite his high praise of her intelligence

and good judgment, he refuses to recognize or concede to it in the matter of Henry's proposal. Though he approves her disinterested conscientiousness in refusing a man she does not love, he rejects her reasons for not loving him.

When she explains that her observations of Henry's misbehavior during the play, and with Maria in particular, lead her to distrust his character, he merely replies that no one should be judged by that period of "general folly" and that "nothing could be more improper than the whole business" (349-350).

Furthermore, his neglect of Fanny when she is in Portsmouth is almost as complete and as callous as Sir Thomas's. He does not consider her health, loneliness, or discomfort. As Scott points out, "once Fanny...is out of sight and mind, Edmund takes seven whole weeks to write her a letter; and for all that he does not at that stage know he is the individual around whom she builds her emotional life, this is still, in their acknowledged relation, as casual and churlish as anything in the book" (152). He does not write to her until he has his own concerns to relate (despite her having sent him word that she expected to hear from him). When, weeks later, he does write, the missive is merely an account of how things stand with Mary and does not contain a single question or remark about her health or comfort beyond observing, "You are happy at Portsmouth, I hope, but this must not be a yearly visit. I want you at home, that I may have your opinion about Thornton Lacey" (423). He does not even ask about Henry's

visit. As Scott rightly says, “The real active concern in it for how Fanny may be, in health, spirits and occupations, is effectually zero” (152).

Finally, the suddenness of the ending itself, the abrupt nature of Edmund’s and Fanny’s union is a matter of mild dissatisfaction; within a few pages, Edmund has gone from claiming that no other woman could replace Mary in his affections to realizing and acknowledging his love for Fanny. Austen’s narrator is aware of this abruptness and playfully addresses it, saying,

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that everyone may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people – I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (470)

Again Scott’s comments are illuminating:

We cannot but feel how much better it would be if to respective espousals the partners from Mansfield Park brought their steadying influence, their sobriety, and the Crawford siblings their vitality and free-flowing bright spirits. The best possible marriages – those of Edmund and Mary, Henry and Fanny – are frustrated, and in their place we see the kind of wedding people make in the real world often enough where matters, following the vagrancy of so many human identities, have to be patched up. (141)

This is taking the matter pretty far, perhaps; no one can justly accuse Austen of “patching up” the ending because it is what the reader generally expects and, in most cases, wishes. Beneficial as it might be for Fanny to marry and influence

Henry – to be the one to instruct and influence, rather than continuing to serve as the receiver of knowledge – it would hardly be in keeping with her wishes throughout the novel, and the novel must end with Fanny happy *now*, not Fanny embarking on a marriage that will make her happy one day. Nevertheless, there is truth in what Scott says: Edmund and Fanny would benefit from the buoyant spirits and cheerful optimism of the Crawfords almost as much as the Crawfords would benefit from the steady sense and upright morals of Edmund and Fanny; it would be making two whole, happy, successful couples, rather than one. This view is supported by what the narrator says of Mary in chapter thirty-seven when Fanny is reflecting on the inequality of merit between Edmund and Mary and on the impossibility of Mary's improvement: "Experience might have hoped more for any young people so circumstanced, and impartiality would not have denied to Miss Crawford's nature that participation of the general nature of women which would lead her to adopt the opinions of the man she loved and respected as her own" (367).

Despite, however, the various objections to hero, heroine, and ending, *Mansfield Park* is a work of genius and makes evident Austen's powers of revealing the psychology of her heroines. Indeed, readers see and understand more of Fanny's psychology than we do of many other heroines because nearly all of it is presented directly through the narration; Fanny has less dialogue than

any other heroine in the six complete novels, due to her shyness, reserve, and the way she is circumstanced in the Bertram home. She is the most conscientious and honorable character in the novel, though it would probably be highly dull to sit in a room with her. Likewise, whether they like her or not, readers are more fully able to sympathize with her due to the narrator's pragmatic signals, her revelations and support of Fanny's psychology. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator proclaims, "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest" (461). The subjective expressions, too, are evident in that the narrator often refers to Fanny as "my Fanny." If the narrator were not so diligent in presenting Fanny's judgments, feelings, and motivations, if readers were only to judge her by her actions, we might be likely to root for Mary after all. However, thanks to the narrator, even those who do not enjoy Fanny can care about her, and those who cannot care about her can understand her. We may agree with Scott that she is "a personality considerably crippled" (133), but it is not her personality with which the narrator is mainly concerned.

CHAPTER THREE

Self-Awareness and Perception: Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennett Versus Elinor Dashwood

Though her heroines' hearts are of great importance to Jane Austen, their minds are what truly make them heroines. Good intentions and good morals abound in Austen's protagonists and are generally instantly apparent, but sound minds, clear-sightedness, and discernment usually must be gained. If we are to truly appreciate the growth of a heroine and truly believe in the likelihood of her happiness at the novel's close, we must examine the flaws and failures that prompt that growth. Two of the most crucial failures Austen portrays are a lack of perception regarding the behavior of others and a lack of awareness regarding one's own feelings and motivations.

In the opening lines of *Emma*, we are informed that Emma Woodhouse, "handsome, clever, and rich," unites "some of the best blessings of existence" (5). In *Emma*, the narrator successfully creates sympathy in the reader toward a character who might, in other hands, have been quite unsympathetic. Austen was aware of this tendency in Emma and, in a letter to her sister Cassandra, called Emma a heroine whom no one but herself would much like. The first page acquaints us with some of her undisputed good qualities and several of her bad ones: "the real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having

rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (5). These two "evils" initially blind Emma to a just knowledge of her own limitations. She imagines herself capable of arranging people's destinies quite successfully and therefore sets about matchmaking.

