THE INCLUDED LETTER IN JANE AUSTEN'S FICTION

Susan Pepper Robbins
Cartersville, Virginia

B.A., Westhampton College, 1964
M.A., University of Virginia, 1967

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ABSTRACT

Jane Austen began her career as an epistolary novelist at the end of the eighteenth century when the novel in letters was the most popular kind of fiction. By 1797 however, she had rejected the "pure" letter narrative structure for narratives that included letters in them. The reasons for her change are suggested in the dissertation: the epistolary novel exemplified in Richardson's Clarissa is a form which depends on public referents, which assumes that the nature of man and his social order are essentially uniform and stable, and which defines itself as a series of documents attesting to these fixed orders. Austen's concerns with the ambiguous relationship of the private life to public norms and with the changing nature of the family are not compatible to the epistolary structure.

In the decade of the 1790's, Austen wrote four epistolary works: Love and Freindship, Lady Susan, Elinor and Marianne, and First Impressions. Of these, only the first has a subject compatible to its vehicle of the letter; the later three because they were reworked into narratives with included letters suggest that Austen felt that letters were inadequate for her emerging theme of the collapse of social order. We see the narrating voice replace the ennervated public consensus of the eighteenth century. She abandoned the letter-structure with its implications of order and trust in public authority for a narrative strategy that allowed her to explore a community whose order had been

shaken. The included letters in the novels function to show the loss of community, the decadence of the family, the shift from a Lockean to a Kantian world view, and the assertion of private values against public ones.

The included letters in each novel are examined and their functions defined. In Pride and Prejudice, the letter functions to discriminate between eighteenth and nineteenth century characters or between characters who remain essentially the same and those who change. In Northanger Abbey, the included letters frame and thereby expose the two "Gothics" of the novel. The letters of Mansfield Park mark the difference between the two languages of the novel--the language of the theatre and the language of real feeling. Only one letter is quoted completely in Emma: it tells its readers what they already know. Its function is to show us that we do not know as much as we need to know in order to be civilized. It defamiliarizes the familiar. In the revision of the finale of Persuasion, Austen embedded a letter which completes the shift from the function of the eighteenth-century "public document" letter to the new function of the letter as a private "affective gesture." From Sense and Sensibility where the letter is rejected as evidence to Persuasion where it is used as gesture, we see Austen's redefinition of the device of the letter in the structure of fiction.

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Introduction

The parents in Jane Austen's major novels are best remembered for their failings: the Bennets' sharing of only one true mind between them and that one flawed by cynicism; Mr. Woodhouse's small concerns with drafts from open windows and light suppers; Mr. Price's "Saturday condition"; Sir Walter Elliot's dependence on tall mirrors and the Baronetage. The children of these parents, however, are remembered for their sparkling intelligence, cleverness, sober virtue, and self-effacement. This family structure in which children are superior and minister to their parents is not found in Jane Austen's earliest fiction. There, she creates wise and protective parents who are cursed with stupid and ungrateful progeny. The parents are like Sir Godfrey and Lady Marlow who "were indeed very sensible people & tho' like many other sensible People, they sometimes did a foolish thing, yet in general their actions were guided by Prudence & regulated by discretion."[1] An examination of Austen's fiction suggests that she associated the world of the good parent and its implications of community order with epistolary fiction. When she began to alter the nature of the families in her fiction in the period of the late juvenilia,[2] she

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[1]All references to the works of Jane Austen will be taken from R. W. Chapman's edition. The Novels of Jane Austen rev., B. C. Southam in 6 volumes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923-75), "Edgar and Emma," VI, p. 30.

[2]B. C. Southam has assigned dates to the juvenilia; Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 16.

discarded the documentary function of the letter found in epistolary fiction and developed new functions for letters as literary devices embedded in narration. Although Jane Austen never published a novel written in letters, the epistolary fiction of the eighteenth century was the point of departure for her career, and much of her juvenilia is epistolary. During the last decade of that century, she rejected the "pure" epistolary novel for the novel that incorporates letters whose function is the presentation of the "new" family where the child is father to the man.

By 1797, Austen had completed her career as an epistolary novelist. Love and Freindship, written entirely in letters during the "middle" period of the juvenilia, was finished around 1790. Although she later copied it into a notebook, Volume the Second, she never revised it. The later transcription of this epistolary work in her "middle hand"[3] suggests that she was satisfied with it or felt that it could not be reworked or translated out of its epistolary casting. Two other epistolary compositions of this decade were later reworked into the narrated Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice. Lady Susan, which was written around 1793-94, begins as an epistolary novel but breaks off abruptly at the height of the exchange of letters to be brought to a conclusion by the narrating voice that is so familiar in the later novels. Austen's sensitivity to form is impressive, for she was in this decade rejecting "the most popular method for all kinds

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[3]Southam, p. 17.

of fiction,"[4] the epistolary novel. Between "13 June 1790," the date written at the end of Love and Freindship and 1797, when she reworked the epistolary Elinor and Marianne into the narrated Sense and Sensibility, Austen accomplished a revolution in the functions of the letter within the form of the novel. This is not to say that there had never been narratives that included letters before 1797. Her own narratives had included letters in them, and in Tristram Shandy Walter Shandy writes to his brother Toby to explain the mysteries of women, but the Austen canon which begins in eighteenth-century epistolarity and moves to nineteenth-century narratives with embedded letters reveals the technical process by which she merged and transformed the traditions she had inherited from eighteenth-century novelists. My discussion will focus on the embedded letters in Austen's novels in order to show how she changed the function of the letter from an eighteenth-century "effective document," a sign of the ordered community and fixed character, to a nineteenth-century device of "affective gesture" in which changes in social structures and identity are reflected.

Letters are "effective" when they document a world where parents are the source of goodness and value; they function to maintain or at least not disturb this status quo. In the narrated "Frederic and Elfrida" written between 1787 and 1790--one of the "early" juvenilia--the wisdom of Elfrida's parents gives structure to the tale, for their daughter finally marries

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[4]Southam, p. 26.

the man they had "earnestly wished" her to accept from the beginning, though they refused to press her to do something that would task her "delicate frame of mind." One letter appears in the story: Elfrida commissions her friend Charlotte to buy her a bonnet to suit her complexion. The narrator tells us that Charlotte "bought her Friend the wished-for Bonnet, & so ended this little adventure, much to the satisfaction of all parties" (p. 5). The narrator's closure--"so ended this little adventure, much to the satisfaction of all parties"--confirms the effectiveness of the letter. Its function is that of a document of community: communication is an unquestioned and given verity of the social group.

Another short narrative, "Henry and Eliza," demonstrates the compatibility of the world of the good parent and the effective function of the letter. Eliza writes to her patroness a letter that documents the new situation in the plot in a summarily lucid way: "Madame, We are married and gone" (p. 36). At the end of the story, Eliza is rescued by people who reveal themselves to be her real parents whose generosity she had repaid with the theft of fifty pounds. In the very short epistolary story, "Amelia Webster," seven letters effect three marriages; here letters and community ordering are in perfect harmony.

In the "late" juvenilia, written between 1792 and 1793, we see the beginning of the crisis in family order that is fully presented in the mature fiction and the accompanying crisis in form. Parents desert their children, or they are

mean to them like the mother who divides a pair of slippers between her daughters ("A Tour through Wales--in a Letter from a Young Lady--" p. 177). Louisa Lesley in "Lesley Castle" is an adultress who "wantonly disgraced the Maternal Character" (p. 110); her neglected daughter is a forerunner of the wunderkinder of the later novels--"just turned two years old; as handsome as tho' 2 and 20, as sensible as tho' 2 and 30, and as prudent as tho' 2 and 40" (p. 112). Sir George Lesley, the patriarch of the castle, "still remains the Beau, the flighty stripling, the gay lad, and springthly Youngster that his Son really was about five years back, and that he has affected to appear ever since" (p. 111), as his daughter writes. It is significant that the story written in letters was left unfinished; Southam rightly says that "as a whole, the work lacks unity."[5] We can conclude that epistolary form cannot give shape to a world of irresponsible parents and shaken community order.

In "Evelyn" of the same period, parental generosity and sibling loyalty are ridiculed. The four letters embedded in the narrative function to describe the confusion in the family; they are "ineffective"; their function is not to "effect" resolutions because the relationships they represent do not exist except as shams. For instance, the hero writes to his first wife's parents to tell them that their daughter is dead, assuring them in the same letter that he is happy with his new wife. They answer his letter thanking him for his "unexampled

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[5]Southam, p. 32.

generosity in writing to condole with us on the late unhappy accident" (p. 191) and enclose thirty pounds as a wedding gift when only ten days have passed since their daughter's death. When family loyalties and, by extention, community ties break down, letters cannot be effective, depending as they do on the assumption of a stable world of honored family relationships.

Another piece of late juvenilia has for its heroine an orphan who finds the letters from her best friends (orphans too) "always unsatisfactory" ("Catharine or The Bower," p. 194). There are no included letters in this story in which both family and community are seen as threats by Catharine's Aunt: "The same fears that prevented Mrs. Peterson's joining much in the Society of her Neighbors, led her equally to avoid inviting her relations to spend any time in her house" (p. 196). Catharine finds solace not in epistolary confidences, but in her bower "which afforded her constant relief in all her misfortunes" (p. 193). "Solitude & reflection" are her only restoratives; she thinks the only subjects suited to correspondence are trivia like a "bonnet & pelisse." In her isolation, she anticipates the heroines of the major novels who do not write letters.

Although we do not have the manuscripts of the early epistolary versions of Sense and Sensibility or Pride and Prejudice, we know that the course of Jane Austen's development from 1793 to 1805 was away from the letter toward direct narrative.[6] Her career can be looked at as a later reflection

[6]Southam, p. 46.

in individual terms of the historical trend that Godfrey Frank Singer traces in his book The Epistolary Novel, Its Origin, Development, Decline, and Residual Influence: "we have traced the gradual upward trend of the novel in letters from 1742 to its brilliant peak in 1785, from which it suddenly and, in some ways unjustly, was allowed to decline."[7] Troublesomely, Singer does not define the "brilliant peak" of the epistolary novel as the publication of Clarissa in 1748, but thirty-seven years later when seventy-five epistolary novels were published, none of which are now remembered. Furthermore, he does not deal with the implications of the shift from letter to narrative. His analysis of the development of the letter device as "one of the natural adjuncts of narrative, used to add verisimilitude to the story being told"[8] is inadequate, for verisimilitude is of course only one of many possible functions for the included letter. Implicit in Singer's argument is the assumption that literary devices like the included letter have absolute functions, e.g., "verisimilitude." Surely however, the devices and techniques of a novel function as answers to the author's demands on the form. For Richardson and other eighteenth-century authors, verisimilitude and the imitation of Nature were the great duties of art; their task, as Dr. Johnson described it in Rambler IV, was to engage "in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance." They were "just copiers

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[7](Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), p. 216.

[8]Singer, p. 55.

of human manners." Other standards, however, replaced imitation. Therefore, an examination of Austen's use of the letter in her novels will show how it responds to the new demands she imposed on the art of the novel, for she was writing at the turn of the eighteenth century when profound revolutions of political and philosophical orders were reshaping the minds and lives of men and women.

Austen is the inheritor of the traditions of the novel, and Lloyd K. Brown's chapter, "The True Art of Letter Writing," is the most thorough discussion of her debt to Richardson and the epistolary tradition.[9] Still, for all his care, he sees her handling of the letter as basically the result of her knowledge of Richardson. Although it is true that her knowledge of Richardson's works was "probably such as no one is likely again to acquire,"[10] he does not see her use of the letter as innovative. While I do not dismiss his insights, it seems very clear that in spite of all the brilliant similarities, Richardson and Austen use the letter in very different ways.

The letters of Clarissa are intended from the beginning by Anna Howe and Clarissa to function as public records of relationships and of the essential consistency, though not the simplicity, of the characters of the writers--documents of Clarissa's goodness and Lovelace's evil. In Anna's first letter to Clarissa, the emphasis is on the public concern with

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[9]Bits of Ivory: Narrative Techniques in Jane Austen's Fiction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 167.

[10]J. E. Austen-Leigh, Memoir of Jane Austen ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford, 1951), p. 89.

the affairs of the Harlowe family. She writes, "I know how it must hurt you to become the subject of the public talk; and yet upon occasion so generally known, it is impossible but that whatever relates to a young lady, whose distinguished merits have made her the public care, should engage everybody's attention . . .. Everybody pities you. So steady, so uniform in your conduct; every eye, in short, is upon you with the expectation of an example." Clarissa is a public figure. The letters will be a public "justification" of her "noble consciousness." Anna tells her friend,

> Write to me therefore, my dear, the whole of your story from the time that Mr. Lovelace was first introduced into your family and particularly an account of all that passed between him and your sister; about which there are different reports; some people scrupling not to insinuate that the younger sister has stolen a lover from the elder. And pray write in so full a manner as may satisfy those who know not so much of your affairs as I do. If anything unhappy should fall out from the violence of such spirits as you have to deal with, your account of all things <u>previous</u> to it will be your best justification.

John Preston is right to see that the letters intended as public "justification" are more "real" than the situation they describe. The letter itself becomes, because of its function as a public document, a fragment of the larger reality, a discrete item in the case against Lovelace. Preston writes, "Richardson allows no insight beyond the written signs. They do not refer to a situation, they <u>are</u> the situation . . . The novel is in this sense about writing and reading . . . the characters . . . have become literature, even to themselves.

The consequence of this is that those parts of their lives which cannot be shown to the reader seem not to exist at all . . . At the points where words fail, where syntax collapses, their existence collapses."[11] Austen, on the other hand, felt the need to explore the realms beyond the spoken or written language, to find, for instance, the Emma behind the dangerously witty and articulate Miss Woodhouse. She is not writing in the context of the "public" eighteenth century which Geoffrey Tillotson describes: "The general mind of the eighteenth century thus believes that what is real and important is what is public and 'normal' rather than private and singular . . . /for/ after all, if the nature of man, is, in essentials, uniform, and if ideas enter the mind only through external experience, then truth must be both simple and ultimately apparent to all."[12] Instead, Austen demonstrates a concern for the inner life and its ambiguities as it relates to society--and this life is not so accessible.

In his preface to Familiar Letters on Important Occasions, Richardson defines the letter as a formal model of other social interactions; in his words, he intended ". . . to describe properly and recommend strongly the social and relative duties, and to place them in such practical lights, that the letters may serve for rules to think and act by, as well as forms to write after."[13] These are large claims for the letter and

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[11]The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp. 46-47.

[12]Eighteenth Century English Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 4.

[13](London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1902), I, xxvii.

ones that Austen did not make; "social and relative duties" were more difficult to define at the turn of the century than they were at mid-century when Richardson wrote. The letters in Austen's novels do not function as public vehicles as those of Richardson's do; for no matter the tampering, the forging, the interceptions, the descriptions "to the moment," their very existence proves Clarissa's case against Lovelace. In Austen, the letter is an instrument for presenting the disruption and reinterpretation by the private consciousness of the "social and relative duties."

Why did Jane Austen revise her epistolary novels? Her revolution in form exactly parallels Wordsworth's: in 1793 he published two poems cast in heroic couplets, "A Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches," but five years later with the publication of Lyrical Ballads, he had rejected the "poetic diction" of the eighteenth-century. During the same decade that was so important to the history of poetic forms, Austen was rejecting the novelistic diction of the eighteenth century and turning away from the novel written in letters. Surprisingly, Austen's critics have neglected the importance of this aspect of her career--even those who have concentrated on her style and use of inherited conventions like Karl Kroeber, Henrietta Ten Harmsel, and Frank Bradbrook.

Those critics who have noted the shift from letter to narrative offer reasons for the change that are inadequate. Southam simply argues that the letter is a more restrictive form than direct narrative and is not so capable of containing

her material: "how character is formed and defined in the events of ordinary life and how speech and behavior are determined by a complex of personal and social considerations."[14] Andrew H. Wright says Austen may have abandoned the epistolary form because it "enjoins the author to so exterior a presentation by limiting the writer to a few correspondents, all of them inhibited by the restraints laid upon that aspect of human intercourse."[15] And Ian Watt agrees that she needed more freedom to comment and evaluate than the letter form allowed.[16] Mary Lascelles suggests that the letter novel "loses the point of vantage from which people are described by shifting for every correspondent and therein lies its stiffness."[17] Most critics agree that the novel of letters became inadequate for Austen's purposes and leave it at that.

The fact that by the 1780's the epistolary novel in England was virtually the novel of sentiment may be one reason why the comic and ironic genius of Austen found it incompatible. If this is true, how do we account for her satire on sentimentality in the epistolary Love and Freindship? As R. F. Brissenden points out, "there had long existed a relationship,

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[14]Southam, p. 35.

[15]Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 76.

[16]The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 296.

[17]Jane Austen and Her Art (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), pp. 157 and 203.

ambiguous but dynamic, between sentimentalism and satire,"[18] for example, in the novels of Sterne and Smollett and in the plays of Sheridan. The association of letters with sentimentality was not an obstacle to Austen, for the letter carries no intrinsic meaning; it is not in itself "sentimental" or Richardsonian. Its function in the text of the novel defines it.

Robert Adams Day in his history of the epistolary novel, Told in Letters, sees the novel with interpolated letters as a "primitive," "transitional" form coming before the triumph of Richardson and "immediately preceding the full development of the purely epistolary novel."[19] Austen certainly does not regress to this primitive form in her use of the interpolated letter; her use of embedded letters illuminates her concerns as a highly accomplished artist. Because critics of Jane Austen often ignore the epistolary qualifies of her fiction, because critics of epistolary form ignore Jane Austen, a full-length study of her use of this form seems needed.

Indeed, it is not going too far to say that Jane Austen evolves a new literary genre in the sense that E. D. Hirsch defines: "When an author evolves a new literary genre . . . he not only extends existing conventions but combines old convention systems in a new way."[20] Although Wolfgang Iser

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[18]"La Philosophie dans le boudoir; or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World," Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture "Cleveland: The Press of Case-Western Reserve Univ, 1972), II, 117.

[19](Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1966), p. 144.

[20]Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 106.

discusses the new genres that were created at the end of the eighteenth century, he bypasses Austen's achievement, skipping from Smollett to Scott. The originality Iser grants to Smollett for the interplay of the epistolary novel with the travel book and the picaresque tale should be shared with Austen, for she also interweaves forms. As Frank Gees Black points out, "the interweaving of epistolary and narrative methods may point to the subsequent development of the novel, in which occasional letters are admitted into a work of narrative form."[21]

In the last ten years, two dissertations have been written on the included letter. The earlier one, Roger Barton Johnson's Anatomy of a Literary Device: The Included Letter (Univ. of Illinois, 1967) defines two approaches which are helpful:

> 1. separating the letter and scrutinizing its traits per se while at the same time noting the nature of the remaining fictional structure independent of its included letters.
>
> 2. noting the specific consequences of the letter inclusion in its fictional environment. (p. 5)

The more recent study, Janet Gurkin Altman's Epistolarity: Approaches to Form (Yale, 1973), surveys the formal implications of a letter as a barrier or bridge, and she discusses the confidential relationship, the internal and "super reader," and the temporal significance of epistolary statement. Such studies are necessary to the analyses of individual authors' use of letters.