Emma is, in many ways, very lucky; however, during the crucial adolescent stage, Emma is thrust into a situation that is not, according to Erikson's theories, ideal for her emotional and psychological development. Though we first encounter Emma at twenty-one, we are informed that she has been mistress of Hartfield from the age of fourteen, owing to her mother's death and her sister's marriage. Therefore, during a time when Emma should, according to Erikson's theories, have been spending time with peers and withdrawing from responsibilities, she was doing the opposite. Her only companions were an older governess (Miss Taylor), a family friend sixteen years her senior (Mr. Knightley), and an elderly father (Mr. Woodhouse). Furthermore, she was forced into taking on the duties and responsibilities of an adult, from caring for her father to deciding what meals should be served to inviting and playing hostess to any and all guests. This unusual adolescent experience understandably thwarts Emma's psychological development by contributing to her failure to accomplish the goals of adolescence. This failure leaves her, for much of the novel, emotionally isolated, unprepared for and

uninterested in appropriate, intimate adult relationships. When Austen first introduces Mr. Elton, it is clear that he is smitten with Emma; his compliments and his manner in delivering them are unmistakable. Emma, however, misses these signs completely, which shows how imperceptive she is to romance where she herself is concerned. This disassociation with romantic intimacy makes sense in light of Erikson's theory on the effect of adolescent failures on adulthood. The young adult stage encompasses ages eighteen to thirty-five. During this stage, individuals struggle with **intimacy versus isolation**. The strengths ideally gained during this period are affiliation (or partnership) and love. It is during this period of life that one seeks intimate relationships and companions. If negotiating this stage is successful, one experiences intimacy; if it is not, an individual may become isolated and emotionally distant (*Identity* 101). When satisfying relationships are not created, the young adult's world may begin to contract as he or she feels superior to others and as if he or she does not need intimate companionship; this is, of course, a defense mechanism. This tendency is clearly the case with Emma, as she focuses all of her energies on other people's relationships, while feeling superior and denying the need for a romantic relationship of her own. When Harriet questions Emma about her declaration of perpetual celibacy, Emma replies,

I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! But I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield; and never, 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)

It is evident by the way she speaks of marriage that Emma feels no attraction or longing for it; she speaks of it with rational and analytical objectivity.

Emma does, of course, grow in self-awareness throughout the course of the novel. Though slowly and reluctantly at first, Emma does begin to recognize her errors in judgment. Tellingly, it is not until about the same period that she realizes her feelings for Mr. Knightley, however, and begins a healthy, intimate, adult relationship that she fully accepts her own faults, learns from her own mistakes, and convinces the reader that she will be unlikely to make them again (thus progressing from her unnaturally long stay in the adolescent stage to the age-appropriate young adult stage).

It is no wonder that Mr. Knightley is Emma's superior in judgment. He is sixteen years older, placing him, at thirty-seven, in the early years of Erikson's Middle Adulthood stage, the challenge of which is **generativity versus stagnation** (Identity 103). During this stage, a person is absorbed with taking care of others and being in charge, both at work and at home. In addition to

caring for others, one generally works for the betterment of society, which Erikson terms "generativity." During this time, a person fears inactivity and meaninglessness. This description could have been written to describe Mr. Knightley. He certainly cares for others; during the course of the novel, we learn that he advises his neighbors, undertakes to write the elderly Mr. Woodhouse's letters of business, sends gifts of food to poor acquaintances, mentors Robert Martin, and sends his carriage to fetch neighbors who do not own one. We also know he works for the improvement of the community by working steadily on "parish business" (425). He is also incapable of inactivity--an incapability ascribed to his mind; the narrator tells us, "he always moved with the alertness of a mind which could neither be undecided nor dilatory" (386). Thus we know that Mr. Knightley is as psychologically and developmentally ideal as Emma is faulty.

During her entire life until the point at which the action of the novel commences, Emma is raised chiefly by a governess, Miss Taylor. They lived in perfect amity, "Emma doing just as she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own" (5). This gives us insight into Emma's nature, and, delivered with the narrator's trademark comedic irony, produces sympathy with said narrator. We come to expect honesty from the narrator, even when it comes to her titular heroine. In the opening pages of the novel, the

narrator enumerates Miss Taylor's good qualities, which include "such an affection for [Emma] as could never find fault" (6). This, we know, is probably for Emma one of the very best of Miss Taylor's many good qualities. While it provides some gentle humor, this observation also produces a valuable contrast to Mr. Knightley's treatment of Emma.

Mr. Knightley is an old friend of the family, the elder brother of Emma's brother-in-law, and the only person in the novel able to find fault with Emma or at least the only one willing to communicate it to her. When he sees her doing wrong, he tells her so. The narrator tells us that this is "not particularly agreeable to Emma" (11); however, it is valuable. Mr. Knightley's disapprobation is the only check Emma has on her own vanity; it often serves as the only alloy of her thoughtless gaiety. Though she rarely seeks his advice and almost never takes it, readers begin to see him working on her like a conscience. Thus, when Emma falls in love with him, we recognize her growth in valuing the kind of relationship from which she can learn over the kind of relationship in which she can only instruct. Emma's psychological growth is evidenced by her preferring a more honest, beneficial relationship with Mr. Knightley to the blindly partial, self-serving kind of relationship she initially enjoys with Miss Taylor, Harriet, and even Frank Churchill. Thus, the marriage of Mr. Knightley and Emma is not, as Henry James might have feared, merely a comedic necessity

or empty “happy ending,” but a means of portraying Emma’s growth and providing the reader with hope of Emma’s continued improvement in self-knowledge.

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth observes that “there can be no dramatic irony, by definition, unless the author and audience can somehow share knowledge which the characters do not hold” (175), and *Emma* is rich in dramatic irony. Much of the novel’s humor and irony derives from the heroine’s lack of understanding when it comes to the feelings and situations of others; she is blind to probabilities and realities that interfere with her wishes. The title character is blithely unaware that Mr. Elton’s warm praise of her drawing of Harriet is due to his wish to flatter *her*, not Harriet. She is likewise in the dark about the charade he brings to her house not for Miss Smith’s collection but as something that Miss Woodhouse might like to see. When the narrator says, “The speech was more to Emma than to Harriet, which Emma could understand,” (71) the reader knows that Emma does not really understand. Indeed Emma always manages to account for any peculiarity in Mr. Elton (or anyone else) by attributing it to whatever cause pleases her most. The reader, however, is never in the dark and shares this awareness with the narrator, who has no compunction about winking at us behind her heroine’s back. When Emma’s brother-in-law suggests the possibility of Mr. Elton’s fancying her rather than

Harriet, she assures him he is wrong and “amus[es] 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). And readers are amused by Emma’s amusement, knowing as we do that she is the one with misplaced pretensions of judgment.