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[21] The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth Century: A Descriptive and Bibliographic Study (Eugene: Univ. of Oregon, 1940), p. 9.

Ian Watt correctly defines Austen's "technical genius," the genius that could solve the two general narrative problems for which Richardson and Fielding had provided only partial answers. The letter and the wise narrator are, respectively, the two devices which Richardson and Fielding had used to achieve their different "realisms." Austen "was able to combine into a harmonious unity the advantages both of realism of presentation and realism of assessment."[22] By embedding letters in her narratives, Austen merged the presentational and assessing perspectives. Her fiction offers us a view of a change in genre, from novels composed entirely of letters to novels that include letters as structural features whose function has been redefined. By absorbing and amalgamating letters into the narrative, Austen mixed the genres of the epistolary novel and the narrated novel so finally and brilliantly that the epistolary structure was made once and for all an archaic genre to which authors like Henry James could only whimsically and nostalgically return.

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[22]Watt, pp. 296-97.

Chapter I

Lady Susan: The Failure of the Epistolary Form

Lady Susan, written between Love and Freindship and Sense and Sensibility, begins as an epistolary work but ends as a narrated one. The interruption of the correspondence by the voice of a narrator makes Lady Susan the logical starting point for a discussion of the incompatibilities of the novel in letters and Austen's emerging themes of the threatened and developing self in an increasingly unstable society. The differences between the use of the letters in Love and Freindship and the function of those in Lady Susan demonstrate that the novel composed entirely in letters had become inadequate to Austen's vision.

In Love and Freindship the epistolary structure succeeds because the violence of the plot never, for all its stagey virulence--kidnappings, chases, thefts, elopements, deaths--disrupts personal and familial relationships. The basic orders of society are not disturbed. The letters are adequate for all that they describe for they function to direct the violence toward positive community ends; they have a public function: the education and protection of the young person. But in Lady Susan, the letters do not direct or control the new kind of violence with which Austen is dealing, a violence which Southam defines as "the disruption of personal and family relationships."[1] The epistolary structure is not a congenial

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[1]Southam, p. 47.

medium for this subject. It is important to remind ourselves that, in the year in which Lady Susan was written, a new kind of violence had broken out, the Reign of Terror under Robespierre in which a cousin of Jane Austen was executed.[2] Brissenden has demonstrated the connections between Love and Freindship and the Revolution in France, and he draws parallels between Sade's short work, La Philosophie dans le boudoir, and Austen's satiric treatment of excessive sensibility. The argument of Love and Freindship is, in his words, "remarkably sadistic." He goes on to say that the theme in both works is that "sensibility as such has nothing necessarily to do with moral worth, and that human beings are fundamentally selfish--or rather that to believe that men in general are basically un-selfish is to be dangerously deluded."[3]

Still, in Love and Freindship the parents represent at least some semblance of a moral order which contains and controls the excesses of Laura and Sophia. In Lady Susan collapse is inevitable--and the abandoned letter form reflects the collapse because the parental order at the center of the work is so deeply flawed. Lloyd K. Brown defines the dilemma this way: "On the one hand, Lady Susan's selfish vitalism thrusts against the established norms of moral conduct. Yet, on the other, the moral order is threatened from within by its putative

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[2]Donald Greene in "The Myth of Limitation," attacks the conventional view that Austen was isolated from the French Revolution. (Jane Austen Today, ed. Joel Weinsheimer /Athens: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 1975/ pp. 142-175).

[3]Brissenden, p. 125.

champions," the Vernons.[4] Supposedly concerned for their niece Frederica, they are motivated by a prurient voyeurism as they watch the girl suffer in their own home. And Lady Susan calls her daughter, the benighted Frederica, a "devil."

The protective parent and trust in the family as a source of value and support are the norms against which Austen sets her parody of sentimentality in Love and Freindship. In response to Isabel's request to write to her daughter Marianne, Laura writes fifteen letters giving "a regular detail of /her/ Misfortunes and Adventures" (Vol. VI, p. 76). Isabel intends Laura's letters to be a "useful lesson" to Marianne. We can hear in Isabel's first letter the controlling comic note of the good parent that reverses Laura's pompous and sentimental intentions. Isabel, the wise parent, can risk having Laura write to her daughter, can risk the contamination, because she is perfectly confident of her authority and strength. She appeals to Laura's infatuation with her own suffering and deflates it slyly: "You are this day 55. If a woman may ever be said to be in safety from the determined Perseverance of disagreable Lovers and the cruel Persecutions of obstinate Fathers, surely it must be at such a time of Life." In the penultimate letter, we hear the unspoken maternal intentions of Isabel in spite of Laura's loudly asserted sanctimony: "faultless as my Conduct had certainly been during the whole course of my late Misfortunes and Adventures, your mother pretended to find fault with my

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[4]Brown, p. 153.

Behaviour in many of the situations in which I had been placed" (p. 104). Isabel obviously had good reason to find fault with Laura, and she of course knows that Laura's letters will expose her to Marianne. Thus, Isabel, the protective mother, puts all the misfortunes, faults, and excesses to educative purposes when she asks Laura to give a "regular detail" of her life. Thus, all chance, misfortune, and misdirection are turned into direction, a lesson for Marianne, in good eighteenth-century fashion.

Within the frame of Isabel's request for the history which will teach Marianne how not to conduct her loves and friendships and how to guard against the dangers of excessive sentiment, are smaller episodes which reinforce the norm of the good parent and the wisdom of submitting to that norm. Laura's future husband appears out of nowhere in the Vale of Uske and announces to her family, "My father is a mean and mercenary wretch" (p. 80). Immediately making them his confidants, he continues, "My father, seduced by the false glare of Fortune and the Deluding Pomp of Title, insisted on my giving my hand to Lady Dorothea. No, never, exclaimed I. Lady Dorothea is lovely and Engaging; I prefer no woman to her; but know Sir, that I scorn to marry her in compliance with your Wishes. No! never shall it be said that I obliged my Father" (p. 81). His is the "mercenary" father who later provides Laura with an annuity.

In another instance of foolish rebellion against parents, Laura and Sophia find or at least claim a grandfather who gives

his money to four strangers. Then he admonishes them to remember that he has done the "Duty of a Grandfather." Later in Sense and Sensibility, the duty of the older generation is abrogated, but here in the earlier work, the grandfather is good. The children are foolish and selfish; they take the money and viciously berate the old man, "Ignoble Grandsire! Unworthy Grandfather!" (p. 92). They persuade young Janetta to rebel against her good father for the excellent reason that he approves of the man she wishes to marry: "The very circumstances of his being her father's choice too was so much in his disfavour, that had he been deserving her, in every other respect yet that of itself ought to have been sufficient reason in the Eyes of Janetta for rejecting him" (p. 93).

All the parents in Love and Freindship are morally superior to their children. Austen ridicules the rebellions of the young, and her parody reduces their rebellions to irrational antics. Brissenden makes this point: "Jane Austen's loving couples are absurd because they defy and disobey their parents when there is no need to."[5] It is fortunate that neither Laura nor her comrade-in-tears, Sophia, has children to corrupt.

The violence in Love and Freindship, then, is contained and controlled within the hierarchial structure of the family, and the use of the letters as educators points to this maintained and transferred order. Parents are wiser than children;

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[5]Brissenden, p. 132.

the children rely on them for their education, as Marianne relies on Isabel, and for "those very significant supports of Vituals and Drink." Their rebellions are temporary and comic. Young Edward says as he steps into his father's carriage to escape his "domination," "it is my greatest boast that I have incurred the displeasure of my Father!" (p. 85). The long suffering Sir Edward is good enough to support the selfish daughter-in-law, the letter-writing Laura, who left his son to languish in Newgate and later watched him die. Laura speaks of the death of her own parents as "a trifling circumstance" (p. 101). All the rebellions are vitiated by the parody; they cannot disturb the essential order of the society, and we are always aware of this order because we read the letters from the perspective of the good parent Isabel.

Although B. C. Southam argues that Love and Freindship illustrates "the mishandling of the letter as a narrative form" and that the "highly eventful story exposes the limitations of the letter for dealing with such material,"[6] I must disagree, for it seems clear that here the letter is an ideal form to use in recounting the "regular detail" of Laura's misfortunes. The events detailed are never revolutionary for all their melodrama; they really are amenable to a correspondence. Laura is safe at last on the pension handed down through the orderly ranks of family. She never reinterprets her past as Anne Elliot will so painstakingly do

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[6]Southam, p. 26.

in Persuasion. The implications of Isabel's framing request for the "regular detail" interpret Laura's life and expose it for what it is--silly and wasted--until her request turns it to good use, the education of young Marianne.

Like the letters of Clarissa, the letters of Love and Freindship are intended for a social end. Whether it is the education of the young or proof to the community of the heroine's essential chastity, letters in eighteenth-century fiction are never totally private enterprises. They work toward some societal end, some community ethic, and Austen's parody does not impair that ethic. The violence in the story is turned into constructive energy. Truths such as "Beware of Swoons" can be transmitted. Language can serve as the vehicle for education; letters can teach Marianne. The burlesque distortion of the arbitrary opening and closing of Laura's letters does not, as Southam says, expose the limitations of the form, but instead adds to the comedy of Laura's status as a teacher. The letter is a function and symbol of the community's investment in the future widsom of its young. The letter is the formal expression of the trust Austen originally placed in the social processes that insure order and control. Letters will not serve a similar function in Austen's work hereafter.

In the later novels, the "regular detail," the empirical data of the world recounted in Love and Freindship, will dissolve into hints and shreds of evidence which the mind, seen and described by a narrating presence, expands. Mrs. Jennings in Sense and Sensibility, for example, tells Marianne

Dashwood,

> "Now, my dear, I bring you something that I am sure will do you good."
> Marianne heard enough. In one moment her imagination placed before her a letter from Willoughby full of tenderness and contrition, explanatory of all that had passed, satisfactory convincing; and instantly followed by Willoughby himself, rushing eagerly into the room to enforce at her feet, by the eloquence of his eyes, the assurances of his letter. (Vol. I, p. 202)

Marianne's imagination has seized on Mrs. Jennings' "something" and expanded it into a scenario of reunion with the faithless Willoughby. Similarly, in Austen's last novel, Anne Elliot expands a "little circumstance" into an epiphany.

> Yes,--he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest. She was very much affected by the view of his disposition towards her which all these things made apparent. This little circumstance seemed the completion of all that had gone before. She understood him. He could not forgive her,-- but he could not be unfeeling. Though condemning her for the past, and considering it with high and unjust resentment, though perfectly careless of her, and though becoming attached to another, still he could not see her suffer, without the desire of giving her relief. It was a proof of his own warm and amiable heart, which she could not contemplate without emotions so compounded of pleasure and pain that she knew not which prevailed. (Vol. V, p. 91)

Wentworth merely hands her into the carriage; yet she "understood him." Private epiphanies are not as compatible to the form of the letter as "regular detail" is. Because of this

incompatibility, the later novels often contain fragments of letters and letters that must be ignored.

Unlike the violence of Love and Freindship, that of Lady Susan cannot be converted to good purpose. The family cannot absorb the threats to its stability, nor can the letters reshape the chaos into education as they do in the earlier work. The epistolary form of the novel is truncated--the letters are halted, and a narrator affixes a conclusion to them. Unlike the world of Love and Freindship where parents provide everything, even the carriages in which their children run away, the world of Lady Susan includes parents who provide nothing except bad examples and anguish for their children. In short, a world in which parental order is necessary and productive has been replaced by a world of disorder in which power is not in the hands of good authority, but is seized by individuals and wielded without regard for the older moral hierarchy. Austen had evidently begun to feel in the years between the writing of Love and Freindship and the end of Lady Susan that the epistolary novel was not suited to the presentation of a world in which the young cannot count on being educated or on learning the value of their heritage. The narrating voice that concludes Lady Susan, bringing to rest all the havoc caused by the heroine's egotism, is the formal replacement of the lost ordering of the world represented in the good parent.

From the beginning of the story, we see familial confusion. There is enmity between the Vernons and Lady Susan, the sister of Mr. Vernon; Lady Susan's visit almost destroys the Manwaring

marriage. She writes to her friend Mrs. Johnson just before she is ousted from the Manwaring home: "We are now in a sad state; no house was ever more altered; the whole family are at war" (p. 245). She describes her own daughter, whom she sees as little as she possibly can, as "the torment of my life," "the greatest simpleton on Earth," "such a little devil," and "that horrid girl of mine." The deCourcy family, Mrs. Vernon's family, is in a sad state also; when Reginald deCourcy falls under the spell of Lady Susan, his father's letter of warning leaves him more intransigent than ever. Frederica, the "torment" of Lady Susan, looks down from her prison-like window, and her aunt describes her in a letter to Lady deCourcy: "Poor Creature! the prospect from her window is not very instructive, for that room overlooks the Lawn . . . where she may see her Mother walking for an hour together, in earnest conversation with Reginald . . . Is it not inexcusable to give such an example to a daughter?" (p. 271). Parents are no longer examples. Frederica and her mother are rivals for Reginald, and the daughter is in every way, except her complexion and wit, superior to her mother.

In a society in which mother is set against daughter, the hostilities between them prevent language from working in its customary way, that is, in a public way. Codes and private uses of language must work to protect the values of civilization; the letter, when it functions with the implication of order and trust in public meaning, is inappropriate to this world. Secrets and hypocrisies are not consonant with the

public function of the letter, and Lady Susan is the consummate hypocrite. She talks so well that she can "make Black appear White" (p. 251), as her sister-in-law says. Her most deceptive relationships are with her family, though she deceives her friends too. Her one honest contact is with her confidant, Mrs. Johnson. She fills the opening letter to her brother with saccharine lies: "I impatiently look forward to the hour when I shall be admitted to your delightful retirement. I long to be made known to your dear little children." She writes the truth to Mrs. Johnson: "Were there another place in England open to me, I would prefer it" (p. 246). Given such confusion in the hierarchy and meaning of the family, the problem is how to communicate in spite of it. Letters are not the solution to this formal difficulty.

The epistolary assumption--that there is a world that values and trusts established orders of relationships and the language of those orders--is discredited in Lady Susan. Frederica writes only one letter in the book; it is addressed to Reginald, the man who loves her mother. In it she begs him to rescue her from her mother's plot to marry her off to the foolish Sir James Martin. Forbidden by Lady Susan to complain to her aunt and uncle Vernon of the way she is being treated, Frederica writes to the one person her mother did not expressly forbid her to contact. Her pun on "letter" suggests the extent of the difficulty Austen faced in finding the appropriate vehicle for this story. Frederica writes: "I am afraid my applying to you will appear no better than

equivocation, and as if I attended only to the letter and not the spirit of Mama's command" (p. 279). The harsh irony is not only that "Mama's command" is cruel and impossible to obey, but that Frederica must rely on this "letter" to Reginald, a man to whom she has hardly ever spoken, for her rescue. This letter does not have the deeper function of those in Clarissa which justify Clarissa's resistance, or of those of Love and Freindship which educate the young Marianne. This letter is an ineffective form--only letter, not spirit--as Frederica herself feels. It is only temporarily convincing, for Reginald is quickly soothed by Lady Susan when he confronts her with his aroused suspicions. He is only momentarily moved by the letter, and soon he forgets it.

Nevertheless, this letter, written into the void where "the whole family are at war," is a sign of a new function of the letter which will be brought to perfection in the later novels, especially in Wentworth's letter of porposal in Persuasion. He relies on a traditional form, the letter, to encase a private gesture. The change in the letter's function from Love and Freindship to Frederica's letter in Lady Susan is from effective document to affective gesture, encased in the shard, as it were, of an old formality.

In Love and Freindship the letters effect Marianne's education. In Lady Susan they are ineffective; the plot stagnates as the letters fail to do anything to bring to order the confusions in the families. The dilemmas and problems that prevail at the beginning of the story continue at the end of the last

letter; there has been no change. Only Frederica's letter is different in kind from the other letters: it is a gesture put into a letter. But this gesture, ephemeral as it is, is the one that the narrator takes up and develops in the narrated conclusion. In other words, the gesture made by Frederica in her letter, a gesture which is ignored in the epistolary part of the novel is "protected" and validated by the narrator, for Frederica does marry Reginald. Her gesture encased in a letter resonates in the narrated conclusion. Here is the beginning of the redefinition of the embedded letter technique in Austen's fiction: the letter functioning as private gesture instead of public document needs the support or "environment" of narration, since narration offers what the letter had lost, the authority of effective language. Frederica's letter announces that it conforms merely to the "letter," not to the spirit of parental law, a law that is dramatized as cruel and arbitrary. Frederica's letter is never answered except by the implication provided in the narrated conclusion; Reginald finally does respond to her plea by marrying her.

All the letters in Lady Susan except Frederica's are incapable of breaking the inertia of the plot; although hers seems to fail, it is the only one that attempts to bring some order out of the chaos. Alone it cannot resolve the hypocrisies and machinations of her mother; it is only a desperate and hopeless gesture and cannot salvage the plot. The narrator must rescue the story from its epistolary casting and, in so doing, change the function of the letter and its status from an inde-

pendent to dependent feature of the novel. At the end of the letters, Lady Susan's power over her daughter is still absolute; she takes her to London with her, away from even the dubious protection of her uncle Vernon. The destructive power of the mother is unmitigated when the letters end. We hear that Mr. Johnson has forced Reginald to accept the truth about Lady Susan. Yet there are no letters from Mr. Johnson, the choleric husband of Lady Susan's confidant. We must ask why the truth that will be the salvation of Frederica is excluded from the epistolary form. Reginald learns that Lady Susan had ruined the young Manwaring's marriage and that she persecutes her daughter. Even though the young hero now knows the worst, there seems little indication that Frederica will be saved. Clarissa Harlowe's letters save at least her good name, but Frederica's letter to Reginald cannot save her. As Lukacs says, "Any form must contain some positive element in order to acquire substance as a form."[7] Frederica's letter to Reginald is the only letter of the work that contains "a positive element," but the voice of the narrator must bring about the rescue of Frederica.

Lady Susan, then, written during the years when the original version of Sense and Sensibility was being revised from its epistolary form into a direct narrative, provides a time and place, a locus classicus, for the rejection of the epistolary novel and the function of the letter as an effective,

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[7]Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, trans, Anna Bostock (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1971), p. 119.

public document. After forty-one letters, there is a "Conclusion" by an omniscient narrator who, as it has been suggested, stands in the place of the lost parent, in this case the malevolent mother.

Austen turns to a narrator who, in loco parentis, directs confusion toward resolution into harmony and organizes diverging points of view. B. C. Southam sums up Jane Austen's achievement, "In the later novels, she evolved a mode of presentation which unites and reconciles the different points of view that can divine relationships and comprehend meanings far beyond the range of epistolary fiction."[8] The lost parental authority finds ample compensation in the voice of the narrator whose tone of amused tolerance in the conclusion to Lady Susan assures us that all is well, if not right, in the new world presented in the book. Lady Susan marries Sir James, the man she has stolen from Miss Manwaring for Frederica to marry. Only a wise narrator could sort out the tangled relationships:

> Whether Lady Susan was, or was not happy in her second Choice--I do not see how it can ever be ascertained--for who would take her assurance of it, on either side of the question? The world must judge from Probability. She had nothing against her, but her Husband, & her Conscience. Sir James may seem to have drawn an harder Lot than mere Folly merited. I leave him therefore to all the Pity that anybody can give him. For myself, I confess that I can pity only Miss Manwaring, who coming to Town & putting herself to an expence in Cloathes, which impoverished her for two

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[8]Southam, p. 50.

> years, on purpose to secure him, was defrauded of her due by a Woman ten years older than herself. (pp. 311-13)

Behind the irony of the Conclusion are the clear moral judgments that suggest that the narrative voice has indeed become a source of order and value.

Chapter II

Sense and Sensibility: The Loss of Community

Late in 1797, Jane Austen made a drastic revision in the epistolary novel, Elinor and Marianne; the novel had been originally written in 1793-94, but it later became the direct narrative renamed Sense and Sensibility. This revision is more revolutionary than most critics have thought, though there have been many conjectures about the original novel in letters. As Robert Liddell says,

> It has always puzzled critics to say between whom the letters can have been exchanged in the epistolary Elinor and Marianne; in the present story, the sisters are never a night apart until Elinor's marriage. Nevertheless, even in the existing text, eight letters are quoted in part or in full. . . .
>
> Further conjectures may be made. It is possible that in the first draft the sisters were sometimes separated: Elinor might have remained at Norland for a time at the beginning of the book, and Marianne might have gone alone to London with Mrs. Jennings. It is difficult, however, to see how the story could have been told (if it were still substantially the same) without the clumsiness of confidants; moreover Lucy's story being a secret, there would be no one but herself to whom Elinor could write about it.[1]

Whatever the original situation in Elinor and Marianne, the letters embedded in Sense and Sensibility, whether they are the residue of the first casting or new implants, offer us

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[1] The Novels of Jane Austen (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 15.

insights into the meaning of Austen's revision. For the eighteenth-century epistolary novel assumes the existence of a community of values and of correspondents who participate in those values to some degree--even if they are antagonists like Clarissa and Lovelace who exchange only six of the five hundred and thirty-seven letters in Richardson's novel. Common assumptions make possible the parody of false love and friendship in the letters of Love and Freindship and provide for the affirmation, by parodic denial, of real love and friendship. In Sense and Sensibility, however, as in Lady Susan, the community of values is disappearing; individuals must exert themselves to reinvest public morals with private, that is, genuine value. Austen uses the embedded letters to emphasize the loss of community, especially as it is reflected in the decadence of the family; in so doing, she points toward the new way of thinking in which Kantian intuition will replace Lockean experiential epistemology. Lukacs offers a perspective on this change when he defines the structural differences between the nineteenth-century novel and earlier novels as "the elevation of interiority to the status of a completely independent world /which/ is not only a psychological fact but also a decisive value judgement on reality; this self-sufficiency of the subjective self is its most desperate self-defence; it is the abandonment of any struggle to realise the soul in the outside world, a struggle which is seen a priori as hopeless and merely humilating."[2]

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[2]The Theory of the Novel, pp. 112-114.

In Sense and Sensibility private worlds, especially the interiority of Elinor Dashwood, are replacing the outside world.

As Sense and Sensibility opens, two family models compete with each other: a new generation of broken and jejune relationships and an older ideal of familial harmony, an ideal which is itself flawed. In the first chapter the differences are set out clearly. We are introduced to four generations of Dashwoods: the oldest, a brother and sister, represent stability and order. "The late owner of this estate was a single man who lived to a very advanced age, and who for many years of his life had a constant companion and housekeeper in his sister" (Vol. I, p. 2). Even though the "constant companionship" of the old Dashwood brother and sister also suggests sterility, their relationship is the closest thing to family order in a novel which shows us the rationalized misery of the Palmers and the manufactured cheerfulness of the Middletons. As the story develops, John Dashwood, of the third generation, will steal from his sisters who, in turn, alienate themselves from each other because of their secret commitments to strangers. Children will usurp traditional parental privileges and authority, and parents will renege on their responsibilities to their children.

In the more ideal world of the elder Dashwoods, the death of the sister-companion is a natural "alteration." The brother's age was "very advanced"; the sister had lived at Norland for "many years." They are the last in a line of "many generation," "long settled" in Sussex. At her death

the Henry Dashwoods are "invited and received" into Norland. The same congenial patterns continue for ten years; there is respect and deference to the old uncle. "The constant attention of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood to his wishes, which proceeded not merely from interest but from goodness of heart, gave him every degree of solid comfort which his age could receive; and the cheerfulness of the children added a relish to his existence" (p. 2). Here the proper order of the family is generational. The younger generation's "constant attention" to the elderly uncle is not motivated by cold "interest" but by "goodness of heart." The younger generation defers to the older here. But this paradigm of domestic order is soon threatened and destroyed as the prerequisite for the "elevation of interiority." We see that the older Dashwoods are not the model of order they seemed to be. Austen breaks the old paradigm of the hierarchial ordered family by introducing children who are more powerful and wiser than their parents.

The sister-brother "marriage" had suggested sterility in the institution of the family, and the stipulations of the old uncle's last will and testament prove how vulnerable the family structure is. Henry Dashwood and his family are passed over, and the entire estate is secured to his grandson, the child of his son by an earlier marriage. This boy of four "had so far gained on the affections of his uncle, by such attractions . . . and by many cunning tricks . . . as to outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received from his neice and her daughters" (p. 4).

The hierarchy of the generations is ignored and ruined; a child "outweighs" a family of five; the "value of all attention" which had its source in "goodness of heart" goes for nothing. The great estate will no longer be the home of the best; the aristocrats will live in a cottage or parsonage, and they prove their worth by individual exertions made without the benefit of the great family estate. The elder Dashwood uncle is culpable, and his grandneices Elinor and Marianne must leave Norland to look for a life that does not ignore "goodness of heart."

The other families of the novel are also presented as unreliable sources of value. In their different ways, Lady Ferrars and Mrs. Henry Dashwood urge their children toward disastrous marriages with fortune hunters, Lucy Steele and John Willoughby. Their relationships with their children are too problematic to be set straight by the simple comic mockery found in Love and Freindship. The "cunning tricks" of a child make the old gentleman grossly neglect people who have loved and cared for him. Henry Dashwood has lost all the power of a husband and father; he is left with only "the recommendation of the death bed": "Mr. Dashwood recommended with all the strength and urgency which illness could command, the interest of his mother-in-law and sisters" (p. 5). The son "promised to do everything in his power to make them comfortable." There is a crisis of power in the novel, a crisis which results from the transfer of power from the family to the individual, from the parents to the child or, in Lukacs'

words, from exterior to interior worlds. In Persuasion the power vested in parents is clearly overthrown; here there is an uneasy reconciliation at the end as the daughters provide half-time homes for their mother.

John Dashwood does not abide by his father's dying request; he abides only by the letter of his promise, certainly not by the spirit of filial obligation. Helped by his unxoriousness--his wife is a "strong caricature of himself"--he steals from his half-sisters their inheritance. Even though his stepmother and sisters are entitled to at least a thousand pounds each, his wife urges him to decide that all he can do for them is look out for a comfortable small house, help move their things, and send them presents of fish and game whenever they are in season. The heritage of the great estate has dwindled into presents of fish and game. A promise to a father has not been honored; sisters have been betrayed. There has been a great change from the sibling companionship of the elder Dashwoods to the anarchic one for which they are in part accountable. Now brother preys on sister; the child, in various ways, is father to the man, in that power is in the hands of the child. Little cunning Harry Dashwood has stripped his grandfather, Henry Dashwood, of the power to provide for his daughters, Elinor and Marianne. At nineteen, Elinor, in the first chapter of the book, is mother to her mother and sisters since it is she who sets the example of right behavior. "Elinor, too was deeply afflicted; but still she could struggle, she could exert herself. She could consult

with her brother, could receive her sister-in-law on her arrival, and treat her with proper attention; and could strive to rouse her mother to similar exertion, and encourage her to similar forbearance" (p. 7). Elinor's energy, typified by the verbs, "could struggle," "could exert," "could strive," will salvage whatever can be saved of the ruined family, and her struggle will relocate the center of value in the individual. Stuart M. Tave thoroughly details Elinor's exertions in his book, Some Words of Jane Austen. "It is Elinor who must exert herself to bring Marianne to the point where Marianne is capable of performing her own essential acts of exertion." He argues that "Sense and Sensibility is the story of Elinor Dashwood. The action of the novel is hers; it is not Marianne's and it is not equally divided between the sisters. It is Elinor's . . . The whole of the story comes to us through Elinor . . . The structure of the novel, in all senses turns our attention to Elinor."[3] Southam is right to say that Elinor is not an epistolary heroine either by temperament or circumstance.[4] Her exertions are too private to allow for correspondence, for her secret alliance with her tormentor, Lucy Steele, isolates her from Marianne and thus from traditional claims to confidance. "/Marianne/ then left the room, and Elinor dared not follow her, for bound as she was by her promise of secrecy to Lucy, she could give no information that would convince Marianne; and painful as the

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[3](Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 105, 96, 98.

[4]p. 56.

consequence of her still continuing in error might be, she was obliged to submit to it" (p. 244).

In a world in which family connections are broken by the "promise of secrecy" to strangers and parents have surrendered traditional authority, the embedded letter is a device that expresses new assertions against older models and claims. The letters are superfluous and do not communicate in their new function as missives against the value of family and community. For instance, Elinor's desperate letter to her mother from London, "relating all that had passed, her suspicions of Willoughby's inconstancy, urging her by every plea of duty and affection to demand from Marianne an account of her real situation with respect to him"--for no one as yet knows whether or not Marrianne and Willoughby are engaged--is answered by a non-sequitur. "But the letter when she was calm enough to read it, brought little comfort. Willoughby filled every page. Her mother still confident of their engagement and relying as warmly as ever on his constancy, had only been roused, by Elinor's application, to entreat from Marianne greater openness toward them both; . . . she wept with agony through the whole of it" (p. 202). The letter which is supposed to answer "every plea of duty and affection" inflicts "agony." The parent is not able to answer the child's letter. Marianne thinks when she hears that she has received a letter that it comes from Willoughby: "The handwriting of her mother, never till then unwelcome, was before her; and, in the acuteness of the disappointment which followed such

an extasy of more than hope, she felt as if, till that instant, she had never suffered" (p. 202). The letter from a loving mother causes suffering because it marks the loss of an aligned vision and reports in its fatuousness the confusion and pain of the disordered relationship. Mrs. Dashwood, as the letter indicates, is not the mother her children need.

The letters in the novel do not "connect." We hardly ever see a letter read by the person to whom it is sent. Elinor reads Marianne's letters to Willoughby and Edward's to Lucy, as well as Lucy's to Edward. Marianne's three letters to Willoughby are finally returned unanswered except by a letter dictated to Willoughby by his financé. The letters function to reveal dead connections; they do not function as proof of the vitality of those connections.

When Marianne finally does hear from Willoughby, she intuitively knows that the letter is not Willoughby's: "Willoughby could this by yours! The lock of hair (repeating it from the letter) which you so obligingly bestowed on me--! That is unpardonable. Willoughby, where was your heart when you wrote those words?" (p. 190). As it turns out, she is right to reject the letter as proof of Willoughby's cruelty. Marianne knows by means other than observed facts. When Willoughby confesses to Elinor that he always loved Marianne, we see that Marianne's rejection of the "proof" of the letter has been justified; that her truth is superior to the truth his letter offered, for we along with the skeptical Elinor believe him when he says, "Tell her my heart was never inconstant to her . . ." (p. 330).

Elinor, like Marianne, rejects the proof that letters seem to offer. At the end of Volume I, Lucy Steele forces on Elinor three proofs of Edward Ferrar's attachment to her: a miniature of himself, a ring of Lucy's hair which Elinor had mistaken for her own, and a letter from Edward. The letter seems to offer incontrovertible proof of the engagement:

> Elinor saw that it was his hand, and she could doubt no longer. The picture, she had allowed herself to believe, might have been accidentally obtained; it might not have been Edward's gift; but a correspondence between them by letter, could subsist only under a positive engagement, could be authorized by nothing else; for a few moments, she was almost overcome--her heart sunk within her, and she could hardly stand; but exertion was indispensably necessary, and she struggled so resolutely against the oppression of her feelings, that her success was speedy, and for the time complete. (p. 134)

Elinor must assert herself against the powerful validity of sense data, in fact, against Lockean epistemology. The picture, ring and letter at first present proof of Edward's betrayal of her to Lucy Steele. "What Lucy had asserted to be true, therefore Elinor could not, dared not longer doubt, supported as it was on every side by such probabilities and contradicted by nothing but her own wishes" (p. 139). At this point her mind is working as the Lockean mind-as-mirror works: "These simple Ideas, when offered to the mind, the Understanding can no more refuse to have nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor blot them out and make new ones in itself, than a mirror can refuse, alter or obliterate the Images or

Ideas, which the Objects set before it do herein produce."[6]

However, Elinor does exert herself against the validity of her own observations and proceeds to "refuse, alter, and obliterate" int picture, ring, and letter, for within the paragraph, she has come to a conclusion that has dissolved the data of the proofs. "His affection was all her own . . .. He certainly loved her" (p. 139-40). Her internal struggle to "refuse and alter" the Lockean outer reality and to make a new reality is close to the process Coleridge was defining as the secondary imagination: "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify."[7] Truth in Sense and Sensibility goes beyond the sensible objects of letters and rings, and Elinor is, by Locke's definition, a person who does not love truth because she entertains a ". . .Proposition with greater assurance than the Proofs it is built upon will warrant."[8] Of course, at the end of the story, Elinor's truth holds--Edward does love her, rings and letters to the contrary. The plot of the novel shifts the basis of truth from demonstrable evidence to the mind's intuitive reaching beyond evidence.[9]

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[6]An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1959), Bk. II, Ch. I, No. 25, p. 142-3.

[7]Biographia Literaria, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 202.

[8]"Of Enthusiasm," Bk. IV, Ch. 19, p. 429.

[9]Everett Zimmerman agrees: "Jane Austen often suggests that her heroines perceive more than one can attribute to simple sense data. . ." (Jane Austen Bicentenary Essays, ed. John Halperin /Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975/, p. 114).

In the introduction to the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant provides the source of the kind of knowledge Elinor comes to--"our own faculty of knowledge. . .itself." He writes, "But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself."[10] Certainly, Elinor's mind has supplied from itself the knowledge of Edward's love for her.

The letter in Sense and Sensibility is not functioning as evidence; it is functioning as sham evidence, for Austen inserts it in the narrative only to have it overridden by the powers of the "dissolving" imagination. The novel written entirely in letters had been congenial to the imitation of empirical reality, to accounts given in "regular detail," to histories. But when the structures of that reality, like the family and sensible objects, are seen as failing or soluble, a new form must be found which can present the conditions of dissolution and the perception of it. The narrative that includes letters as devices that call into question old assumptions about the family and about observation as the way to truth is Austen's remarkable innovation.

Willoughby's letter, which "acknowledged no breach of faith, denied all peculiar affection whatever--a letter of

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[10](New York: The Modern Library, 1958), p. 25.

which every line was an insult, and which proclaimed its writer to be deep in hardened villainy" (p. 184), is dictated by the heiress he will soon marry--as Marianne intuitively suspects. Enclosed in the letter are Marianne's three notes to him asking him to call on her and to explain his cruelty to her. The dictated letter with its three enclosed returned notes marks the destruction of the relationship between Willoughby and Marianne, but it also points up the breach of confidence between the two sisters. Elinor begs Marianne to "exert yourself. . .if you will not kill yourself and all who love you. Think of your mother; think of her misery while you suffer; for her sake you must exert yourself" (p. 185). Marianne answers, "Happy, happy Elinor, you cannot have an idea of what I suffer. . . You must be happy; Edward loves you. . . ." Here is Elinor's opportunity to re-establish sisterly ties; here is the place for her confession to Marianne of Lucy Steele's engagement to Edward, the man who Marianne thinks is in love with Elinor. But Elinor does not confide in her sister. When Marianne presses her to explain what can distract from the happiness of being loved by Edward, Elinor only answers vaguely and solemnly, "Many, many circumstances" (p. 186). The letters in this scene underline the isolation of the sisters from each other. The returned notes emphasize their abortive mission; their painful reflexive function--the fact that they are sent back to the sender--throws Marianne back on herself by making her read her own letters. Elinor feels Marianne's agony: ". . .she saw

Marianne stretched on the bed, almost choked by grief, one letter in her hand, and two or three others lying by her. Elinor drew near, but without saying a word; and seating herself on the bed, took her hand, kissed her affectionately several times, and then gave way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's" (p. 182). Still, she does not fully open her heart to Marianne. The inclusion of the returned letters and the dictated letter in a scene in which confessions are not made, and during which the demands of strangers have imposed a barrier between sisters argues that Austen intended the letter as a model of shattered relationships and the new privacy that results.

Four months later Elinor is forced to tell Marianne Lucy Steele's secret, not because of any inner compulsion, but because it has been revealed anyway and has sent Edward Ferrar's family into hysterics. Although Elinor's brother is married to Edward's sister, the news of the announced engagement does not reach Elinor through family grapevines. It comes from a Mr. Donavan, the physician to Mrs. Jennings' family. Elinor and Marianne are staying with Mrs. Jennings simply because their brother has not invited them to stay with him; instead he has invited the Steele sisters to his home, and it was while they were enjoying their usurped hospitality that Nancy Steele blurts out the secret of Lucy's engagement to Edward. The news is so devastating that Mr. Donavan has been called to minister to Fanny Dashwood. He later brings the news of her collapse to Mrs. Jennings'

household where Elinor hears it. The incident demonstrates the absence of familial ties, although John Dashwood tries to rationalize the invitation to the Steeles instead of his sisters. He tells them that his wife had asked the Steeles "because she thought they deserved some attention, were harmless, well-behaved girls, and would be pleasant companions; for otherwise we both wished very much to have invited you and Marianne to be with us. . ." (p. 266). Every word damns him further.

What has really happened is that he and his wife have been shamed into remembering that they should invite Elinor and Marianne to their home. An invitation to a musical party that includes the girls has come to Harley Street because the hostess thought that the sisters would naturally be staying in their brother's home while they were in London. "The consideration of Mrs. Dennison's mistake, in supposing his sisters their guest, had suggested the propriety of their being really invited to become such,. . .The expence would be nothing, the inconvenience not more; and it was altogether an attention, which the delicacy of his conscience pointed out to be requisite to its complete enfranchisement from his promise to his father" (p. 252-53). However, instead of inviting his sisters, he is persuaded by Fanny to invite the Steeles.