In addition to her failure to understand the behavior of others, Emma is also hindered by a total lack of self-awareness. Emma prides herself on her keen penetration, while turning none of that penetration inward (until the end of the novel). For example, in Chapter Thirty of *Emma*, when Frank Churchill’s departure necessitates the cancelling of a ball that Emma was looking forward to and Mr. Knightley was not, Emma fancies herself in love with Frank Churchill because of the vague feelings of boredom and restlessness that ensue. She comforts herself in the face of the loss of the ball with the immediate reflection that at least “Mr. Knightley will be happy” (262). Then, upon idly wondering what Frank would think of the insufferable Mrs. Elton, Emma, though she has in actuality rarely thought of Frank since he left, exclaims to herself, “Ah! There I am—thinking of him directly. Always the first person to be thought of! How I catch myself out! Frank Churchill comes as regularly into my mind!” (279). This amusing episode naturally brings to mind the moment just pages before when Mr. Knightley immediately and causelessly sprang to mind. (It also draws the

readers' attention to all the times hereafter when he will be the first whose feelings or opinions she considers or wonders about.) Later, when Emma and Harriet, who is recovering from her hopeless infatuation with Mr. Elton, are trying to recall some incident that occurred months ago, Harriet relays many details of the incident to no avail; Emma cannot remember it. However, upon Harriet's mentioning Mr. Knightley's share in the conversation, Emma cries out, "I do remember it [. . .] Mr. Knightley was standing just here, was not he?—I have an idea he was standing just here," to which Harriet replies, "Ah! I do not know. I cannot recollect. [. . .] Mr. Elton was sitting here, I remember, much about where I am now" (339-340). This picture of the girls' selective memories is a deft move by Austen; it is fairly subtle and yet impossible to overlook. Each girl has remembered the situation only as it relates to the man she loves. Both are aware of Harriet's share of this selectiveness and its cause, but neither stop to wonder why Emma should remember where Mr. Knightley happened to be standing during a conversation that took place months before.

Despite Emma's lack of self-awareness, readers are able to fully understand her, thanks to Austen's use of free indirect discourse. The free indirect style in *Emma* allows the reader free range through Emma's psyche; we have access to the feelings she cannot hide from herself, though she hides them from others. David Lodge provides a perfect representative example for this

technique; this passage takes place just after Mr. Elton's declaration of love for Emma has taken her by surprise:

The hair was curled, and the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable. – It was a wretched business, indeed! – Such an overthrow of everything she had been wishing for! – Such a development of everything most unwelcome! – Such a blow for Harriet! – That was the worst of all. Every part of it brought pain and humiliation, of some sort or other; but compared with the evil to Harriet, all was light; and she would gladly have submitted to feel yet more mistaken – more in error – more disgraced by misjudgment, than she actually was, could the effect of her blunders have been confined to herself. (134)

Lodge provides a helpful analysis of Austen's use of free indirect discourse in the above passage, saying,

The beginning of the first sentence is objective narrative description – “*The hair,*” not “*her hair.*” “*The maid,*” not “*her maid.*” But “to think and be miserable” moves the focus of the narrative onto Emma's state of mind, and the succeeding sentences actually give us access to her consciousness. We overhear, as it were, Emma's thoughts as she might have formulated them – “*It's a wretched business – such an overthrow of everything I've been wishing for!*” but transposed into the third person, past tense – though in fact some of the sentences lack a main verb, further blurring the distinction between author's voice and character's voice. The advantage of the third-person mode is that it allows a smooth, seamless transmission to a more summary, and syntactically complicated description of Emma's state of mind, in which the authorial narrator's voice mingles with Emma's. (48)

Superficially, this type of narration is a wise choice, as it avoids the clumsiness of tags like “she thought” and provides naturalness; on a deeper level, it supplies a view of Emma's mind that is essential to any kind of sympathetic reading of the

character. Readers see that Emma is humiliated and vexed at having guessed wrongly and schemed fruitlessly; however, we also learn that hurting Harriet and leading her astray in a serious way is a source of great pain to Emma, greater than might have been suspected. We see that, despite the fact that Emma formed their relationship for her own gratification and convenience, more than her avowed high-minded hopes for improving Harriet, Emma genuinely cares for her and regrets her own insensitive actions.

In addition, by limiting her inside views to mainly her heroine (with only the occasional fleeting visit into Mr. Knightley's consciousness), Austen further heightens the audience's sympathy. For instance, if readers were allowed into Jane Fairfax's mind and heart, we would be even more ashamed of Emma's unfair assumptions and accusations than Emma eventually is herself. As it is, most of the novel is told from Emma's point of view, and she is present in almost all scenes. However, since Emma is generally mistaken or misinformed about the state of affairs, readers must pay especially close attention to the narrator's hints and insights to avoid being misled into Emma's mistakes. According to Lodge, "telling the story through the consciousness of characters whose understanding of events is partial, mistaken, deceived, or self-deceiving" was a specialty of Henry James's, "which makes it all the more surprising that his recorded remarks about Jane Austen are so condescending" (49). This

condescending view of Austen as a writer who stumbled onto clever techniques, rather than an artist who studied and honed them, is all too prevalent.

In "The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury: Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*," Casey Finch and Peter Bowen are generally fair, however, in their assessment of Austen, proclaiming her "the first great technician of the free indirect style" (4). However, they claim that this style of narration negates the narrator's authority: "the novel's deployment of free indirect style (which Austen first brought to fruition) has the effect of naturalizing *narrative* authority by disseminating it among the characters" (3). Finch and Bowen go on to say, "the development in Austen's hands of free indirect style marks a crucial moment in the history of novelistic technique in which narrative authority is seemingly elided, ostensibly giving way to what Flaubert called a transparent style in which the author is 'everywhere felt, but never seen'" (3). I disagree with Finch and Bowen on their assessment of Austen's authority or lack thereof. Though I do believe Austen's narrator is "everywhere felt," I do not believe that the free indirect style employed by Austen undermines her narrator's authority but rather makes it constantly and consistently felt. Though the narrator's judgment and views are occasionally delivered by or through a character, readers are never mistaken about the fact that they are indeed the narrator's views.

Furthermore, this indirectness lends just enough mystery to justify the rereading of the novels. The narrator does not tell us what to feel or see; she only subtly implies that we turn our attention to one episode or another. Therefore, not only are new discoveries to be made upon rereading but new judgments may be formed about characters and events when readers become more familiar with the narrator's irony and her employment of inside views. Thus, the novels (perhaps especially *Emma*, where there are mysteries and surprises buried within the larger plot) demand reexamination. According to Richard Cronin in *Jane Austen in Context*, "the use of a free indirect style far more elaborate than anything attempted by her predecessors allowed Austen to seed her novels with ironic pleasures only fully available on rereading" (296). When readers return to *Emma*, they will discover the narrator's sympathy not in her ironic comments about Emma but in her willingness to account for Emma's actions by revealing her thoughts and motivations.