> "My love, I would ask them with all my heart, if it was in my power. But I had just settled within myself to ask the Miss Steeles to spend a few days with us. They are very well behaved, good kind girls; and I think the

> attention is due to them,. . .We can ask your sisters some other year, you know; but the Miss Steeles may not be in town any more. I am sure you will like them; indeed, you do like them, you know, very much already, and so does my mother; and they are such favourites with Harry!" (p. 253)

Fanny, having convinced her husband of the "necessity of inviting the Miss Steeles immediately," writes the next morning to invite Lucy and her sister to Harley Street. These notes, the one from Mrs. Dennison which wrongly assumes family hospitality and the deliberately vicious invitation from Fanny to the Steeles, ironically mark the change from the time when Elinor's parents had been "invited and received" into Norland years before. Certainly, a great change has occurred within the Dashwood family, for now instead of "goodness of heart" there is animosity. Fanny little suspects that her letter of invitation goes to a girl Edward is obligated to marry; she thinks that he will marry the wealthy Miss Morton. Little does she suspect that her guest will soon control her family's fortune by marrying her next brother, Robert. The ironies are richer because of these notes of invitation, for the Steele sisters are in fact better "sisters" for the John Dashwoods, that is, more like them in avarice and sycophancy than the Dashwood girls or Edward Ferrars, their blood relatives, could ever be. The invitation to the Steeles is a call of like to like; the mistaken invitation from Mrs. Dennison recalls the death of the old "goodness of heart" in the Dashwood family.

A later incident demonstrates the way in which Austen has changed the function of the letter from a public, effective form to a private form which must be interpreted. A few days after the secret of the engagement is out, Elinor meets by accident Nancy (also called Anne) Steele in Kensington Gardens and is forced to listen to information that she later learns has been gleaned from an overheard conversation. Nancy, it seems, has stood outside the parlour door and listened to Edward and Lucy. She tells Elinor:

> "And after thinking it all over and over again, he said, it seemed to him as if, now he had no fortune, and no nothing at all, it would be quite unkind to keep her on to the engagement, because it must be for her loss, for he had nothing but two thousand pounds, and no hope of anything else; and if he was to go into orders, as he had some thoughts, he could get nothing but a curacy, and how was they to live upon that? He could not bear to think of her doing no better, and so he begged, if she had the least mind for it, to put an end to the matter directly, and leave him to shift for himself. I heard him say all this as plain as could possible be." (p. 273)

It is obvious that Edward is trying to extricate himself from his obligation to Lucy. The next day Lucy sends her version of her meeting with Edward in a letter to Elinor. The juxtaposition of the two accounts reveals Lucy's "real design": Elinor is expected to pass the letter or at least its message around in hopes of raising a curacy for Edward. Lucy intends her letter for public consumption. She writes:

> I spent two happy hours with /Edward/ yesterday afternoon; he would not hear of our parting, though earnestly did I, as I thought my duty required, urge him

> to it for prudence sake, and would have parted for ever on the spot, would he consent to it; but he said it should never be, he did not regard his mother's anger, while he could have my affections; our prospects are not very bright, to be sure, but we must wait, and hope for the best; he will be ordained shortly, and should it ever be in your power to recommend him to any body that has a living to bestow, am very sure you will not forget us, and dear Mrs. Jennings too, trust she will speak a good word for us to Sir John, or Mr. Palmer, or any friend that may be able to assist us. (p. 277)

Elinor discerns the "real design" of the letter: "As soon as Elinor had finished it, she performed what she concluded to be its writer's real design, by placing it in the hands of Mrs. Jennings." Elinor's mind is the interior world where the two versions of Edward's visit converge. The letter's version is false, for Nancy's account of what Edward said, even filtered through her solecisms, rings true. Elinor has the power to read the true purpose of the letter and again, as in the case of the letter Lucy offered as proof of Edward's love of her in Volume I, Elinor must exert the energies of her mind against the "absolute" validity of this letter's claim to veracity. Her response to the letter, her rejection of its truth, changes the function of the letter, for it is no longer a document, a representation of things in reality: it is subject to the processes of Elinor's mind.

Lucy's last letter to Edward releases him from their engagement; she acknowledges that she has just returned from the altar with his brother who has recently come into Edward's inheritance. This letter, according to Edward, "is the only

letter I ever received from her, of which the substance made me any amends for the defect of the style" (p. 365). Only one letter in the novel tells the truth about its author. We are told that Sir John Middleton's "countenance was thoroughly good-humoured; and his manners were as friendly as the style of his letter" (p. 30). Substance and style have been, like the family, divided; they have been only "half-blood relatives." The vital connection between the written word and truth has been broken. Letters are not reliable--except for Sir John's. They must be supplemented by "personal enquiry" by a character like Mrs. Vernon in Lady Susan who "perceived by the stile of Frederica's Letters, that they were written under her Mother's inspection," or by Willoughby's face-to-face confessional supplement to his letter in Marianne's imagination, by Elinor's exertions of mind, and more generally by the omniscient narrator.

When Edward is asked to write an obsequious letter of "proper submission" to his mother, he resists the idea, declaring a "much greater willingness to make mean concessions by word of mouth than on paper." Here it is clear that he does not want to commit himself to paper, for such a letter would be utterly false to his feelings; he has told Elinor's mother that his sons "will brought up. . .to be as unlike myself as is possible. In feeling, in action, in condition, in everything" (p. 103). His "proper submission" to his parents is not a return to good sense as it was in Love and Freindship in which parents are models of wisdom. His

rebellion from his family is different in kind from the rebellions in Love and Freindship. His engagement to Lucy Steele, contracted when he was a schoolboy at her uncle's, but honored four years later on principle, causes him to be "dismissed from his family." His reward, beyond the dubious prize of Lucy, is his integrity, the promise he kept which Elinor and Marianne "glory in." There is no wish, not even a death wish, to return to one's Father's house as there is in Clarissa. It is the child who is the moral force in the novel, and Edward's refusal to write a letter of submission to his family suggests an end to the correlation in fiction of letters and a society ordered around a stable parental model, an association which Austen has relied on in Love and Freindship.

The final two letters of the novel, those from Mrs. Jennings and John Dashwood, come after the fact: they bring no news to Elinor whose difficulties with Edward are by now happily resolved, and she knows from his own lips the story of his broken engagement and of his constancy to her. "The letters from town, which a few days before would have made every nerve in Elinor's body thrill with transport, now arrived to be read with less emotion than mirth" (p. 370). There are better ways of arriving at truth; letters are not to be trusted. By describing Elinor's mirth, Austen again gently ridicules the convention of the letter.

Chapter III

Pride and Prejudice: The Letter and Characterization

While Elizabeth Bennet is staying at Netherfield to tend her sister Jane who is sick, she engages in two conversations on the subject of character. In presenting these conversations, Austen explains why her conception of characterization cannot be adequately conveyed through epistolary form. The first conversation arises when Mrs. Bennet, having come over from Longbourne to see if Jane can stay "a little longer" with the Bingleys, tells Mr. Bingley that she hopes he "will not think of quitting /Netherfield/ in a hurry. . .though you have but a short lease" (Vol. II, p. 42). His answer prompts a conversation about character: "Whatever I do is done in a hurry,. . .and therefore if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes." Elizabeth responds that this precipitancy is "exactly" what she supposed of him and that she understands him "perfectly." Ruefully, Bingley answers, "I wish I might take this for a compliment; but to be so easily seen through I am afraid is pitiful." Elizabeth returns a quick and graceful, "It does not necessarily follow that a deep, intricate character is more or less estimable than such a one as yours." Bingley is surprised to know that she is a "studier of character." She admits a preference for intricate characters who are the "most amusing." She is mistaken to take Bingley for a "simple" character, for he will baffle her as much in his desertion of Jane as Darcy does in his proposal to her. At this point,

the intricate Darcy offers his prejudiced view against the provinces. "The country can in general supply but few subjects for such a study. In a country neighborhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society." Elizabeth corrects him: "But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever" (p. 43).

It is this difference in characters, the simple and the "intricate"--those who seem to be quickly and "exactly" or "perfectly" understood and those who "alter so much that there is something new to be observed in them for ever"--that explains in part the function of the letter in this novel and the shift from the epistolary novel to the novel which includes letters. If in Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen presents the breakdown of family and community, here she focuses on the loss of the conception of fixed and stable characters.

Later during her stay at Netherfield, a second discussion about character occurs. Darcy is trying to write a letter to his sister in spite of Miss Bingley's interruptions; Austen uses this "letter-scene" to draw a connection between the function of the letter and characterization. Elizabeth is doing some needlework and studying the characters of Darcy and Miss Bingley, the intricate and simple types, respectively. She is "amused" at what she sees: "The perpetual commendations of the lady either on his hand-writing, or on the length of his letter, with the perfect unconcern with which her praises were received, formed a curious dialogue, and

was exactly in unison with her opinions of each" (p. 47). A discussion about different "stiles of writing" arises. Darcy, according to Bingley, "does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables." Darcy proudly admits to his friend, "My stile of writing is very different from yours." Miss Bingley, whose standard for a good writer is one who can write a long letter with ease, describes her brother's style: "Charles writes in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the rest." Bingley adds humbly, "My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them--by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents." Perhaps his inability to convey ideas in his letters is the reason he does not write even a note to Jane during the eight months of their separation. Elizabeth sees Bingley's claim to a careless style as a sign of his humility whereas Darcy interprets it as the "deceitful appearance of humility," "an indirect boast," and relates it to Bingley's earlier "boast" that he could quit Netherfield in five minutes:

> . . .you are really proud of your defects in writing, because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity of thought and carelessness of execution, which if not estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of doing any thing with quickness is always much prized by the possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection of the performance. When you told Mrs. Bennet this morning that if you ever resolved on quitting Netherfield you should be gone in five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of compliment to yourself--and yet what is there so very laudable in a precipitance

> which must leave very necessary business undone, and can be or no real advantage to yourself or any one else? (p. 49)

"Leaving Netherfield in five minutes," the exemplum of Bingley's precipitancy and carelessness which are reflected in blotted letters that convey "no ideas at all," moves to the center of the argument that is rising between Elizabeth and Darcy. He enlarges it into a hypothetical situation: "--and if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, 'Bingley, you had better stay till next week,' you would probably not go--and, at another word, might stay a month" (p. 49).

Darcy's hypothesis becomes a prophecy, and Darcy will be the friend who has the power to persuade Bingley to go and come. At the end of the novel, Elizabeth and Darcy's argument over Bingley's character resolves itself in a draw: Darcy convinces the affable Bingley to rely on Darcy's judgment and return to Jane; Elizabeth bites her tongue to keep from reminding him that <u>now</u> Bingley's tractable nature makes him an "invaluable" friend even though, earlier at Netherfield, he had denigrated it as careless, rash, and spineless (p. 371). We learn from Darcy's long letter, written to Elizabeth after she has rejected his proposal, that he is the one who had persuaded Bingley to leave Netherfield for London and then had persuaded him "against returning into Hertfordshire." His persuasions against the Bennets had consisted of two arguments. The first had been that "total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by /<u>y</u>our mothe<u>r</u>/, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father." The second was much more convincing: he has thought

that Jane was indifferent to Bingley, "that he had deceived himself" (p. 198). But leaving Netherfield is still in the future, and Elizabeth answers Darcy's hypothesis: "We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs, before we discuss the discretion of his behavior thereupon." Twelve days later, when Bingley leaves Netherfield, the "circumstance" does occur. At this point Elizabeth thinks yielding easily to the persuasion of a friend is a merit while Darcy sees it as a weakness. It is during this discussion of character that Darcy begins "to feel the danger" of loving Elizabeth as he later tells her. It was her "liveliness of. . .mind" or, as Elizabeth recalls it, her "impertinence," her behavior "bordering on the uncivil," that attracted Darcy. The scene at Netherfield in which Bingley's character is anatomized concludes with Elizabeth's saying, ". . .Mr. Darcy had much better finish his letter." "Mr. Darcy took her advice and did finish the letter."

These two discussions of character occurring early in the novel suggest a relationship between letter-writing and characterization and, by extention, a relationship between the epistolary novel and its concept of character. Those who yield easily, who come and go, who can be understood "perfectly" and "exactly," as Elizabeth thinks she understands Bingley, those who lack conviction, cannot write letters; at any rate, they can write only ones that "convey no ideas at all." On the other hand, those who are consistent, who are of fixed purpose, who hold strong convictions, as Darcy thinks himself,

can write letters. Precipitancy and rashness, traits assigned to Bingley, are not the habits of good letter-writers. Ironically, Darcy, the good letter writer, will recant his long letter of self-justification written to Elizabeth after she rejects his proposal. In hoping that Elizabeth will burn his letter, Darcy is admitting his own inconsistency, wavering purpose, and revised convictions. In other words, he is moving away from the character of the "good letter writer." In admiring the "liveliness" of Elizabeth's mind, Darcy is changing from the fixed and rigid character of the letter writer to a more dynamic character. It is significant that Darcy and Elizabeth will not write to each other even after her visit to Lambton where she is convinced enough of his "ardent love": Darcy loves "her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection" (pp. 265-266). They are soon separated, and Elizabeth has confided to him that Lydia and Wickham have eloped. The conditions that would ordinarily stimulate an exchange of letters are established--separation and confidence--but still they do not write. Evidently, Darcy is changing, and the formal representation of his development is that he does not write to Elizabeth after his post-proposal letter. He no longer sees himself as fixed and consistent; therefore, by his own definition given at Netherfield, he cannot write letters. Nor is Elizabeth's lively mind given to epistolarity. The way she sees the world does not lend itself to the letter: "The

more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and everyday confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense" (p. 135).

"Human characters" are inconsistent; sudden conversions in characters are signs of growth, and reversals of convictions are part of the process of developing. But these dynamics of characterization are not suited to the letter which is a "slow" form suited to "regular detail." Samuel Richardson emphasized events "hidden in the womb of fate"[1] which torture the mind of the amanuensis who is writing at the "height of a present distress." Austen changes Richardson's emphasis from the revelation of events which are seen from various perspectives to an emphasis on the perceiving mind's contribution to the event. The nature of Richardson's letters, "written to the moment while the heart is agitated by hopes and fears, on events undecided,"[2] has changed in Austen to letters that imply their own inadequacy as forms when they are not detailing the coming to light of events, but the coming to life of character. In other words, the essential, unchanging letter-writer in Richardson has been replaced by the developing (inconsistent, rash, precipitant) character whose changing perceptions of the world make impossible his own recording of events. Both Bingley, the "simple" character and Darcy, the

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[1]Preface to Clarissa Harlowe (London: Chapman, Hall, Ltd., 1902), V, xii.

[2]Preface to Sir Charles Grandison (London: Chapman, Hall, Ltd., 1902), I, xi.

"intricate" one, change during the course of the novel. Both are poor letter writers.

Dr. Johnson in his Dictionary defined character as "A mark; a stamp; a representation"; and he quotes Locke in his definition of personality: "This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it imputes to itself past actions, just upon the same ground that it does the present."[3] Consistency in time, then, defines the eighteenth-century character, an extended consciousness that identifies someone over a duration of time. Paul Fussell writes that the eighteenth century assumed "a static image of human character" and a "more or less uniform human personality."[4] The best way to satirize character in the eighteenth century is to deny its stability, as Pope did in his "Of the Characters of Woman": "Nothing so true as what you once let fall/ Most Women have no Character at all." Locke wrote on personal identity in the Essay on Human Understanding: ". . .in this alone consists personal identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done. . .the same thinking thing, in different times

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[3]9th ed. (London: Longman, Hirst, Kees, and Orme, 1805), I.

[4]"Writing as Imitation" in The Rarer Action, Essays in Honor of Francis Fergusson, eds. Alan Cheuse and Richard Koffler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 236.

and places."[5]

The "same thinking thing in different times and places" applies to those characters in Pride and Prejudice who can write letters or whose characters can be "unfolded" in a letter as Wickham's is in Darcy's letter to Elizabeth. Elizabeth is mortified that she did not expose Wickham's character to her family when she hears of Lydia's elopement: "When I consider. . .that I might have prevented it!--I who knew what he was. . .Had his character been known, this could not have happened" (p. 277). Locke's definition applies to characters in eighteenth-century fiction who remain essentially themselves from start to finish no matter what events lie hidden in the womb of time. Herein lies Clarissa's nobility--that she is herself, Clarissa Harlowe, through all the trials she faces. But in Austen's fiction, fixed characters are not the central characters. Mr. Bennet acknowledges his error in letting Lydia go to Brighton by telling Elizabeth, "let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough" (p. 299). It does pass away soon enough, and he "needs only another letter from Mr. Collins" to return to his amused detachment: "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn" (p. 364). He is the "same thinking thing, in different times and places"; he has not changed from the man

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[5]Book II, Chapter xxvii, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959), pp. 448-449.

at the beginning of the book who told his wife, estatic over the arrival of a rich bachelor in the neighborhood, "I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying which ever he chuses of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy." His sameness over a duration of time is marked by his attitude toward the letter. At the opening of the book, he would obviate the plot with a letter offering the rich stranger one of his daughters; at the end, his anticipation of a letter from the foolish parson Mr. Collins emphasizes his essentially unchanged identity. Similarly, Lydia's letter near the end of the book proves that the humiliation of being more or less sold to Wickham has left her the same person she was in Chapter II when she boasted, "though I am the youngest, I am the tallest." The narrator tells us, "As for Wickham and Lydia, their characters suffered no revolution from the marriage of her sisters." Lydia's letter asking for a place at court for Wickham falls on deaf ears, appropriately, for if all that has happened to Lydia and Wickham has not changed them, a place at court for him will not. Mr. Collins' letter offering "the olive branch" is a true reflection of the "mixture of servility and self-importance" that define him from start to finish.

In contrast to these "eighteenth-century" characters, Elizabeth and Darcy are not conceived as essentially the same over a period of time. By the end of the book, they have grown out of the various vanities which had climaxed during Volume II in Darcy's letter justifying his interference between Jane and Bingley and his scorn of Wickham. Marvin

Murdrick says that this letter is more appropriate to a Richardsonian correspondent than to Darcy as he has been presented.[6] I agree that the letter is Richardsonian in that its function is to prove the sameness of Darcy from the beginning of the book until he writes the letter. But Mudrick is arguing that the letter is Richardsonian because it is "thoroughly frank and unreserved" and therefore inconsistent with his "rigid and principled reserve." Austen intended, it seems to me, to insert a "Richardsonian" device, a letter that would set out emphatically how consistent Darcy has been up to the time he writes the letter. After writing the letter, Darcy will change. He is not the same person who has been recorded in the letter: from the time of the letter, he will work to make his old enemy Wickham his future brother-in-law, and he will renounce his class prejudices against "Trade" to be on "the most intimate terms" with the Gardiners, Elizabeth's relatives. Elizabeth, secure in her prejudices until the letter comes from Darcy, undergoes a revolution of self-perception: "She read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes. . .. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed her. . .. Till this moment I never knew myself" (pp. 204, 208).