Another character who prides herself on her clear-sightedness and quick judgment, while being continually blind to the realities around her, is Austen's most famous heroine: *Pride and Prejudice's* Elizabeth Bennett. Though readers recognize Emma's flaws from the beginning (in fact, the narrator explicitly acquaints us with them on the first page of the novel), for much of the novel Elizabeth seems the standard of female perfection. While Elizabeth's vivacity

and wit are undeniable, she is not without her own flaws. They consist mainly, of course, of the titular prejudice, which causes her to judge falsely the merits and motives of others; Elizabeth prides herself on being a good judge of character, but the reader discovers, as does Elizabeth herself, that she is not. When Elizabeth discovers how mistaken she has been about both Darcy and Wickham, the narrator informs us, "She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (208) and Elizabeth herself says, "Till this moment I never knew myself" (208). It is this knowing herself, this discovery and admission of her own faults that, as with Emma, provide hope for Elizabeth's psychological development.

As Elizabeth eventually realizes, she lacks both self-awareness and true insight into other people's behavior and motivations. However, the source of these failings is less easily traced to one particular event or stage of development. Of Elizabeth's early life, we know very little. However, what we know is interesting, especially in light of her education or lack thereof. When closely and impertinently questioned by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Elizabeth says that none of her sisters draws, only she and one other sings or plays the piano, and that their family never employed a governess. Lady Catherine is shocked at the shameful negligence: "Who taught you? Who attended to you? Without a

governess, you must have been neglected." Elizabeth calmly replies, "Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might" (165). Readers can easily assume that Elizabeth was not one of those who chose to be idle.

However, whether or not she devoted sufficient time to learning and practicing academic skills, it can easily be understood that she would not have received the proper encouragement from her parents upon the successful completion of those tasks. Mr. Bennett is an indolent man and an uninvolved father, who deprecates his daughters' behavior without regulating it and sees foolishness in everyone but himself, a man whom the narrator neatly sums up as an "odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice" (5). Mrs. Bennett is a selfish, ignorant woman and an unjust, undiscerning mother, more interested in marrying her daughters off than in educating them or instilling values in them; the narrator says, "she was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news" (5). With such parents, the Bennett girls must have been largely left to shift for themselves in principles, talents, and abilities. Similarly, though surrounded by siblings, the girls must have felt little need to compete with each

other, as there was no audience for their successes. In other words, as they could not compete for the approval of a parent or a governess, they could have very little motivation for striving hard for success. Therefore, during Erikson's crucial School-Age Child stage, Elizabeth was likely unable to accomplish the goal of developing industry.

Though the psychology of Austen's characters lines up very well with Erikson's theories, his are by no means the only psychological theories that can be successfully applied to her characters. As such, some passages of *Pride and Prejudice* are interesting simply as studies of the effect of parental discord on children. The disparity between the personalities, pleasures, and abilities of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett are prime fodder for Austen's wit; their conversations, in which Mr. Bennett usually insults Mrs. Bennett without her realizing it, are some of the funniest moments in the novel. However, Elizabeth reflects on the disadvantages such a relationship must have on the children of such a couple. In a time when divorce was hardly an option, many couples (or at least many couples in Austen's world) found themselves marrying at haste and repenting at leisure. Lured in by a pretty face or a prettier dowry, men like Mr. Bennett and *Sense and Sensibility's* Mr. Palmer discover with disappointment that their wives are silly and nonsensical. Likewise, worthy women like Charlotte Lucas or *Northanger Abbey's* Mrs. Tilney are seduced by a title or a respectable income to

marry men whom they might otherwise never give a thought to. Austen clearly shuns the idea of a loveless and mercenary marriage, and, though sometimes treating its effects with humor, she nevertheless devotes enough time to these effects to show their great importance and their influence on the happiness of their children and the success of their children's relationships.

The narrator, beginning objectively enough, explains the origin of the Bennetts' affection and the unhappiness of the ensuing union; she also gives a brief view of Elizabeth's thoughts regarding it:

Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her father, captivated by youth and beauty [. . .] had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her [. . .]. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement [. . .]. Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents (236-237).

It is evident that unlike her younger sisters and Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth is aware of the dangers of marrying for the wrong reasons, which allows her to reject Mr. Darcy's first (inappropriate) proposal. This mature attitude gives

readers a good idea of Elizabeth's state of mind. She is a flawed heroine, no doubt, but she is capable of rationality, of (eventually) self-awareness, and of a desire for intimacy. Thus, whatever the failures of her parents and the poor example she has had of intimacy, she is psychologically healthy enough to experience the growth which prepares her for the Young Adult stage and a healthy, intimate relationship with Mr. Darcy.

Readers might better understand both Emma's and Elizabeth's failings in light of Erikson's theories. Though readers encounter the characters in early adulthood, their behavior is shaped by the previous stages of development, and both Emma and Elizabeth have less than ideal adolescences. The Adolescent stage encompasses the approximate ages of twelve to eighteen. The psychosocial crisis of this stage is **identity versus role confusion**. During this time, the adolescent is trying to integrate many roles (those of child, sibling, friend, and student, for example) into one comprehensive self-image, but that self-image may change rapidly and often. According to Erikson's theories, "[adolescents'] advanced cognitive skills allow them to imagine themselves in different roles" (Kail 278); this description aptly applies to *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine Morland, who imagines herself in the role of gothic heroine. In addition, adolescents experience frequent identification with one or more role models (*Identity* 98), as Catherine does with Isabella Thorpe and, as I will observe later in

this chapter, as *Sense and Sensibility's* Marianne does with Mrs. Dashwood.

During this stage, the adolescent should also discover who she is as an individual separate from her immediate family and should withdraw from responsibilities. At this time, the adolescent's most significant relationships are with peer groups; thus, peer pressure is a highly significant issue. The strengths that should be gained during adolescence are devotion and fidelity, be it to people or causes. If a person is unsuccessful in negotiating this stage, he or she will experience role confusion and upheaval (*Identity* 97).

Though Emma's and Elizabeth's experiences in youth color their adult behavior, readers encounter them only in adulthood. However, readers' acquaintance with Marianne Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility* covers a time span of under two years, allowing us to observe her mostly from the ages of sixteen to seventeen (though the events in the final chapter of the novel take place two years later); this means that Marianne is in the latter years of adolescence. Tony Tanner, in his introduction to a 1969 edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, says, "The validity of Marianne's responses is subtly undermined by giving them an edge of caricature – as though Jane Austen were defending herself against her own creation" (qtd. in Scott 81). Though Marianne is undoubtedly melodramatic, she is intentionally represented that way to illustrate

the extreme sensitivity and sensibility of her nature, which is thoroughly in keeping with her adolescent mindset.

While her childhood and early adolescence were, as far as readers know, relatively normal, she is nonetheless subject to the typical weaknesses of adolescence; she is struggling to discover her identity, and is under the influence of a role model. While it would be more advisable to take the sensible, steady Elinor for her role model, Marianne adopts the behaviors and failings of her mother instead. Though truly good and well-meaning, both Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood are romantic and sensitive to a degree that makes them fail to behave with common discretion and instead to act in a way that is often inattentive to the feelings of others. When Marianne's love interest, Willoughby, first leaves Barton, Marianne, though still confident in his affection, wallows in grief at the loss of his company: "This violent oppression of spirits continued the whole evening. She was without any power, because she was without any desire of command over herself" (82). Mrs. Dashwood is likewise oppressed, though still more confident, and encourages Marianne in the indulgence of her feelings. Elinor thinks her mother should question Marianne about the nature of the relationship between her and Willoughby, but her mother refuses: "Elinor thought this generosity overstrained, considering her sister's youth, and urged the matter farther, but in vain; common sense, common care, common prudence,

were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood's romantic delicacy" (85). Readers can be certain here of the narrator's disapproval of Mrs. Dashwood's behavior; though Austen's narrator may joke about a lack of common sense, she always takes a lack of prudence very seriously, and breaches in prudence and the care of wayward children always end in disaster.

When Marianne's troubles in her relationship with Willoughby are increased by learning that he is engaged to another woman, her extreme sensibility is proportionally increased. Readers see her at her most melodramatic when, after learning of his engagement, Elinor suggests that she exert herself and try to master her feelings, to which Marianne replies, "I cannot, I cannot [. . .] leave me, leave me, if I distress you; leave me, hate me, forget me; but do not torture me so. Oh! How easy for those who have no sorrow of their own to talk of exertion!" (185). As we can see, Marianne at her most melodramatic is also Marianne at her most selfish, blind to Elinor's sorrow.

The narrator also provides examples of another kind of self-willed, though less selfish, blindness. When Edward visits the Dashwood girls in London, he finds himself awkwardly situated on finding them in the company of his secret fiancée, Lucy Steele; thus, he is quiet and awkward. Marianne, who "saw his agitation, and could easily trace it to whatever cause best pleased herself, was

perfectly satisfied" (243). This is one of many times that Austen shows people deceiving themselves—blind to whatever they do not desire to see.

Nevertheless, despite Marianne's self-willed blindness and overwrought sensibility, she does experience significant growth by the end of the novel. When she recovers from her illness, she expresses her sense of her own errors in regard to Willoughby in a conversation with Elinor:

"I am not wishing him too much good," said Marianne at last with a sigh, "when I wish his secret reflections may be no more unpleasant than my own. He will suffer enough in them."

"Do you compare your conduct with his?"

"No. I compare it with what it ought to have been; I compare it with yours."

"Our situations have borne little resemblance."

"They have borne more than our conduct." (345)

And of her own conduct, she says:

Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing indulged. Every body seemed injured by me. The kindness, the unceasing kindness of Mrs. Jennings, I had repaid with ungrateful contempt [. . .]. But you,--you above all [. . .] had been wronged by me. I, and only I, knew your heart and its sorrows; yet to what did it influence me?--not to any compassion that could benefit you or myself.--Your example was before me; but to what avail?--Was I more considerate of you and your comfort? Did I imitate your forbearance, or lessen your restraints, by taking any part in those offices of general complaisance or particular gratitude which you had hitherto been left to discharge alone?--No;--not less when I knew you to be unhappy, than when I had believed you at ease, did I turn away from every exertion of duty or friendship; scarcely allowing sorrow to exist but with me. (346)

Marianne's recognition of her own self-indulgent failings in behavior reveals her growth and development. She recognizes and confesses her faults, and announces her intention of amending her behavior to prevent their recurrence: "The future must be my proof. I have laid down my plan, and if I am capable of adhering to it--my feelings shall be governed and my temper improved" (347). Thus we see that Marianne has progressed from the adolescent mindset to a level of maturity that will prepare her for adulthood and a healthy, intimate relationship with Colonel Brandon. In addition, it is clear that Marianne is capable of devotion and fidelity and, therefore, has successfully accomplished the goals of the adolescent stage.

In addition to her good sense, Elinor is endowed with the clear-sighted and discriminating judgment of others that Emma and Elizabeth mistakenly pride themselves on. Elinor is the only Dashwood to be suspicious of Willoughby's behavior before his character is revealed. She understands Mrs. Jennings's motives better than Marianne. She comprehends Colonel Brandon's reasons for seeking her out without suspecting him of transferring his attachment to her, as Mrs. Jennings does. She recognizes the ulterior motives of Lucy Steele's friendship. And she is not fooled by the exaggerated superciliousness of Mr. Palmer's behavior into believing him to be as indifferent and callous as he wishes to seem. Her opinions and assessments of the behavior

of the dramatis personae of the novel serve to replace the otherwise necessary narrator commentary.

The neighborhood of Barton Park is peopled with personalities of every imaginable sort: the rudely taciturn, the rudely inquisitive but well-meaning, the exuberantly playful, the deceitful, the friendly, the cold, and the well-bred, all handled with equal deftness by Austen. Take, for example, Lady Middleton: cold and dull, interested in nothing but indulging her children and courting the acquaintance of fashionable people. Her behavior Austen treats with the insightfulness of a true observer of human nature and the irony of a true humorist; when first introducing the reader to Lady Middleton, the narrator reflects seriously, "Her manners had all the elegance which her husband's wanted. But they would have been improved by some share of his frankness and warmth" (31). In the next example, when Marianne is playing the piano for the Middletons and Colonel Brandon, only the Colonel is attentive. However, the ways in which the Middletons are inattentive varies; Sir John is engaged in his characteristic unrestrained conversation, while Lady Middleton's inattentiveness is inexplicable:

Sir John was loud in his admiration at the end of every song, and as loud in his conversation with the others while every song lasted. Lady Middleton frequently called him to order, wondered how anyone's attention could be diverted from music for a moment, and asked Marianne to sing a particular song which Marianne had just finished (35).

We can only assume that she was wrapped up in her own thoughts or activities. While Sir John's behavior is by no means admirable in the above passage, it is important to note that the root cause of his bad behavior both at this time and throughout the novel is voluble good humor, friendliness, and a love of company, while the source of Lady Middleton's bad behavior is selfishness and a self-serving desire to climb the social ladder. Those who accuse Austen of merely promoting strict adherence to manners and mores should note that in mocking the polite but insipid behavior of Lady Middleton, Austen shows as thorough a distaste for the technical adherence to custom and manners as she does for absolute noncompliance. Elegant good breeding without kindness or sense are as problematic as the warm and friendly vulgarity of a Mrs. Jennings.