F. B. Pinion is right when he discriminates between Elizabeth and Darcy and the "traditional figures": "More

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[6]Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 118.

than any other leading pair in Jane Austen's novels, they appear to have been conceived and developed in critical antithesis to the conventional heroes and heroines of romance."[7] They are different from the other characters of the book because they are conceived differently, as persons who change, who are different at the end of the story. From the plateau of their achieved love at the end of the book, they recall Darcy's letter. "I hope you have destroyed the letter. . ." says Darcy. Elizabeth answers, "Think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it, ought to be forgotten. . ." (p. 368). When character is conceived as mobile, as developing, as opposed to Locke's "same self" past and present, the letter, like Darcy's, needs to be destroyed for it is false in the same way that a photograph of a child is not the picture of the adult.

When Darcy writes his letter, it is clear that he sees it as a document; it is something that "his character required . . . to be written and read" (p. 196). He wants to argue his case with Elizabeth, to offer evidence of his essential integrity of character. He writes, "I demand it of your justice." He then proceeds to offer a "regular detail" of the history of his actions, "an account of my actions and

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[7]A Jane Austen Companion: A Critical Survey and Reference Book (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1973), p. 96.

their motives." He tells her, "Two offences of a very different nature, and by no means equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mr. Bingley from your sister,--and the other, that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity, and blasted the propects of Mr. Wickham" (p. 196).

The letter is a refutation and an apology which proceeds by "laying before you the whole of /Wickham's/ connection with my family"; he shall not be prevented by a suspicion that Elizabeth cares for Wickham from "unfolding his real character," which he successfully does. This section of the letter is the part Elizabeth is able to read "with somewhat clearer attention" (p. 204). She rereads it, and again, and again once more. And she is convinced: "every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent, as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole." Checking Darcy's account against her own memory, her perception of Wickham changes. "How differently did every thing now appear in which he was concerned!" Elizabeth "grew absolutely ashamed of herself.--Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (p. 208). Darcy ends his letter by offering the testimony of his cousin, Col. Fitzwilliam,

as a verification of what his letter has told her of Wickham's proflicacy and his seduction of Anne Darcy. The letter, like the letters of Clarissa, announces itself as a document. It can be verified. It is evidence and a character witness. It is written "to the moment," for events (Elizabeth's acceptance of Darcy) are still hidden in the womb of time. It captures Darcy at the height of his self-righteous pride. Howard Babb calls the letter "almost the only unequivocal instance in the novel of pride usually attributed to Darcy."[8] Elizabeth begins reading the letter "with a strong prejudice against every thing he might say" (p. 204). The letter freezes Elizabeth and Darcy in their titular sins because it is a function here of the old formality of stasis. It holds them in character types of pride and prejudice out of which they will grow. When the letter is handed to Elizabeth, she and Darcy are further apart on Dorothy Van Ghent's diagram of their relationship then at any other point in the novel.[9] Wickham's character can be contained and "unfolded" in the letter; the letter settles his case completely. Darcy's character, on the other hand, though he intends to rest his case on the letter, cannot be contained in this document since his great changes in attitude are still to come. The narrator shows how inadequate the letter is for containing his character: "Mr. Darcy's letter, she was in a fair way of soon knowing by heart. She

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[8]Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1962), p. 142.

[9]The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart, 1953), p. 46.

studied every sentence: and her feelings towards its writer were at times widely different. When she remembered the style of his address, she was still full of indignation; but when she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him, her anger was turned against herself" (p. 212). Darcy's "style of address" is no more an indication of what he becomes in the course of the novel than Bingley's blots in his letters are a sign of his character. Letters are not seen by Austen as potent forms flexible enough to trace the development of the self, though they can capture and confirm stages of development as Darcy's letter does.

Austen's use of other letters in Pride and Prejudice confirms this point--that the letter is an inadequate formal technique for dealing with characters who are conceived as ones who change, grow and become themselves and, conversely, that it is a perfect form for characters who are drawn as static, who are essentially themselves from the start of the novel to the end. Southam writes, "in the reworking of First Impressions /the 1797 version of Pride and Prejudice which would be revised three more times before it was published in 1813/ the pride of Darcy and prejudice of Elizabeth may have been more subtly presented, as weaknesses common to both. . . ."[10] The more subtle presentation of the characters of Darcy and Elizabeth is directly related to the subtle functioning of the included letters and letter-scenes in a novel which had originally been epistolary. Austen's change in the concept

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[10]Southam, p. 41.

of characterization and the related change in the function of the letter is one of the innovations of her fiction. Lionel Stevenson points to characterization as the flaw in the turn-of-the-century novel: "The mediocrity of the English novel in the decade 1790-1800 was due mainly to ineffectual characterization. In Gothic novels the characters were puppets adopting attitudes of terror or nobility; in the novels of doctrine they were specimens of social tendencies or mouthpieces for the author's opinions."[11] Kenneth Moler argues that the revisions that First Impressions underwent were mainly revisions in characterization, though he does not associate the change in characterization with the change from the epistolary novel to the narrated one.[12]

In the third volume of Pride and Prejudice, the epistolary casting is more visible. As Norman Page puts it, "the novel draws to a conclusion with a burst of epistolary energy."[13] There are nine letters in Volume Three, and they function to discriminate between characters. Elizabeth is visiting Kent with her Uncle and Aunt Gardiner. Lydia is in Brighton with Col. and Mrs. Forster. The situation calls for an exchange of letters, for there is much to report. Elizabeth visits Pemberley, the seat of the Darcys. She is invited to meet Darcy's sister; she meets Bingley for the first time since he

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[11]The English Novel: A Panorama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 7.

[12]Jane Austen's Art of Allusion (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1968), pp. 75-108.

[13]The Language of Jane Austen, p. 32.

precipitantly left Netherfield, and Darcy has changed greatly.

> It was not often that she could turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy himself; but, whenever she did catch a glimpse, she saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that he said, she heard an accent so far removed from hauteur or disdain of his companions, as convinced her that the improvement of manners which she had yesterday witnessed however temporary its existence might prove, had at least out lived one day. When she saw him thus seeking the acquaintance, and courting the good opinion of people, with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace; when she saw him thus civil, not only to herself, but to the very relations whom he had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Hunsford Parsonage, the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on her mind, that she could hardly restrain her astonishment from being visible. Never, even in the company of his dear friends at Netherfield, or his dignified relations at Rosings, had she seen him so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence, or unbending reserve as now, when no importance could result from the success of his endeavors, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom his attentions were addressed would draw down the ridicule and censure of the ladies both of Netherfield and Rosings. (p. 263)

Such a "great" change in Darcy seems to promise a second proposal, but two letters interrupt this idyll. Jane writes to Elizabeth to tell her that Lydia and Wickham have gone to Scotland. She sends another letter to say that they are not married. In the first letter Jane hopes that Wickham's "character has been misunderstood" (p. 273), but in the second, she admits that he is not "a man to be trusted." Elizabeth immediately returns to Longbourne where she and her family suffer the delays and gradual revelations of epistolary fiction. "Every day at Longbourne was now a day of anxiety; but the most

anxious part of each was when the post was expected. The arrival of letters was the first grand object of every morning's impatience. Through letters, whatever of good or bad was to be told, would be communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some news of importance" (p. 296).

Austen ironically comments on their suffering by insetting an outrageous letter from Mr. Collins which exacerbates their anxieties about the post. This letter of "comfort" pours salt in the family wound. He assures them that "the death of /their/ daughter would have been a blessing in comparison to this"; that the whole family will be ruined by Lydia's "false step"; and that he is relieved that he did not marry into such a family. He ends by advising Mr. Bennet "to throw off your unworthy child from your affection forever" (p. 297).

Immediately following Collins' pompous signature, the narrator summarizes a letter from Mr. Gardiner. This juxtaposition of techniques for presenting letters contrasts the lifeless Mr. Collins caught in the frame of his inset letter to the "quicker" character of Mr. Gardiner who is presented through the narrator who combines information, evaluation and the response of the reader, Jane Bennet. Here is the filtered letter in part:

> Colonel Forster believed that more than a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear /Wickham's/ expences at Brighton. He owed a good deal in the town, but his debts of honour were still more formidable. Mr. Gardiner did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Longbourne family; Jane heard them with horror. "A gamester!" she cried. "This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it. (p. 298)

Some days later, an express letter arrives from London from Mr. Gardiner. It is quoted in full. Lydia and Wickham have been found; if a settlement can be arranged of one thousand pounds plus 100 pounds per annum, they will be married. This letter, for all its welcomed news, is as inadequate in its way as Mr. Collins's letter of "condolence" was, for it must be complemented by Mr. Bennet's and Elizabeth's reading between the lines. When they finish reading the letter, Mr. Bennet says, "Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know:--one is, how much money your uncle has laid down, to bring it about; and the other, how am I ever to pay him" (p. 304). Elizabeth credits her uncle with securing Wickham for Lydia: "The kindness of my uncle and aunt can never be requited." But she is mistaken. The truth slips out later in Lydia's post-nuptial babbling. She says that her uncle's being called away on business would not have stopped the wedding, "for Mr. Darcy might have done as well" to give her away. This crucial piece of information had been omitted from all the letters from London. Elizabeth instantly writes to her Aunt Gardiner for an explanation of Darcy's involvement with the Bennets. She asks why "a person unconnected with any of us, and (comparitively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have been amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me understand it--" (p. 320). The answer comes in a long, five-page, directly quoted letter.

But the answer is as unsatisfactory as its formal encasement in the letter implies. It had been Mr. Darcy who

had searched out and found the young couple; it was Darcy who paid Wickham to marry Lydia, for it seems that Wickham "still cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage, in some other country"; and it was Darcy who was on time for the wedding (p. 319). But the question of motive is not answered (to Elizabeth's satisfaction) in the letter. He had told Mrs. Gardiner that "It was owning to him, to his reserve and want of proper consideration that Wickham's character had been so misunderstood, and consequently that he had been received and noticed as he was" (p. 324). Thus, the case against Wickham's character is confirmed again in a letter. In this letter we see him sell himself in marriage after haggling over the price. Mrs. Gardiner reports evidence against him that adds to the more than sufficient proof that Elizabeth has been given in her letter from Darcy. A character conceived as Wickham is, a villain from beginning to end, lends himself to being presented in a letter. However, a Darcy who has changed greatly in the course of the book, does not. His motives are still vague and uncertain to Mrs. Gardiner though her womanly intuition offers a suggestion about his real motive. She ends her letter with a description of Darcy, ". . .he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and <u>that</u>, if he marry <u>prudently</u>, his wife may teach him." (p. 325). Elizabeth cannot feel so sure. The letter throws her into a "flutter of spirits."

This letter is very important, and its function is complex, for it offers proof in what I have been calling "eighteenth-

century" fashion, of Wickham's essential villainy and at the same time it proves that Darcy is and always was a good man. His change is not from evil to good, but from disdain to "exertion of goodness." To have his goodness reported in a letter validates it, but the letter alone cannot present his character in its entirety as it can the more simply conceived Wickham. It does prove that he is <u>good</u> enough for Elizabeth; we have always known that he was <u>fine</u> enough.

> The contents of this letter threw Elizabeth into a flutter of spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure or pain bore the greatest share. The vague and unsettled supicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister's match, which she had feared to encourage, as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true! (p. 326)

As soon as Elizabeth finishes the letter, she is overtaken by Wickham whose careful and deceitful conversation verifies again that he is exactly what the letters have said he was; this incident shows that Austen is using the letter device to discriminate between the kinds of characterization in her fiction. For Darcy is not clearly nor entirely visible in this long letter from Mrs. Gardiner; nor was he in his own long letter, though of course, he thought he was. His motive for helping the Bennets rescue Lydia, as stated to Mrs. Gardiner, belongs to the realm of eighteenth-century epistolary fiction. He wanted to rectify his mistake in concealing the true character of Wickham. This is a public motive, the one he tells

her, and the one she explains to Lizzy. But his real motive he saves for Elizabeth when she tries to thank him by referring to family honor or to his public motive: "If you will thank me," he replied, "let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you, might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your family owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe, I thought only of you" (p. 366).

The final letter in the novel comes from Mr. Collins who writes to warn Elizabeth that Lady Catherine has heard rumors of a match between her nephew and Elizabeth and is highly displeased. Appropriately enough, his letter arrives after Lady Catherine has already called on Elizabeth to sound her out on the subject and to warn her against such an indiscretion. Interspersed in the letter, which is not as diverting to Elizabeth as it is to her father, are comments that reveal his unchanged perceptions. He is amused that the mistaken rumor could have circulated about Darcy and his Lizzy. "Had they fixed on any other man it would have been nothing; but his perfect indifference, and your pointed dislike, make it so delightfully absurd!" (p. 364). The gulf between father and child has widened. They read the letter, and the contrast in their reponses is devisive for they are responding to different things: Mr. Bennet to the letter and Elizabeth to her father as he reads the letter. Austen has employed two modes of characterization in the novel and has used the embedded letter to discriminate between the two modes. The contrast here between Elizabeth's and her father's attitude to the

letter once again sets the two modes against each other. She is deeply hurt at his "lack of penetration" into the change in her feelings. Her mind takes in the whole situation and interprets it: he can read the letter, laugh at Mr. Collins, but he cannot read the change in his daughter. This letter scene again shows Mr. Bennet as a static "eighteenth-century" character. His appreciation of fools is just as refined as it was at the beginning of the novel, and he is just as blind to the needs of his family. Here the letter is associated with static characters as it is in eighteenth-century epistolary fiction and in this final scene, we see how Austen expanded the function of the letter to mark the difference between the father and daughter and thus between two kinds of characters.

Chapter IV

Northanger Abbey: A Page of Empty Professions

Northanger Abbey was the first of Austen's novels to be originally conceived as a direct narrative; it went through no epistolary drafts. Southam and McKillop agree that the extant version of the novel is close to its original form and that no major structural alterations were made in the three revisions it underwent.[1] Therefore, its included letters cannot be seen as residual forms from an early epistolary casting. The letters in the novel, then, are deliberate inclusions and, as such, suggest new functions for the device of the included letter.

Godfrey Frank Singer found in his study of the epistolary novel that only one Gothic novel was written in letters. This fact suggests that a Gothic view of the world in which surfaces violently and mysteriously collapse or erupt cannot be accommodated by the letter. In Northanger Abbey, Austen proves that common life in Christian England has its own Gothic, that there are, as Catherine Morland discovers, greater alarms than those of romance; and she recognizes the incompatibility of the epistolary novel to the presentation of a Gothic reality, whatever its origins and location.

Two specific scenes in Northanger Abbey confirm this point. When Catherine "awakens" from the "visions of romance" in which

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[1]Southam, p. 61. Alan D. McKillop, "Critical Realism in Northanger Abbey" in Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1963), p. 52.

she had seen General Tilney as the murderously cruel husband, her first reaction is to look for a letter from her friend in Bath, Isabella Thorpe. "The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance. Her desire of hearing from Isabella grew everyday greater" (Vol. V, p. 201). For Catherine the letter is the emblem of "common life anxieties"; it recalls everyday reality and is a sign that the "alarms of romance" are over. But in the course of the novel, those common life anxieties will become as profound and disturbing as any in Udolpho, and the letter will prove to be inadequate to the depiction of English varieties of the Gothic. Catherine must learn that although the room at the end of the gallery is in fact filled with sunshine instead of the moans of the Abbey's starved mistress, the motives of a General Tilney are as dark as any Alpine or Italian subterranean passage. While the conventional appointments of Gothic novels are ridiculed--the old manuscript, the locked Japan cabinet, the "speaking" portrait--Austen's more serious purpose is to prove that everyday reality is just as treacherous as the reality in Gothic fiction.

The second scene which confirms the incompatibility of the letter to the English Gothic comes after Catherine's return to her home, Fullerton. She has experienced two Gothic worlds--the "alarms of romance," an Italian kind, and an English terror, her sudden and unexplained expulsion from the Tilney home. She tries to write to her friend Eleanor Tilney but realizes that what has happened to her is so complex as to

"frighten away all powers of performance." She cannot write a letter; explanation and even description have become too difficult. Her own heart is as perplexing to her now as the Abbey used to be. It is clear in this passage that the old relationship of the letter to the writer's heart has become increasingly difficult. The narrator sets out the problems Catherine faces as she sits down to write the letter:

> The strength of these feelings, however, was far from assisting her pen; and never had it been harder for her to write than in addressing Eleanor Tilney. To compose a letter which might at once do justice to her sentiments and her situation, convey gratitude without servile regret, be guarded without coldness, and honest without resentment--a letter which Eleanor might not be pained by the perusual of--and, above all, which she might not blush herself, if Henry should chance to see, was an undertaking to frighten away all her powers of performance; and, after long thought and much perplexity, to be very brief was all that she could determine on with any confidence of safety. The money therefore which Eleanor had advanced was inclosed with little more than grateful thanks, and thousand good wishes of a most affectionate heart. (p. 235)

When Catherine's mother who has been observing her daughter struggle to write the letter says "as the letter was finished; 'This has been a strange acquaintance,'" she is unknowingly telling a truth to which the novel has been pointing: expressing oneself presumes an understanding of the self and one's circumstances, two unknowables which are all the more incomprehensible because they seem to be so accessible.

Henry Tilney, who undertakes the education of Catherine and falls in love with her in good sentimental style, is

equipped to disabuse her of her Gothic notions. But he himself must be educated to understand the "Christian England" he thinks he understands.[2] It is important to remember that he is the character who, on the drive from Bath to Northanger, has planted the Gothic notions in Catherine's mind. He tells her: "How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment! And what will you discern?--Not tables, toilettes, wardrobes, or drawers, but on one side perhaps the remains of a broken lute, on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can open, and over the fire-place the portrait of some handsome warrior, whose features will so incomprehensively strike you, that you will not be able to withdraw your eyes from it" (p. 158). He goes on, enjoying her response, "Oh! Mr. Tilney, how frightful! This is just like a book!--But it can not really happen to me." Later, after she has found the laundry lists in the locked Japan cabinet and has been discovered by Henry investigating his mother's room and looking for signs of her untimely death at the hands of the General, Henry delivers his famous reprimand:

> If I understand you rightly you had formed a surmise of such horror as I hardly have words to--Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember that we are English, that we are Christian. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated

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[2]Robert Kiely in The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), passes lightly over Henry's demerits as a teacher (pp. 126-135).

> without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (p. 197-198)

There is no doubt that here Udolpho is being "wittily put in its place," as McKillop says,[3] but this speech is also a demonstration of Henry's limitations. "Consulting one's own understanding," one's "sense of the probable," or one's "own observation of what is passing around" cannot reveal the world to Catherine or to Henry any more than it could to Elinor Dashwood when she looked at the evidence of the ring, the portrait, and the letter in Sense and Sensibility and rightly rejected them as evidence of the reality they purported to be. All things are not accessible to observation, the sense of the probable, or to the understanding; irrational behavior and secret motivations do not accord with one's sense of the probable.