Mrs. Jennings at first seems like a well-meaning but obnoxious nuisance. Her gossip, her inquisitiveness, and her untoward jollity seem to deserve almost all of the censure that an impatient Marianne can bestow upon them. However, the narrator reveals, by degrees, the kindness and generosity of Mrs. Jennings's character and the really good feelings by which she is guided; her kind attentions to the Dashwood girls in London are checked only by the ridiculousness of the way in which they are sometimes offered. When Willoughby's engagement becomes known, the narrator explains Mrs. Jennings's behavior:

Their good friend saw that Marianne was unhappy, and felt that every thing was due to her which might make her at all less so. She treated her therefore, with all the indulgent fondness of a parent towards a favourite child on the last day of its holidays. Marianne was to have the best place by the fire, was to be tempted to eat by every delicacy in the house, and to be amused by the relation of all the news of the day. Had not Elinor, in the sad countenance of her sister, seen a check to all mirth, she could have been entertained by Mrs. Jennings's endeavours to cure a disappointment in love, by a variety of sweetmeats and olives [. . .]. (193)

But her decision to remain at Cleveland with the girls during Marianne's illness, her genuine sympathy, and her selfless attendance and care counteract all the negative effects that her behavior has previously occasioned; we are told that her help during this time was given "with a kindness of heart which made Elinor really love her" (308), and the narrator implies that people's intentions and motivations are generally more important than their actions.

Mr. Palmer is an even more fascinating study in human behavior and is possibly an entirely unique character in Austen's novels. His intentional effrontery, while unreasonably amusing to his wife and Mrs. Jennings, generally surprises and offends the Dashwoods. He has no scruple about ignoring direct questions or insulting people, be it indirectly or directly. However, the narrator provides Elinor with a nice insight into his character; she says, "Elinor was not inclined, after a little observation, to give him credit for being so genuinely and unaffectedly ill-natured or ill-bred as he wished to appear [. . .] it was rather a wish of distinction" (112). Furthermore, during Marianne's contagious illness at

the Palmers' home, Cleveland, he remains after his wife has left "as well from real humanity and good-nature, as from a dislike of appearing to be frightened away by this wife" (308). The contradictions of his character (and Elinor's perception in recognizing them) are interesting points in the novel and evidence of Austen's thorough understanding of the contradictions inherent in human behavior.

Through her representation of Mrs. Jennings, Mr. Palmer, and others, Austen seems to be making an argument about appearances which reinforces the value of perception in her heroines. It is important to note that Elinor, though not blind to their defects, recognizes the good in others while Marianne sees only the bad. Marianne's lack of perception with regard to the behavior of others places her in the same category of obstinate, selfish obliviousness to which Emma and Elizabeth belong. Because she is wrapped up in her own concerns, she consistently misunderstands and misjudges the behavior of others.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Psychologically Mature Adult: Anne Elliot

In Anne Elliot of *Persuasion*, Austen supplies a heroine who seems to serve as a standard of upright and noble behavior; Anne is one of the most thoroughly psychologically developed and emotionally mature heroines of Austen's creation. Unlike Austen's other heroines who must experience emotional or intellectual growth throughout the novel, Anne is, for the most part, endorsed and supported by the narrator and praised and valued by the respectable characters throughout the novel.

Anne is encountered only as an adult, and, at twenty-seven, a rather older adult than any of Austen's other major heroines. Not much is told us of her childhood and adolescence, except that her mother died when Anne was fourteen and Anne was sent away to boarding school. After her mother's death, Anne receives most of her guidance and affection from her mother's friend, Lady Russell, rather than from her father, who is a selfish, vain, and shallow man. Despite this loss, however, Anne's life during these years molds her into a young woman who stands as a model of healthy psychological growth. According to Erikson, the adolescent's task is to discover who she is separate from her family (*Identity* 95); she also generally withdraws from responsibilities associated with

family life. At school, Anne is easily able to accomplish both the self-discovery and the avoidance of responsibility. We know that she makes friends there, as she later renews an acquaintance with her old classmate, Miss Hamilton, (now Mrs. Smith) and enjoys plenty of time with peers, as it is a boarding school for children of her own age; in fact, Miss Hamilton, at seventeen, is one of the oldest girls there. Thus, her time at boarding school put her in the ideal position to accomplish the goals of the adolescent stage and her successful navigation of this stage prepares her for the next stage: adulthood.

The “persuasion” of the title refers to the fact that Anne has allowed herself, at nineteen, to be persuaded to end her engagement to the charismatic but penniless sailor, Captain Frederick Wentworth, to whom she is engaged. The announcement of her engagement is met by her father with “great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter” (). Unfortunately, Sir Walter is not the only one who disapproves of the alliance; the young couple also meets with resistance from Lady Russell, Anne’s surrogate mother. The narrator explains:

Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill-will [. . .] but Lady Russell, whom she had always loved and relied on, could not, with such steadiness of opinion, and such tenderness of manner, be continually advising her in vain. She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing: indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it. (27)

Lady Russell's disapproval, though in part motivated by the same pride that Sir Walter acts on, is somewhat more pardonable than his, as it is rooted in her desire for Anne's wellbeing. She grieves to think that Anne might

involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession [. . .]. Anne Elliot [. . .] to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence! (26-27)

While her fiancé resents her decision and is disgusted by her pliability of temperament in allowing it, the narrator presents it as an unfortunate but natural decision, not the result of weakness or fickleness but rather an act of sincere devotion. As the narrator reveals, "It was not merely a selfish caution, under which she acted, in putting an end to it. Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up. The belief of being prudent, and self-denying, principally for his advantage, was her chief consolation" (27-28). Presumably, Anne believes that Wentworth will more easily rise in his profession and earn his fortune without the inconvenience of a wife and family. Moreover, it would be considered highly imprudent to enter into an engagement that was not sanctioned by both families. This decision illustrates the selfless devotion of Anne's character (one of the chief strengths gained in adolescence), and we see that it indicates a normal, healthy psychological standpoint. Later episodes, such as her discussion of women's

faithfulness versus men's, which take place eight years after her engagement ends, reveal her fidelity.

The narrator's justification of Anne's behavior in ending her engagement is not meant to imply that the narrator approves of the decision itself or of Lady Russell's hand in it, which the narrator calls an "over-anxious caution which seems to insult exertion and distrust Providence" (30). It merely suggests that she admires Anne's *motives* in ending the relationship. Anne, at nineteen, has made a selfless, prudent, reasonable decision that Anne at twenty-seven heartily regrets; the narrator tells us, "she had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (30). This insight into the heroines' thoughts, feelings, and motives—as well as the insight into typical, natural human behavior—is typical of Austen's narrator, and reveals the sophisticated insight into human nature and psychology that Austen possessed.

Anne's passionate discussion of women's devotion versus men's, which, overheard by Captain Wentworth, brings on the profession of his renewed love, is both a defense of women's fidelity in general and an expression of her own. Anne's and Captain Harville's spirited debate over which sex is more faithful comes to an end with this:

'Oh!' cried Anne, eagerly, 'I hope to do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you [. . .]. I should deserve utter

contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by woman [. . .]. All the privilege I claim for my own sex [. . .] is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone!' (235).

Thus we see that Anne's devotion, softened but not removed by the intervening years, remains. In addition to acquiring the ability to love that is essential to the successful psychological maturation of a young adult according to Erikson, Anne has attained and retained the requisite fidelity.

In *Youth: Change and Challenge*, Erik Erikson claims that "the sense of and the capacity for fidelity" is a strength, "not a moral trait to be acquired by individual effort" but a "part of the human equipment evolved with socio-genetic evolution" (1). Thus fidelity is not simply a nice part of Anne's character; it is a part of what makes her (or anyone) human, (at least if she be fully and naturally developed and evolved), and Austen's ability to capture it in her characters proves her own understanding of what it means to be a fully evolved and psychologically developed human being.

However, Anne is by no means a perfect character, and Austen would likely be incensed at anyone who claimed otherwise. In writing to her niece, Fanny, who had been discussing her aunt's works with an acquaintance, Mr. Wildman, Austen says that Wildman should not read *Persuasion*, as he always wants to think well of all young ladies and "he & I should not in the least agree of course, in our ideas of Novels and Heroines; pictures of perfection as you

know make me sick & wicked" (*Selected* 198). Thus, though Austen concedes that, in Anne, she had created a heroine "almost too good for me" (*Selected* 198) and though the narrator clearly admires her, Anne does not "entirely escape Austen's ironic vision" (Wallace 100). She is gently mocked for her romanticism, (though not to the same extent as Marianne Dashwood). Anne's defect seems to be a propensity to over-romanticize her situation. As Wallace points out, the narrator's ironic wit is gently turned against Anne more than once. For example, when she begins to feel secure of a return of Wentworth's regard, Anne is happily musing on the subject, which prompts the narrator to comment, "Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of Bath than Anne was sporting with from Camden-place to Westgate-buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way" (192). This minor imperfection, however, does not detract from Anne's psychological and emotional maturity, which are in all points superior to most, if not all, of Austen's heroines; this blot on her perfection merely makes Anne flawed enough to be realistic.

Though developmental psychological theories align quite well with the psychosocial behaviors of Austen's heroines, some elements of Austen's psychological and emotional complexity fall outside the scope of these theories, and in fact cross over into concepts related to cognitive psychology.

One such striking element of Austen's representation of psychology is the focus of Lisa Zunshine's "Why Jane Austen Was Different, And Why We May Need Cognitive Science to See It." In this article Zunshine discusses Lev Vygotsky's concept of deep intersubjectivity, as defined by George Butte in *I Know That You Know That I Know: Narrating Subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie*. Intersubjectivity provides insight into the twin concerns of this thesis: Austen's psychological insight and narrative technique. Butte defines deep intersubjectivity as

the web of partially interpenetrating consciousnesses that exists wherever perceiving subjects, that is, human beings, collect. The process begins when a self perceives the gestures, either of body or word, of another consciousness, and it continues when the self can perceive in those gestures an awareness of her or his own gestures. Subsequently the self, upon revealing a consciousness of the other's response, perceives yet another gesture responding to its response, so that out of this conversation of symbolic behaviors emerges a web woven from elements of mutually exchanged consciousnesses. (Butte 28)

To clarify this definition, Butte turns to an episode in the nineteenth chapter of *Persuasion*, in which Anne, her sister Elizabeth, and Captain Wentworth all find themselves in the same shop:

It did not surprise, but it grieved Anne to observe that Elizabeth would not know him. She saw that he saw Elizabeth, that Elizabeth saw him, that there was complete internal recognition on each side; she was convinced that he was ready to be acknowledged as an acquaintance, expecting it, and she had the pain of seeing her sister turn away with unalterable coldness. (176)

This awareness of a recognition and expectation between two other people is an intuitive sort of mind reading that Butte terms a “layering of human consciousness” (4); according to Butte, Austen’s eighteenth-century predecessors were satisfied with two-layer exchanges, rather than multiple ones, and that Austen’s scenes “about the observation of observations” give birth to a “new way of shaping narrative” (4). Thus Austen’s treatment of fictional consciousness was an innovation in narrative as well as in the use of psychology in literature. Furthermore, Zunshine claims that while Butte “does not position himself as working within the new field known as cognitive approaches to literature, his argument provides a crucial first step for recognizing Austen’s prose as actively experimenting with readers’ cognition” (276).

Zunshine does not devote much time to the whys and wherefores of Austen’s use of deep intersubjectivity, as she is more concerned with proving that she is the first novelist to have done so; however, she does make an important observation:

[Austen’s use of deep intersubjectivity] does constitute a crucial component of her construction of multilevel mental embedment. When Anne Elliot observes Elizabeth and Captain Wentworth in Molland’s bakery shop, the stakes of her getting just right the private meaning of their mutually reflecting body language are very high. Austen pulls us into being profoundly invested emotionally in knowing that Anne knows that Wentworth knows that Elizabeth pretends not to recognize that he wants to be

acknowledged as an acquaintance. We rise up to this cognitive challenge because we are made to believe that it matters. (294)

I would argue that Austen's motivations in emotionally investing readers in this exchange are at least threefold; one is the merely superficial disclosure of Elizabeth's pride and resentment (representing the disapproval of almost all of Anne's family and friends), which is at this point in the novel disregarded by Anne, though it was of utmost importance to her in her previous relationship with Wentworth. This, however, could have been told to us by the narrator, rather than through Anne, thus suggesting Austen's second motivation in using this deep intersubjectivity, which is to reveal more of Anne's character. As Zunshine acknowledges, Anne "apparently watches people very closely, [but] is never explicitly described as doing so. Instead we get the results of her observation" (282). Therefore, this exchange serves to show that Anne, like *Sense and Sensibility's* Elinor, is a perceptive person who is highly attuned to other people's thoughts and motivations and is capable of understanding them. Third, and most importantly, this exchange and others like it, develop readers' knowledge of the relationship between the hero and heroine. Anne's close observation of Wentworth reveals her deep and thorough knowledge of his character. Like his ability to "distinguish the tones of [her] voice when they would be lost on others" (237), Anne's observation of "complete internal recognition" and conviction of his readiness "to be acknowledged as an

acquaintance" (176) highlight not only her careful and astute observance of others but her particular insight into Wentworth's thoughts and behaviors. It is not necessary for her to draw conclusions from his *actions* in this episode, as she can draw conclusions from his *intentions*.