Characters exchange letters that we never read in the novel. The hints we hear of them and their innuendoes and implications are techniques for giving the story a Gothic substratum. They serve to ridicule in a subtle way Henry's advice to rely on observation and therefore expose it as facile and even dangerous. For example, Isabella Thorne finds out too late, after she is already engaged to James Morland, that his family is poor. She writes a warning letter to her

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[3]McKillop, p. 59.

brother John so that he can stop his calculated flirtation with Catherine Morland. But her letter to him crosses the one to her in which he sends his "love" to Catherine. We never see the letters; we only hear Isabella murmur to herself, "I only wonder John could think of it; he could not have received my last." Of course her point is that, if he had gotten her letter telling him the true state of the Morland family finances, he would never have wasted his time sending his love to such an ineligible girl. This hidden fact about the Morlands is the secret hinge of the plot, for John Thorpe not only considers himself practically engaged to a girl who stands to inherit not only her own family's but the Allen's money as well, but he also brags about his conquest to General Tilney who immediately invites the young "heiress" to Northanger Abbey for a month. "Catherine herself could not be more ignorant at the time of all this. . .." (p. 245), we hear at the end of the novel. The plot depends on the ignorance of the Thorpes and General Tilney about the Morland wealth and that of Catherine about their designs on her and her brother. Catherine does not suspect the secret machinations of the Thorpes and General Tilney, the real Montonis of the piece. The letters between Isabella and John Thorpe, which are never included in the text of the novel and are never visible even to the most careful observer, serve as emblems of the threatening undercurrent of English Gothic reality. They also serve to connect the Bath chapters, the subplot, to the Northanger story.

Catherine must learn to speak the language of her changing society, a society where parents have abdicated their conventional roles and their substitutes, the Allens and Tilneys, are irresponsible and cruel or, like young Henry Tilney, inadequate to the task. Like Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Allen speaks in non sequiturs. When Catherine tells Mrs. Allen that she had hoped that she would tell her if she thought it indiscrete to drive about the country in an open carriage with a young man, Mrs. Allen's answers that she had not wanted Catherine to buy the sprigged muslin when they came to Bath. She must learn that people do not mean what they say; that language has more complex functions than simply conveying meaning. Isabella Thorpe says she will not dance, "that is quite out of the question," as she gets up to dance, and John Thorpe lies in order to force Catherine to go for a drive with him. Catherine by her own admission must learn to speak "well"; "I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible." She must learn what Goldsmith defined as the "true use of speech": "The true use of speech is not so much to express our wants as to conceal them."[4] It is a sign of Catherine's immaturity that she immediately wants to write a letter to Isabella Thorpe as soon as she learns that riding in an open carriage unchaperoned is questionable behavior. Her impulse is to "explain" the indecorum to Isabella for she is sure that her friend is "insensible" to it. Mr. Allen stops this foolish impulse.

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[4]The Bee, October 20, 1759, "On the Use of Language," Everyman's Library, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1934), p. 356.

It is clear that Catherine's faith in the authority of the letter, of explanation, of communication is naive.

Henry tries to teach Catherine to be precise in her choice of words. He lectures her on her misuse of "nice" to describe The Mysteries of Udolpho. She listens but does not understand him, and with good reason. "I did not mean to say any thing wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should not I call it so?" (p. 108). The mysteries of Udolpho, as it turns out, are indeed "nice": they express "neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement," when compared to the everyday mysteries of motivation in Bath and Northanger. Henry, for all his Oxonian fault-finding with the "incorrectness of language," will be as naive about the mysteries of his home as Catherine is. Catherine's bafflement with language suggests a new Gothic in which everyday life makes no sense and against which Henry's concern with diction is puerile. Catherine wonders, "Why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while . . .How were people, at that rate, to be understood?" (p. 211). How can Captain Tilney stay in Bath showing partiality to Isabella Thorpe whom he knows is engaged to Catherine's brother? Or as Henry phrases it (and it does not make more sense in his terse question), how can Isabella be "in love with James and flirt with Frederick." Joseph Wiesenfarth says,

> in no novel is /the/ concern for words as morally and esthetically pervasive as it is in Northanger Abbey where mastery of language becomes the outward aspect of Catherine Morland's radical human effort to mature; therefore in no subsequent

> novel of Jane Austen's will one find a heroine so lost for words that her moral and emotional integrity will be seen as Catherine's is, in a face in which "the eight parts of speech shone out most expressively from her eyes.[5]

After Henry reprimands Catherine, she follows his advice to consult her own understanding, to observe, and to rely on a sense of the probable. "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. Most grievously was she humbled. Most bitterly did she cry" (p. 199). Recovering, she uses her "observation of what is passing around" her to decide that the General would like her to be his daughter-in-law (p. 215). Remembering that she and the Tilneys are English and Christian, she "could not but observe" from the considerate conduct of the General that he wants her in his family. Austen is leading Catherine from Gothic to Gothic, so to speak, for now Catherine is sure that she is cured of the Radcliffean syndrome.

> Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of

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[5]The Errand of Form (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 29.

> England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. . .
> Her mind made up on these several points, and her resolution formed, of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense, she had nothing to do but to forgive herself and be happier than ever. (p. 200-201)

McKillop is mistaken, I think, to say that "Henry's gentle rebuke jolts the story rather violently" and that "this breach in the imaginative continuity is never fully repaired."[6] Mrs. Erenpreis summarizes the critical consensus when she writes: "Most critics agree that the Gothic burlesque (the bulk of it in Chapters 20-24) is not well blended with the rest of the story. The structural relationship between the Bath episodes and the Northanger experience is not comfortable, and Catherine's adventures at Northanger are not a natural consequence of her reading."[7] On the contrary, it seems clear that Bath and Northanger are tied together by the parallel figures of the false guardians, Mrs. Allen and General Tilney, and the patterns of pursuit of John Thorpe and then later of the General of Catherine's supposed fortune. The two episodes are also unified by a leit motif of "charm," and Austen's use of the included letter emphasizes the relations between Bath and Northanger.

In Bath, Catherine is charmed by the false sentiments of Isabella who tells her in a gush, "Had I the command of

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[6]McKillop, p. 60.

[7]Introduction to the Penguin Edition of Northanger Abbey, 1972, p. 13.

millions, were I mistress of the whole world, your brother would be my only choice." The narrator comments, "This charming sentiment, recommended as much by sense as by novelty, gave Catherine a most pleasing remembrance of all the heroines of her acquaintance; and she thought her friend never looked more lovely than in uttering the grand idea" (p. 119). At Northanger, Catherine is charmed by the Abbey's resemblance to Udolpho. But the knowledge of the true state of the Morland finances delays the real Gothic of Catherine's expulsion from the Abbey, and this delay allows the more theatrical Udolpho scenario to play itself out. Following the shattering of the Radliffean charm, James Morland's letter comes to announce that "every thing is at an end between Miss Thorpe and me.--I left her and Bath yesterday, never to see either again. . .I am undeceived in time" (p. 202). After this letter diminishes the effect that Isabella's charm has had on Catherine, the General takes her to Woodston to see the home he has given Henry. He defers to Catherine's taste when she says, "Oh! what a sweet little cottage there is among the trees--apple trees too! It is the prettiest cottage!" The General replies, in an obvious ploy to win Catherine and her fortune for his son, "You like it--you approve it as an object;--it is enough. Henry, remember that Robinson is spoken to about it. The cottage remains" (p. 214). The visit to Woodston introduces another potent charm, the charm that holds sway in the midland counties of England: the belief that one's observations are trustworthy.

Catherine is sure from what she sees at Woodston that the General intends her to marry Henry. (It is interesting that Isabella in casting her charm on Catherine had also used the notion of a cottage: "A cottage in some retired village would be extasy" /p. 120/.) Now Catherine is gushing over a sweet cottage amid the apple trees. "The next morning" after the trip to Woodston, Catherine receives a letter from Isabella which is filled with hypocrisies and lies. She is "quite" uneasy about Catherine's "dear brother." "Your kind offices will set all right:--He is the only man I ever did or could love, and I trust you will convince him of it" (p. 216). Catherine's growth can be measured by her response to this letter; her awareness of the complex and deceptive uses of language has increased greatly: "Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood, struck her from the very first" (p. 218). She wakes up from Isabella's charm: "I see what she has been about."

The Woodston visit separates the two awakenings--from Mrs. Radcliffe's charm thrown over the Tilney Abbey and from Isabella's charm cast on Catherine--and they lead to her most painful awakening. The chapter following Isabella's letter brings Catherine to her cruelest realization. The General goes to London where he will learn that the Morland family is not wealthy. He returns in a rage to send Catherine away from Northanger without any explanation. The two letters from the world of Bath have been carefully embedded; the one from

James Morland immediately follows the overthrow of the Radcliffean charm, and the one from Isabella comes immediately after Catherine's idyll at Woodston. Brown has noted the "precise timing" of the letters which makes them interact with, and become integral to, the most critical moments of Catherine Morland's development.[8] Their function is not only to tie the two worlds of Bath and Northanger together, but in the first instance to echo and amplify Catherine's release from delusion and, in the second instance, to emphasize the irony that while Catherine may be completely cured of the illusion of friendship with Isabella, she is living under false assumptions about the General's affection and interest in her.

The two letters placed at crucial moments in Catherine's education emphasize the illusory conditions of both Bath and Northanger, conditions that are impenetrable by observation and a sense of the probable. Austen is integrating doubts and anxieties about the observed world with the more easily dismissed anxieties about fictive worlds.[9]

Isabella's letter declaring her love for James flatly contradicts James's letter; having been liberated from her Radcliffean notions, Catherine can read it and see that it actually agrees with James's. Brown says that the reason

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[8]Brown, p. 160.

[9]Katrin Ristkok Burlin, "The Pen of the Contriver: The Four Fictions of Northanger Abbey" in Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), p. 90.

for her new acumen is that all Isabella's "affected hyperboles that Catherine ignored in the rush of dialogue. . . /are/. . . transfixed for the first time by the written format of the epistolary mode."[10] She has come far. However, she is lulled by what she sees at Woodston, believing "almost always--that Henry loved her, and quite always that his father and sister loved and even wished her to belong to them; and believing so far, her doubts and anxieties were merely sportive irritations" (p. 221). Such a trust in what is observed is the product of Henry's lecture, and it will soon collapse.

Chapters Ten, Eleven and Twelve act as a hiatus between the two Gothics of the novel. The letters from James and Isabella frame this period of calm and illusion--the Woodston visit. Chapter Ten begins, "The visions of romance were over." Chapter Twelve ends with Catherine's release from Isabella Thorpe: "She is a vain coquette, and her tricks have not answered. I do not believe she had ever any regard either for James or for me, and I wish I had never known her."

In Chapter Thirteen, Austen prepares us for the "new Gothic" of English Christians by evoking the same Gothic trappings that Catherine has outgrown. Everything seems to be calm; James Morland has broken his engagement to Isabella. Frederick Tilney is "safe" from Miss Thorpe. The letters have announced the news and have resolved this Thorpe-subplot. Eleanor has just persuaded Catherine to extend her visit.

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[10]Brown, p. 160.

The General is in London, and his "loss" proves a "gain" to Eleanor and Catherine: "The happiness with which their time now passed, every employment voluntary, every laugh indulged, every meal a scene of ease and good-humour, walking where they liked, their hours, pleasures and fatigues at their own command, make her thoroughly sensible of the restraint which the General's presence had imposed, and most thankfully feel their present release from it" (p. 220). Henry is to go to Woodston, but his "loss" does not "ruin their comfort." Eleanor and Henry urge Catherine to stay with them, and she happily agrees. "The kindness, the earnestness of Eleanor's manner in pressing her to stay, and Henry's gratified look on being told that her stay was determined, were such sweet proofs of her importance with them, as left her only just so much solicitude as the human mind can never do comfortably without" (p. 221). These "sweet proofs" are about to be confounded, and their annihilation is accomplished with Gothic cliches.

Catherine is alone in her chamber; it is near midnight. She hears "a step in the gallery," "the noise of something moving close to her door," "a slight motion of the lock proved that some hand must be on it." These Gothic palpitations and vagaries earlier had struck fear in Catherine, but they do not have the same effect now that she has been "educated" and "disenchanted"; "Resolving not to be again overcome by trivial appearances of alarm, or misled by a raised imagination, she stepped quietly forward, and opened the door." The

similarity of this experience to the earlier Radcliffean one is deliberate. Here is the description of Catherine about to discover the manuscript of the laundry list: "her hand was upon the important lock," "the lock yielded to her hand," "her fingers grasped the handle. . .the door suddenly yielded to her hand" (pp. 167-171). This time the threat looms larger; "something" is coming toward Catherine; "some hand" is at the door. Before, it was only Catherine herself who moved toward the locked door. The earlier pattern has been that of horror relieved; the ancient manuscript is only a laundry list left by the recent visitor who will return to marry Eleanor. This time, however, the pattern does not complete itself. "Eleanor, and only Eleanor, stood there, Catherine's spirits however were tranquillized but for an instant, for Eleanor's cheeks were pale, and her manner greatly agitated" (p. 223). Eleanor brings a message from the General who has just returned from London: Catherine is to be expelled from her friends' home--the Abbey she has recently come to trust--without explanation. She has relied on the "sweet proofs" of her observations only to find that they are worthless.

Austen makes the contrast between the two kinds of Gothic explicit. When Catherine tries to sleep after Eleanor has told her she must be ready to leave Northanger the next morning, she understands how much more terrible this English Gothic is.

> That room, in which her disturbed imagination had tormented her on her first arrival, was again the scene of agitated spirits and unquiet slumbers. Yet how different now the source of her inquietude from what had been then--how mournfully superior in reality and substance! Her anxiety had foundation in fact, her fear probability; and with a mind so occupied in the contemplation of actual and natural evil, the solitude of her situation, the darkness of her chamber, the antiquity of the building were felt and considered without the smallest emotion. . .. (p. 227)

"Actual and natural evil" is alive and flourishing in the midlands. From Henry's letters at the end of the book, which we never see, Catherine will learn that "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (p. 247). Austen has transplanted the Gothic to the midland counties of Christian England. Human nature in Christian England is as "charmed," that is, as contradictory and frightening as it is in Mrs. Radcliffe's novels. Catherine has awakened from the charm of the Italian Gothic only to find that she is living in an English Gothic.

The letters from James Morland and Isabella Thorpe, old forms associated with a Lockean world view, with Henry's "observation" and "sense of the probable," are used to frame a phase of Catherine's education that is as "charmed" as the one she is confident she has renounced. The English empirical--Henry's school of the observed--is contained within the frame of the two letters from the world of Bath. Then this world of "sweet proofs," in which Woodston appears to be Catherine's

future home, is destroyed by the General's dismissal of her. And Henry admits at last that her Gothic suspicions were not as outrageous as he had thought. The period of security between the letters (from March 30 to April 9, according to Chapman's chronology) will be cancelled by the coming expulsion of Catherine. The letters themselves contradict or cancel each other out: James writes that he is finished with Isabella while she writes that she loves only James. But Catherine has learned to "read" Isabella's letter just as she has learned from Henry how to "read" the Abbey. Both readings are inadequate. She does not learn from the letters to feel suspicious of all surface "proofs"--to suspect the nature of the General's hospitality which is an analogue to Isabella's protestations of love. She cannot see the economic motivations of the Isabella who drops James Morland for the richer Captain Tilney any more than she can see that she herself has been courted by the General because he believes that she is wealthy. The letters function to demonstrate the insufficiency of the observed; what they report is only superficially true and what they frame at Woodston is a lie. The last letter in the novel is the one the General writes after he is relieved and mollified to learn that Catherine will have three thousand pounds coming to her. He sends to her father "a page of empty professions."

Austen's impatience with the old function of the letter as the conveyor of "regular detail" is evident in the way she uses the letter in Northanger Abbey. As the story draws to

a close, the narrator directs our attention to the replacement of the letter by a narrating voice: "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 to Catherine, how much of it he could have learnt from his father, in what points his own conjectures might assist him, and what portion must yet remain to be told in a letter from James" (p. 247). She continues, "I have united for their ease what they must divide for mine." The narrating voice is the voice that unifies in the same way that it has in the conclusion of Lady Susan. The epistolary mode deals with the world discretely; it divides the world into various perspectives which are accumulated into a whole vision. Austen's narrator has united the story "for our ease." Throughout the novel, the letter has been mocked. When Henry is first introduced to Catherine, he begins to tease her for being a journal-keeping heroine. It is this "delightful habit of journalizing which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated." Catherine wonders if ladies really do write better letters than men. Henry allows that their style is faultless except "in three particulars": "A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar" (p. 27). It is significant that Catherine's mother did not ask her daughter write anything from Bath but "some account of the money you spend" (p. 19). Letters are effete forms that Austen must put to new uses, such as the framing-device they become in Northanger Abbey. When the

narrator says, "And now I may dismiss my heroine to a sleepless couch, which is the true heroine's portion," she is dismissing a great deal of the epistolary novel's tradition--the letter-writing heroine burning the midnight oil to record the distresses of the moment. Catherine Morland is a new kind of heroine: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her" (p. 13). She must be educated to the language of her "Gothic" society where letters and observation no longer tell the truth. She must learn to deal with Dr. Johnson's caveat against epistolary intercourse: "There is indeed, no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse."[11] Catherine cannot write like Isabella Thorpe; in the course of the novel, she must be educated to understand people who speak well enough to be unintelligible; she must learn sophistication. Wiesenfarth rightly calls Northanger Abbey a novel of initiation "in which Catherine Morland undergoes a rite du passage into love and social reality. . . ."[12]

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[11]Lives of the Poets, "Pope" (Troy, N. Y.: Pafraets Book Co., 1903), p. 293.

[12]The Errand of Form, p. 165.

Chapter V

Mansfield Park: The Language of Real Feeling

In her third major novel, Austen uses the theatrical implications of role-playing, type-casting, and staging to devastate the decorum of the great house, Mansfield, the home that Fanny Price will move toward in the course of the novel. And she uses the included letter to demonstrate that language is a theatre in which everyone plays a part--even a person like Fanny who says, when she is urged to play the walk-on role of the Cottager's Wife in Lover's Vows, "I could not act anything if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act" (Vol. III, p. 145). The letters of Volume III in particular act as a model of Austen's attitude toward the theatrical, that is, the deceiving capacities of language. There are nine letters quoted there and thirty-two references to letters, whereas in Volume I there are no letters and in Volume II, only two. As Roger B. Johnson writes in his dissertation on the technique of the included letter, "The scheme defined by the author's use of letters becomes a microcosmic model of that author's attitudes toward the capacity of language--an effect that would be impossible if the letter did not fix communication in static form."[1]

In spite of her protest that she cannot act, Fanny is constantly being forced to act parts from that of the rescued waif to that of the Cinderella figure courted by the prince,

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[1]"Anatomy of a Literary Device: The Included Letter," Diss. University of Illinois, 1968, p. 226.

Henry Crawford. Lionel Trilling best defines the threat posed by the theatrical presented in the absence of Sir Thomas: the play arouses "a traditional, almost primitive, feeling about impersonation. . .. It is the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator; that indeed the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the real self."[2] While the importance of the theatrical proper, Kotzebue's Lover's Vows, translated by Elizabeth Inchbald, has been thoroughly discussed by various critics, the function of the letters in the novel as comparable emblems of more pervasive linguistic games has not. Donald Stone argues persuasively in an essay called "Sense and Semantics in Jane Austen" that Austen is the "most indispensable of English novelists" because of her attempt in her novels to "keep us from playing any more language games, whether of an emotional or verbal nature."[3]

An example of the word games typical of Mansfield Park comes at the end of Volume II when Henry Crawford proposes to Fanny immediately after bringing her the news of her brother William's promotion in the navy. The promotion, as Henry is at pains to make clear to Fanny, has come about by his intervention with his uncle, the Admiral. He tries to manipulate her feelings with his "strong expressions" when he speaks of his "deepest interest," his "twofold motives," and his "views

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[2]"Mansfield Park," reprinted from The Opposing Self (1954) in Discussions of Jane Austen (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1761), p. 93.

[3]Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 25 (1970), p. 50.

and wishes more than could be told." Finally, he says that she has "created sensations which his heart had never known before, and that every thing he had done for William, was to be placed to the account of his excessive and unequalled attachment to her" (p. 301). He makes Fanny understand why he has troubled himself so, but Fanny feels that Crawford is playing the same games with her that she has seen him play with her cousins, Maria and Julia. "She considered it all as nonsense, as mere trifling and gallantry, which meant only to deceive for the hour;. . .it was like himself, and entirely of a piece with what she had seen before" (p. 301). Crawford speaks "nonsense." So, when he offers "himself, hand, fortune, everything" to her, Fanny's "astonishment and confusion" increase, for she knows that he cannot be serious; it is nonsense. She is saved from having to listen to more of his entreaties by the entrance of Sir Thomas who breaks in on this "theatrical," this role-playing "nonsense" just as he had broken in on the rehearsal of Lover's Vows on his return from Antigua. Crawford thinks that Fanny's cry, "No, No No," is the result of her "modesty," that it is a coy role assumed for the occasion and that it is the precursor to her acceptance of him. That night he returns with a note for Fanny from his sister Mary. She sends "a few lines of general congratulation" on their engagement and gives her "most joyful consent and approval" (p. 303). Fanny is trapped in a theatre of language where people speak and write nonsense, but it is nonsense that cannot be taken lightly, for it is the language

of power. Mary's note assumes that Fanny's engagement to Henry is an accomplished fact, though Fanny's last words to Henry had been, "no, no, don't think of me. But you are not thinking of me. I know it is all nothing" (p. 302). The letter emphasizes the characters' imprisonment in linguistic roles--the pursued, the pursuer, and his accomplice. Fanny's refusal is interpreted as a maidenly necessity, a response which Henry and Mary expect. Henry, in his aggression as the pursuer, translates Fanny's answer into a hesitant acceptance, and Mary's note of approval dramatizes the dangers of language used as theatre. Fanny is caught in this language of hypocrites or actors, the insincerity of which Austen was the first novelist to represent, according to Trilling.[4] The opposite of freedom in Mansfield Park is the assigned role, or as George Steiner so aptly puts it, "the opposite of freedom is cliche."[5] The letter from Mary emphasizes the attack on Fanny's integrity and freedom. "These were not expressions to do Fanny any good. . .it was evident that /Mary/ meant to compliment her on her brother's attachment and even to appear to believe it serious. She did not know what to do, or what to think. There was wretchedness in the idea of its being serious; there was perplexity and agitation every way" (p. 304). Fanny "very earnestly /is/ trying to understand what Mr. and Miss Crawford were at"; she feels that they are playing

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[4]Trilling, p. 93.

[5]"Night Words," Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 75.

a terrible game with her--and they are.

> There was every thing in the world against their being serious but his words and manner. Every thing natural, probable, reasonable was against it; all their habits and ways of thinking, and and all her own demerits.--How could she have excited serious attachment in a man, who had seen so many, and had been admired by so many, and flirted with so many, infinitely her superiors--who seemed so little open to serious impressions, even where pains had been taken to please him--who thought so slightly, so carelessly, so unfeelingly on all such points--who was everything to every body, and seemed to find no one essential to him? (p. 306)

Their words and manner are not "serious"; they are playful, insincere, and theatrical. There is nothing "natural, probable, or reasonable" in the Crawfords.

Henry asks for a reply to his sister's note, and Fanny is forced to answer its nonsense: "how to reply to any thing so imperfectly understood was most distressing. Quite unpracticed in such sort of note writing, had there been time for scruples and fears as to style, she would have felt them in abundance; but something must be instantly written, and with only one decided feeling, that of wishing not to appear to think anything really intended, she wrote thus, in great trembling both of spirits and hand" (p. 307). Fanny must act as nonsensically as the Crawfords have. She pretends in her note that Miss Crawford's congratulations were intended for William's promotion. Then at the end of her note, she tries to be serious, to drop her act: "The rest of your note I know means nothing, but I am so unequal to anything of the sort, that I hope you will excuse my begging you to take no

further notice" (p. 307). Like Catherine Morland, she "can not speak well enough to be unintelligible." At the end of this chapter, the conclusion of Volume II, Austen explains that Fanny "had no doubt that her note must appear excessively ill-written, that the language would disgrace a child, for her distress had allowed no arrangement; but at least it would assure them both of her being neither imposed on, nor gratified by Mr. Crawford's attentions" (p. 308). She trusts in the efficacy of her note; she assumes that Crawford will not renew his attentions when he hears of this note, and Volume III opens the next morning as Fanny remembers the "purport of her note." She is "sanguine as to its effect," and "satisfactorily settled /in/ the conviction her note would convey." But she is mistaken. "Astonished," she sees Mr. Crawford coming up to the house. Her note had conveyed "nonsense" to the Crawfords just as Mary's had to her. She is a prisoner of language, for no matter what she says or writes, the result is the same--the Crawfords consider her engaged to Henry. She cannot escape from this theatre of language.

Likewise, Sir Thomas, even though he has come to value her more since his return from Antigua, forces her into playing a part; when she refuses, he cannot understand her. She tries to tell him that she has refused Crawford and intends to do so again, but he replies, "I do not catch your meaning . . .. There is something in this which my comprehension does not reach" (p. 315). Later, he notes, "this is beyond

me. . .. This requires explanation" (p. 316). When she speaks "out of character," he literally cannot understand what she is saying.

The language spoken at Mansfield is the language of the theatre, and the effect of the "script" on Fanny is to make what she does not say truer than what she does say. For instance, when Sir Thomas, baffled by her refusal of Crawford, asks her if she has "any reason. . .to think ill of Mr. Crawford temper," she answers, "No, Sir." But the narrator tells us, "she longed to add, 'but of his principles I have', but her heart sunk under the apalling prospect of discussion, explanation and probably non-conviction" (p. 317). To Sir Thomas, Fanny is the ungrateful ward. He forces her into this role by his analysis of her, "Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had deceived his expectations; she had lost his good opinion. What was to become of her?" (p. 319). She cries bitterly, and Sir Thomas, convinced by his own interpretation of her behavior, begins to see her refusal as the result of maidenly reserve (p. 320). Like the Crawfords, his language has created its own reality, and it is a reality to which Fanny must re-act. As Donald Stone writes,

> language rather than reflecting reality, can create its own reality: what we see becomes defined for us by our manner of seeing, by the kind of language we draw upon to make our definitions. When our perception becomes enslaved to an unconsciously held mental jargon, we are the slaves of habits of mind. For the philosopher this is an obvious source of confusion; for the novelist, however, the

> realization of this fact can provide a source of literary material, comic or tragic or both.[6]

Fanny's crying ravages her face, and Sir Thomas, taken in by his own melodramatic "jargon," relents in his decision that she must go down to see Crawford. Since her "make-up" is ruined, she cannot make an impressive "entrance" as Sir Thomas' Cindrella to Crawford's prince. Sir Thomas is using the jargon of the righteous parent to the prodigal child who is accused of "throwing away" a fortune. He convinces himself of Fanny's "gross violation of duty and respect." His speech is staged and insincere when he says to Fanny, "Gladly would I have bestowed either of my own daughters on him" (p. 319). He is, of course, unaware that within a year his Maria will leave her husband for Crawford. Fanny can only answer his attack "inarticulately through her tears." The greatest danger to Fanny occurs when she begins to accept the role he has assigned to her; her own language at this point is uncharacteristically stagey. She is acting a part in the reality his language has created: "I must be a brute, indeed, if I can be really ungrateful! said she in soliloquy. Heaven defend me from being ungrateful" (italics added, pp. 322-23).

Even though Sir Thomas has ordered the stage to be torn down and the prompter's copies of Lover's Vows to be burned, Mansfield Park is still "theatrical." And the uncurtained theatre is far more dangerous than the one built by the carpenters a few months before. Fanny is intuitively aware of

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[6]Stone, p. 31.

the new danger. Her gentle conduct with Crawford after his proposal contradicts her adamant refusal. Her manner, "by speaking the disinterestedness and delicacy of her character . . .was of a sort to heighten all /his/ wishes, and confirm all his resolutions" (p. 326). He sees a cliche, a type, the pure innocent, instead of a person who is free and capable of deciding whether she wants to marry him. He thinks she is acting. And she realizes that his acting has become more subtle. "She might have disdained him in all the dignity of angry virtue, in the grounds of Sotherton, or the theatre at Mansfield Park" where he had been the "clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram" (p. 327-28). His new role as the reformed rake, the penitent, is frightening because everyone believes him, except Fanny who can see that he is still performing. She recognizes the change: "Here was a change," and it is a dangerous one because the theatrical context is not apparent. They are playing roles; the "truth; or at least the strength of her indifference" is hidden from Crawford by her "incurably gentle manner." "Her diffidence, gratitude, and softness, made every expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial; seem at least, to be giving nearly as much pain to herself as to him" (p. 327). Unintentionally, Fanny is acting; at least Crawford takes her denials as "an act."

Fanny's role as the sought-after Cinderella elevates her in her aunt's estimation by convincing her that "Fanny was very pretty, which she had been doubting about before, and

that she would be advantageously married, it made her feel a sort of credit in calling her neice" (p. 322). She offers Fanny the "only rule of conduct, the only advice" she ever has given her in eight and a half years: "it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this" (p. 333). As Trilling notes, the character of Lady Bertram "affirms, with all due irony, the bliss of being able to remain unconscious of the demands of personality (it is a bliss which is a kind of virtue, for one way of being solid, simple and sincere is to be a vegetable)."[7] She plays the great lady, unaware that her role has become her soul. She offers one of the pug's next litter to Fanny on the condition that she play her part and marry Mr. Crawford. This merging of role and soul is the danger Fanny is threatened with at Mansfield.

Even Edmund's treatment of Fanny emphasizes the theatrical quality of life at Mansfield. He joins with his father in promoting the match with Crawford. The scene the night of Edmund's return to Mansfield is drawn as a stage--set with actors, spectators, set speeches and screen-scenes. Crawford takes up the volume of Shakespeare that Fanny has been reading to her aunt. Significantly, he can read all the parts excellently: "The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell. . .whether it were dignity or pride, or tenderness or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty. It was truly dramatic--" (p. 337). Just

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[7]Trilling, p. 98.

as Fanny suspects, "he can act any thing." Edmund is spectator to this play enacted by his cousin and Crawford; he watches to see "how he sped with Fanny and what degree of immediate encouragement for him might be extracted from her manners" (p. 336). Crawford admits that he has not read Shakespeare since he was fifteen, but he reads so well that Lady Bertram supposes that he will "fit up a theatre" in his house in Norfolk. Despite the fact that he has just read so well that Fanny drops her needlework proving that he has just won over his sternest critic, Crawford hastens to say that no theatre will ever be built in his home. This claim, of course, is made for Fanny's benefit; Crawford clearly remembers who had objected to the presentation of Lover's Vows. Then the subject changes to sermons. Crawford sees them as performances, and Edmund for the most part agrees. Fanny sees that Crawford can change from "one set of words to another" (p. 343), just as he can court first Julia, then Maria, then herself, just as he can act either the King or the Queen. Finally, as in a screen-scene, Edmund hides behind his newspaper, an action which grieves Fanny when she sees his "arrangements," for they allow Crawford to carry on his "thorough attack."

Sir Thomas wants Henry Crawford "to be a model of constancy," and Edmund as his assistant wants Fanny to be the "perfect model of a woman" by accepting Crawford. Mary Crawford tells Fanny that Henry in London is "quite the hero of an old romance, and glories in his chains" (p. 360). Everyone is acting a part which the correspondence in the last volume of the novel will emphasize.

The letters Mary sends to Fanny before she leaves Mansfield for Portsmouth continue to play the exquisite and painful linguistic games at which she is so expert, and they force Fanny to act out a harrowing role of ministering to Mary and Edmund's love affair and to Henry's attachment to herself:

> in each letter there had been a few lines from /Crawford/, warm and determined like his speeches. It was a correspondence which Fanny found quite as unpleasant as she had feared. Miss Crawford's style of writing, lively and affectionate, was itself an evil, independent of what she was thus forced into reading from the brother's pen, for Edmund would never rest till she had read the chief of the letter to him, and then she had to listen to his admiration of her language, and the warmth of her attachments.--There had, in fact, been so much of Mansfield in every letter, that Fanny could not but suppose it meant for him to hear; and to find herself forced into a purpose of that kind, compelled into a correspondence which was bringing her the addresses of the man she did not love, and obliging her to administer to the adverse passion of the man she did, was cruelly mortifying. (pp. 375-76)

Her position is becoming desperate; she is pandering to the very person who stands to ruin her happiness. The letter-reading scene heightens the cruel theatrics of Fanny's existence at Mansfield and marks the nadir of her experience there, for at this point everything has degenerated into nonsense.

Sir Thomas, frustrated in his attempts to make Fanny play the role he has designated for her, conceives of a "medicinal project" (p. 368). He will send her to Portsmouth where "her Father's house would teach her the value of a good income." The "experiment he has devised" is another experiment in the-

atrics; he wants her to be "heartily sick of home before her visit ended: a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort," that is, Crawford's Norfolk home (p. 369). The visit to Portsmouth is a "project" intended to teach Fanny the wisdom of marrying Crawford. It will leave her in "a sober state"; she will miss the real luxuries of a monied estate. It is a scenario engineered to create "a little abstinence."

It is clear that at this point Sir Thomas does not consider Mansfield Park to be Fanny's home, and neither does she. To everyone and to Fanny especially, Portsmouth is still her home in spite of her having been at Mansfield for "eight or nine years," half of her life. Mansfield with "all its pains" is not a real home. Fanny is not comfortable there, forced as she is to play parts. She has never had a fire in her room; Edmund appropriated her gray mare for Mary Crawford to ride. As a child, "the grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease. . ." (p. 14). It is not a home; it is a theatre. Sir Thomas cannot see her except in the costume of the fortunate ward, rescued temporarily from Portsmouth by his beneficence and about to be permanently rescued from Portsmouth by her marriage to Crawford. Typically, Fanny's weapon against the theatrics imposed on her is silence: "never a greater talker, she was always more inclined to silence when feeling

most strongly. . .there were emotions of tenderness that could not be clothed in words" (p. 370). Thus, she cannot describe what it means to her to be going home, but she does imagine a true and loving home. She will find it however, "in almost every respect, the very reverse of what she could have wished" (p. 388). The noise and disorder and pain at Portsmouth have their counterparts at Mansfield in Tom's illness and Maria's adultery. What happens at Mansfield while Fanny is away is a signal that the theatrics have ended there; the pretences have been purged, and Mansfield stands in readiness for Fanny to return to it as a home and to Sir Thomas as "the daughter he had always wanted" (p. 472).

Portsmouth, no matter what Sir Thomas intends it to be, is not theatrical, though it is not what Fanny had hoped it would be, a loving refuge from the pains of Mansfield. There she will be free, but not in the way she has expected. Before she goes, she thinks of being

> in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before, to feel affection without fear or restraint, to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her, to be at peace from all mention of the Crawfords, safe from every look which could be fancied a reproach on their account!--This was a prospect to be dwelt on with a fondness that could be but half acknowledged. . .Edmund too--to be two months from <u>him</u>, (and perhaps, she might be allowed to make her absence three) must do her good. (p. 370)

Portsmouth is "the very reverse" of such a secure and loving circle. "It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety" (p. 388), but these are just the conditions Fanny needs as an

antidote to the theatrical ordering and proprieties at Mansfield. The indifference there provides a certain kind of freedom. She undertakes to teach her sister Susan the pleasure of reading, for "Susan had read nothing, and Fanny longed to give her a share in her own first pleasures, and inspire a taste for the biography and poetry which she delighted in herself" (p. 398). Therefore, she becomes a subscriber to a circulating library, "amazed at being any thing in propria persona, amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a chuser of books!" (p. 398)

At Portsmouth, in all the disorder and noise and indifference to her, Fanny becomes for the first time, fully herself. Dramatically, she rejects Portsmouth as the home she has cherished for all her years at Mansfield and turns to Mansfield as her true home. Mistakenly, she had hoped that Portsmouth would make her forget Mansfield: "On the contrary, she could think of nothing but Mansfield, its beloved inmates, its happy ways. Every thing where she was now was in full contrast to it. The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of every thing opposite to them here" (p. 391). Here is the great peripeteia of the novel, the reversal of the meaning of home. Fanny's "spirit of independence," which her Aunt Norris railed against, flourishes at Portsmouth and turns her back toward Mansfield. At the end of her three months stay in Portsmouth, "days of penence" for Fanny,

Cowper's lines continually run through her head, "With what intense desire she wants her home" (p. 431). And Mansfield will be purged of its theatrics in Fanny's absence. It will become a real home and the change there will be marked in a letter from Lady Bertram who begins to write "in the language of real feeling." Sending Fanny to Portsmouth allows Austen to separate her from a theatre-home, one filled with role-playing characters, clichés, and parent figures instead of real parents--the fact that her real parents are a slattern and a drunkard cannot enhance the status of Sir Thomas and his lady; they must become real from their suffering.

Exiled from Mansfield, her real home, Fanny must learn to "live on letters," even with all their insincerities and theatrics. She lives "in terror" of Edmund's letter which will bring, as he has promised, the news of his engagement to Mary Crawford. The letters keep alive her connection with Mansfield, and Fanny cherishes the thought of even this letter from Edmund. The letters coming to Fanny from Mansfield and from London emphasize the theatrics she has left behind; at Portsmouth, neglected as she is, she can achieve something she never had at Mansfield, rights <u>in propria persona.</u> She learns to reject the linguistic roles assigned to her by her correspondents. Having Fanny receive these letters, without for the most part answering them, is analagous to her silences when she is urged to "act" by Sir Thomas, Edmund, and Crawford. Like her silences, her absence from Mansfield is a moral position. Robert Liddell has pointed out that it is not neces-

sary for Fanny to leave Mansfield in order to receive letters, for the Crawfords and Edmund have already left for London when she goes to Portsmouth.[8] However, it is necessary to remove Fanny from Sir Thomas' house which is run like a theatre. The "noise and disorder" at Portsmouth are exaggerated conditions of freedom which Fanny needs to allow her not to act. Only there can she be herself.