Though this knowledge of his character may seem no more than what might be expected in a pair of lovers, it is actually essential in gaining the audience's confidence in the couple's chance for happiness. We are told in the beginning that they were originally drawn together by mainly superficial attractions and that "half the sum of attraction, on either side, might have been enough, for he had nothing to do, and she had hardly anybody to love" (26). The love of two very young people, rooted in boredom and loneliness, might seem to readers unlikely to withstand eight years of separation or lead to happiness if it does; thus it is essential that Austen reveal that, whatever the causes of their initial interest in each other, the relationship did lead to a deep knowledge and understanding of each other, and a love based on that knowledge. Anne's maturity, devotion, fidelity, and consistently blameless conduct are rooted in healthy psychosocial, cognitive, and emotional development and make her an ideal heroine.

One of the central themes of *Persuasion* is the value of considered, rational judgment over stubborn impulsivity; Austen's endorsement of the former is

evident in her support of Anne's motives in ending her engagement, but it is perhaps more clearly revealed in her decision to set up the heedless, young Louisa Musgrove as Anne's rival for Wentworth's affection. Despite Louisa's lively temperament, which is so unlike Anne's, she and Anne are fond of each other; however, it soon becomes evident that Louisa's determined willfulness appeals to Wentworth in his state of resentment over Anne's pliant, persuadable temperament. After Louisa's boast of her own determination never to "[turn] back from doing a thing that I had determined to do," Wentworth replies, "yours is the character of decision and firmness, I see [. . .] It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on (88). However, after Louisa's impulsive and determined actions at Lyme cause a near-fatal accident, and Anne's more mature and reasonable behavior helps to lessen the ill effects of that accident, Wentworth learns to again value thoughtful, reasoned judgment. He later explains how a comparison of Anne's and Louisa's actions had returned the former to his favor:

Till that day, till the leisure for reflection which followed it, he had not understood the perfect excellence of the mind with which Louisa's could so ill bear a comparison [. . .]. There, he had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind. (242).

While juxtaposing Austen's descriptions of her heroines' consciousnesses to established psychological theories helps us see the intentionality of her

renderings of the human mind, this intentionality is also evident in her detailed descriptions of other characters' minds. In the following passage from *Persuasion*, the narrator reveals an attention to the invalid Mrs. Smith's mindset that is very representative of the attention Austen paid to the psychological makeup of even minor characters; of Mrs. Smith, Anne reflects,

She had been very fond of her husband,--she had buried him. She had been used to affluence,--it was gone. She had no child to connect her with life and happiness again, no relations to assist in the arrangement of perplexed affairs, no health to make all the rest supportable [. . .]. Yet in spite of all this, Anne had reason to believe that she had moments only of languor and depression, to hours of occupation and enjoyment. How could it be?—She watched—observed—reflected—and finally determined that this was not a case of fortitude or of resignation only.—A submissive spirit might be patient, a strong understanding would supply resolution, but here was something more; here was that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone. It was the choicest gift of Heaven [. . .]. (154)

This consideration of Mrs. Smith's mind is vital to understanding what the author is saying about the mind in this novel. It shows the author's recognition of the value of a mature, judicious mind over even the value of a sanguine disposition (paralleling her endorsement of Anne's clear thinking and maturity over Louisa's impulsive liveliness). It also illustrates again Anne's intuitive, observational nature, her ability to see past people's actions to their very thoughts and intentions.

Tara Ghoshal Wallace suggests a problem in the narration of *Persuasion* that I think must be contested. While discussing Austen's "careful layering of narrative voice and characters' speech" (99), (which is presumably another way of describing free indirect speech), Wallace puts forth an interesting view of Austen's use of narration in *Persuasion*:

Distinctions between voices and values are sometimes difficult to unravel, requiring a certain amount of careful narratological work. In *Persuasion*, these confusions are further problematized because the narrative voice frequently aligns itself with some of the novel's least attractive characters, thereby changing once again a code that readers habitually follow. (113)

I concur with Wallace about the code readers follow (instinctively and habitually trusting the narrator), but I do not think the narrator "frequently" aligns herself with the unsympathetic characters. Wallace's examples are faulty. She cites the narrator's discussion of Elizabeth Elliot's thirteen years of being "out" in society—a polite euphemism for husband hunting—enduring the "sameness and elegance, the prosperity and the nothingness, of her scene of life" (9), comparing this bit of narration with Anne's later reflections on "the elegant stupidity of private parties" (180). However, the two attitudes are, I believe, intended to be contrasted, not compared. The narrator is not sympathizing with Elizabeth Elliot but rather subtly rejoicing in Elizabeth's spinsterhood, suggesting that it is deserved and self-imposed (caused, as it is, by her self-importance and greed), while Anne's is not. This view is reinforced by the more overt contrast of the

sisters' happiness in chapter twenty, when Elizabeth is enjoying the attentions of aristocratic relatives, while Anne has just enjoyed the attention of her beloved. Austen's narrator tells us, "it would be an insult to the nature of Anne's felicity to draw any comparison between it and her sister's; the origin of one all selfish vanity, of the other all generous attachment" (185). If Austen hesitates to draw comparisons between the happiness of Elizabeth and that of Anne, it seems unreasonable to assume that Austen displays equal sympathy for their similar situations, as Wallace does; instead, the author's view of each character should be interpreted as contrasting.

Austen's place in the literary canon is secure with or without scholars' recognition of her characters' psychological sophistication. However, studying the highly developed intuitive understanding evidenced by Austen's narration can add a new dimension to readers' understanding of the characters. By examining Austen's revelation of her characters' psychological complexity as evinced by Austen's use of free indirect discourse and other narratorial techniques, readers may gain a new sympathy for Emma and Marianne or a new appreciation for Fanny and Elinor; they will also undoubtedly gain a new respect for Austen. Though more or less overt and authorial in her various novels, Austen's narrator is always as insightful and revelatory as she is charming, drawing on her knowledge of human nature and human foibles to create true-to-

life, three-dimensional characters who conform to standard psychological norms. Though further investigation is no doubt needed, I hope to have brought to light a misconception about the psychological sophistication of Jane Austen's works, which has been largely overlooked. Her works deserve to be studied not just for their charming characters and clever dialogue but for the psychological depth of those characters, for Austen's ability to create characters whose thoughts and behaviors conform to standard developmental stages, and for the narratological innovation of her works, all of which confirm Austen's status as a literary genius.

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