In Chapter X of Volume III, Henry Crawford appears unexpectedly in Portsmouth. He walks with Fanny and Susan on the ramparts to watch the "sea now at high water, dancing in its glee. . .with so fine a sound" (p. 409). Considerate, gracious, and unappalled by Mr. Price's Saturday "condition," Crawford seems to Fanny to have undergone "wonderful improvement." Two days later, Fanny receives a letter from Mary which parodies a "mere letter of business, penned for the purpose of conveying necessary information, which could not be delayed without risk of evil" (p. 415). Mary, mockingly careful, "informs" Fanny of what she already knows: "that Henry has been to Portsmouth to see you; that he had a delightful walk with you. . .." She says she has "no news." Fanny has to make news out of the casual mention that Edmund has come to London, since she knows that he had meant to go there to propose to Mary. What the letter does not say is more important than what it actually does say. "The only certainty to be drawn from it was, that nothing decisive had yet taken place. Edmund had not yet spoken" (p. 417). "Endless con-

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[8]Liddell, pp. 64-65.

jecture" is the result of this self-consciously artificial letter, and it will be "thought on that day and many days to come without producing any conclusion" (p. 417). Fanny has the leisure, the freedom, to study the letter; it captures Mary Crawford's dangerous superficiality and her playfulness. Fanny seizes on Mary's praise of Edmund's "gentleman-like appearance," reading through the theatrics of the letter to its truth that Mary and Edmund, for all their attraction to each other, are ill-suited, but that they will marry. Though the letter, prima facie, tells her nothing, Fanny decides that Mary would accept Edmund. And painful as her interpretation of the letter is, she "was yet more impatient for another letter from town after receiving this, than she had been before" (p. 418).

Significantly, in the post-script to the letter, Mary says that Henry plans to go to a party on the 14th of March. There he will see Maria Bertram for the first time since her marriage to Mr. Rushworth. This is the most dramatic "news" in the letter, for at this meeting Maria's coolness piques Crawford's pride into resuming the power game he has played with her, a game that will lead to adultery and disgrace. It is this "noise and disorder" in the Mansfield family that provides the freedom from roles that they need in order to appreciate Fanny as a person in her own right. Fanny, thinking that Crawford has "improved," is sure that Henry will not stay for the party, but that he will do as he told her he would and go to Norfolk to check on the welfare of his tenants.

Fanny longs for and dreads the letter from Edmund because it will confirm what she has already inferred from Mary's letter. Ironically, it comes through the agency of Henry Crawford who promised to write Edmund's letters to Fanny: "if he is lazy or negligent, I will write his excuses my self" (p. 412). Since Henry "can act any thing," he could certainly write another man's letters. Fanny must accept this triangular route, though Edmund is her cousin and companion of her childhood and Crawford is the outsider. When Edmund's letter finally comes after seven weeks, it opens with the statement that "Crawford told me that you were wishing to hear from me" (p. 420). Austen has set up ironic patterns of correspondence among the Crawfords and the Mansfield cousins. Mary writes to Fanny as a screen for writing to Edmund whom she hopes to marry, and Henry prompts Edmund to write to Fanny whom he hopes to marry.

Edmund's letter shows how little he knows Mary. He does not know how much she wants to marry him. In her letter to Fanny, she had said that she "should not like to be tempted" to visit St. George's Chapel with Edmund, suggesting that she would marry him on the spot, in fact implying that a double wedding might not be a bad idea: the London brother and sister to the Mansfield cousins. But Edmund, taken in by her airiness, thinks that she has been "altered" by the worldly company of her London friends, Mrs. Fraser and Lady Stornaway. He tells Fanny in his letter that he thinks Mary has given him up. Tortured though he is, Edmund can write to Fanny that

"/Mary/ is the only woman in the world whom I could ever think of as a wife." The letter is to be, in his words, "a faithful picture of /his/ mind." But as it proceeds, the faithful picture blurs as he rapidly vacillates between writing a letter to Mary and going to her in person to explain his intention to follow his calling to the church. "I believe I shall write her. . .I think a letter will be decidedly the best method of explanation." A few lines later, he says, "A letter exposes to all the evil of consultation. . ." (p. 423). Here Edmund is writing "to the moment" in Richardsonian fashion: he is unsure of Mary, but events are not really "hidden in the womb of time" as they are for Richardson's correspondents because his waverings conflict with Fanny's convictions that Mary is "unworthy" of him, and the reader agrees with Fanny. Edmund is taken in by appearances; he tells Fanny that there is "not a shadow of wavering" in Crawford's attachment to her, and that his sister, now Mrs. Rushworth, had received Crawford with a "marked coolness." Two weeks after this show of "coolness," Crawford and Mrs. Rushworth will elope.

This confusing and contradictory letter is the one Fanny has waited for so long. Its function is to highlight the pretenses and role-playing at work at the point of the highest theatrics in the plot. Edmund is still infatuated with Mary even though he sees her in her London setting. She fears a trip to the chapel with him, though she seems breezy and acts as if her feelings for him have been "altered." Crawford has projected himself as the great landowner concerned about the

exploitation of his tenants. According to Edmund's letter, Henry appears to have caused no stir in Maria's heart when he meets her at her party. She is the grand, aloof hostess. Like Crawford, this cast can "act anything." The game of assumed identities is being played. Edmund's letter catches them in their last performance before the masks are torn off, and it shows that he can play the role of "the hero of old romance, singing in his chains" as well as Crawford ever has.

Fanny reads the extraordinary and theatrical letters from Mary and Edmund which come one after the other in chapters XII and XIII. They almost force her into acting the role of the willing and sympathetic confidante. Fortunately, she is removed from the stage of Mansfield and is freer to respond as a person. Edmund, unconscious of the pain he inflicts, selfishly writes that Mary and his "confidences in /her/ need not clash. . . .There is something soothing in the idea, that we have the same friend. . ." (p. 420). Fanny can see the elaborate contrivance that the letter epitomizes and declares, "I never will--no I certainly never will wish for a letter again. . . .What do they bring but disappointment and sorrow?" She sees from the vantage point of her Portsmouth exile that Edmund is blinded: "nothing will open his eyes, nothing can." She dismisses the letter as another example of "nonsense," saying, "Edmund, you do not know me." In her lowest moment, she cries, "Oh write, write. Finish it at once. Let there be an end of this suspense. Fix, commit, condemn yourself" (p. 424). Fanny's cry of despair defines the function of the

letter in eighteenth-century epistolary novels--they "fix and commit," sometimes condemning, sometimes vindicating the self. Her second reaction to the letter, however, suggests that this formal device has a new function--one that Austen would perfect in the revised ending of Persuasion--the letter as affective gesture. Fanny's second response is to value the letter in spite of its message. "It was a letter, in short, which she would not but have had for the world, and which could never be valued enough" (p. 425). She is able to ignore the evidential nature of the letter, to deny the information that it contains--that Edmund will marry Mary Crawford--in order to confer value on this most painful and theatrical missive. She values the letter as an artifact, as Edmund's gesture in her direction, but in order to do so, she must dismiss what it says.

Conferring value on this letter from Edmund recalls an earlier incident in the book when Fanny returns from a visit to Mary Crawford; she brings with her a necklace which is supposedly a gift from Mary but is really from Henry. Mary has to pretend that it is her necklace in order to make Fanny accept it. Edmund, by a coincidence which he lovingly dwells on, is in Fanny's room when she returns with his own gift for Fanny, a gold chain. He has begun a note to Fanny asking her to accept his gift. Fanny is caught in the dilemma of having already promised to wear Mary's necklace to the ball, while desperately wanting to wear Edmund's chain. She consults him about returning Mary's gift, a plan which he strongly forbids

on the usual grounds that Fanny is not grateful enough to her benefactors. Fanny can see that "he would marry Miss Crawford. . .. It was a stab, in spite of every long standing expectation" (p. 264). Resolving to "do her duty" and bury her love for Edmund, "she had all the heroism of principle." Lionel Trilling calls such heroism that dead concept that denies personality and quality of being.[9] But against her principles and duty and in a gesture toward freedom, "she impulsively seized the scrap of paper on which Edmund had begun writing to her, as a treasure beyond all her hopes, and reading with the tenderest emotion these words, 'My very dear Fanny, you must do me the favour to accept. . ..'" The narrator continues,

> It was the only thing approaching to a letter which she had received from him; she might never receive another; it was impossible that she should receive another so perfectly gratifying in the occasion and style. Two lines more prized had never fallen from the pen of the most distinguished author--. . .To her the handwriting itself, independent of anything it may convey, is a blessedness. Never were such characters cut by any other human being, as Edmund's commonest handwriting gave! This specimen, written in haste, as it was, had not a fault; and there was a felicity in the flow of the first four words, in the arrangement of "My very dear Fanny," which she could have looked at forever. (p. 265)

The handwriting itself, the arrangement, the characters are treasures; they are hieroglyphics, artifacts which must be seen in and for themselves alone, regardless of the meaning

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[9]Trilling, p. 98.

they represent. Fanny knows that Edmund would marry Miss Crawford, but she cherishes the fragment of the letter anyway. The letter, as this scene demonstrates so specifically, has lost its function as message, for Fanny's imagination creates a meaning independent of the evidence she also acknowledges. This unfinished letter, as interpreted by Fanny, becomes a powerful symbol of what will be demanded of a person if he would escape the theatre of language; silence, exile, and cunning, one is tempted to say, will be required. Later at Portsmouth, exiled and silent, Fanny receives the long expected letter from Edmund, and her reaction is similar to the one in her white attic at Mansfield. She treasures the letter in spite of its saying that Miss Crawford "is the only woman /he/ could ever marry."

A letter from Lady Bertram to Fanny functions to discriminate between the two languages in the novel--the language of the theatre and the more rarely spoken language of "real feeling."[10] We are told that Lady Bertram "rather shone in the epistolary line. . .and formed for herself a very creditable, common-place, amplifying style. . ." (p. 425). She needed "something to write about" no matter how trivial, Dr. Grant's gout or her morning callers. This time, though, there have been "rich amends" in subject matter. The letter's "amplified"

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[10]Kenneth Moler defines two languages in the novel also: the "two voices" of Fanny, the "bookish" and the "schoolgirlish." She grows out of these voices to be worthy of her true home, Mansfield ("The Two Voices of Fanny Price," Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays, pp. 172-179).

opening is quoted: "My dear Fanny, I take up my pen to communicate some very alarming intelligence, which I make no doubt will give you much concern." At this point the narrator impatiently takes over to insure the delivery of the "alarming intelligence" which is "no less than the dangerous illness of her eldest son." Then the letter is resumed. "This distressing intelligence, as you may suppose . . . has agitated us exceedingly." It seems that Edmund is to go to Newmarket to bring Tom to Mansfield. The narrator says, "Fanny's feelings on the occasion were indeed considerably more warm and genuine than her aunt's style of writing." Lady Bertram is writing in the theatrical language of Mansfield. She continues to write the news of Tom "in the same diffuse style, and the same medley of trusts, hopes and fears all following and producing each other at hap-hazard. It was a sort of playing at being frightened." It is not until Tom is brought to Mansfield, when his mother can see how wasted he is by the fever, that such "playing" ceases. Then she writes "in the language of real feeling and alarm" (p. 427). Edmund writes to Fanny during Tom's illness "a very few lines /to show/ the patient and the sick room in a juster and stronger light than all Lady Bertram's sheets of paper could do" (p. 429). Edmund's letter shows that he too is now speaking "a juster and stronger" language than he has used before. It is with these letters of "real feeling" that Fanny's transfer of feeling for home is made explicit: "When she had been coming to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been

fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her; and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. That was now home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home" (p. 431). When Lady Bertram wishes that Fanny were "at home," Mansfield is ready for Fanny's return because the language of the threatre has been purged. To Fanny, "nothing was more consolatory. . .than to find her aunt using the same language" (p. 431). Roles have been dropped; Mansfield is no longer a theatre; it is Fanny's home.

Tom's decline continues. Finally Fanny receives a letter from Mary Crawford in which she too for the first time speaks the "language of real feeling" (pp. 433-35). Mary wants Fanny to confirm the rumor that Tom may die. His death would make Edmund the heir to the great estate and clear away all the obstacles, namely money, to her marrying him. She can lightly wish for the death of Tom for then "there would be two poor young men less in the world." Mary's real feelings are exposed at last. Her wit cannot decorate or hide such brutal motives. Fanny writes back that Tom's health is as poor as rumor has it.

A week later another letter comes from Mary saying, "a most scandalous, ill-natured rumour" has reached her concerning her brother, but she tells Fanny not to pay any attention to it. Fanny is very apprehensive and does not understand the nonsense of the letter: "it was very strange!" (p. 438). A newspaper account clears up the confusion: "a matrimonial fracas in the family of Mr. Rushworth of Wimpole Street" is reported. Fanny sees that Mary's letter and the newspaper

are "in frightful conformity." "Miss Crawford's letter stampt it a fact." Though Mary's letter has been vague, it confirms the newspaper. Three days later a letter comes from Edmund, "a cordial" which summons Fanny to Mansfield. Even the news it brings of Julia's elopement with Mr. Yates "could affect her comparatively. . . little."

The letters written since Tom's illness have spoken the truth; Mary's last letter is "strange" and cryptic, but it is not insincere. These letters have not been set pieces for the theatre. Sir Thomas has learned of the dangerous "indiscretions" of Maria at Wimpole Street through the correspondence of his friend in London, Mr. Harding, though none of this correspondence is given directly. In London with his father on the rescue mission, Edmund hears Mary dismiss the disgrace as "folly." Edmund is stunned, and at last her "eyes are opened" when he hears her speak the language of London. He tells Fanny later that "the evil in /Mary/ lies yet deeper; in. . .the perversion of mind which made it natural to her to treat the subject as she did. She was speaking only, as she had been used to hear others speak, as she imagined every body else would speak" (p. 456). Edmund realizes also that she has been "the creature of /his/ own imagination" (p. 458). Her last words to him are theatrical: "She tried to speak carelessly but she was not so careless as she wished to appear." Fanny, at home in "the blessed place" purged of its theatricals, is "now at liberty to speak openly" (p. 459); she tells Edmund of Mary's vicious inquiries about Tom's health.

The letters in Volume III of Mansfield Park are of two kinds as the language of the novel has been: the language of the boards and the language of real feeling. The language of real feeling summons Fanny home in propria persona. Mansfield is now "thoroughly perfect in her eyes." Austen's concern with language and real feeling has been as deep as Wordsworth's when he defines the language of "the essential passions of the heart" in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Austen does not restrict the knowledge of this language, as the poet does, to "situations from common life"; Lady Bertram can, on dire occasion, speak it as well as Fanny Price, and both must speak this language of the heart in order to escape the theatrics that have threatened their home.

Chapter VI

Emma: The "Defamiliarizing" Letter

Only one letter is completely quoted in Emma: Frank Churchill writes to Mrs. Weston; she sends the letter to Emma who reads it and then gives it to Mr. Knightley to read. Significantly, this letter comes after almost all the tensions in the story have come to rest. Four chapters before we see the letter, we have learned that Jane and Frank have been engaged for a year. Emma and Knightley become engaged in the chapter before the one in which the letter appears, and Emma has already tried to settle the problem of Harriet's "love" for Mr. Knightley by planning to send her to London to visit the John Knightleys. For once, Emma's plans for other people succeed; in London, Harriet will be reunited with Robert, from whom Emma has alienated her. Then the "thick letter" comes from Randalls.

> She guessed what it must contain, and deprecated the necessity of reading it. She was now in perfect charity with Frank Churchill: she wanted no explanations, she wanted only to have her thoughts to herself--and as for understanding any thing he wrote, she was sure she was incapable of it. It must be waded through, however. (Vol. IV, p. 436)

Emma is still falling into her old selfish errors of wanting "her thoughts to herself." With everything settled, she needs "no explanations"; still, out of deference to her old friend Mrs. Weston, Frank's stepmother, she feels that the letter "must be waded through." Sheldon Sacks agrees with Emma: "the explanatory letter with Emma's and Knightley's comments

upon it might have been omitted."[1]

But this letter has a very important function; it reopens a story that seems to be finished to show us and even Knightley how "seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure" (p. 431). The earlier withholding of Frank and Jane's history has surely increased our sympathies for Emma's speculations, as Wayne Booth has pointed out.[2] Having seen things through Emma's eyes, we now are given another perspective in the letter; the letter is therefore a corrective to the narrator's assumption of a flawed character's point of view. The letter does not tell Mr. and Mrs. Weston, Emma or Knightley anything they did not already know, and certainly the reader knows about the engagement. Embedded at the end of the story, however, it functions to deepen our perception of the relationship between Jane and Frank, who without this letter would dwindle in our imagination to one of the tribe of happily-ever-afters; they would live at Enscombe on the Churchill fortune and be forgotten. It punctures such smug dismissals that neat resolutions of problems produce in readers and in characters like Emma and Knightley. It deepens for a final time Emma's sense of her own limitation. For in spite of the series of lessons she has painfully learned--from Mr. Elton's shocking proposal to her instead of Harriet as Emma had determined, from Harriet's attachment to Mr. Knightley

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[1]Fiction and the Shape of Belief (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1964), p. 17.

[2]The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 255.

instead of Emma's candidate, and from Miss Bates's wounded feelings at Box Hill--Emma and Knightley must be taught one last time that people are not so simple as we would have them be for our convenience. The secret engagement would have been, without the letter, just another "good one on Emma." Its position in the plot is most like that of Darcy's long letter to Elizabeth: it reviews the past, in the process opening Elizabeth's eyes to the truth about Wickham's character. However, that earlier letter functions to fix Darcy's character which from that time forward will change and grow into almost another Darcy. In Emma, the readers of the Churchill letter are not so intimately connected with the writer as Elizabeth is with Darcy. Neither one will cry out as she does when it is finished, "til this moment, I never knew myself." Mudrick makes another distinction: "all Elizabeth needs is to have the facts before her. . .. Yet Emma needs, not facts, but people to undeceive herself."[3]

Austen deepens our perception of the Churchill--Fairfax story by having it presented twice--once when Emma reads the letter and again in the following chapter when she rereads the letter over Knightley's shoulder. Knightley, who "had seen so much to blame in /Churchill's/ conduct," becomes during the reading of the letter more sympathetic to Frank and, in changing his mind, becomes something more than the dignified, always right Mr. Knightley. Booth says Knightley

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[3]Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 181-182.

"lapses from perfection when he tries to judge Frank Churchill . . . ."[4] In seeing further than he previously has, he becomes a more complex character, even more suited than before to marry Emma, the woman who has learned how blind she could be: "What blindness, what madness had led her on!" (p. 408).

Knightley begins his critique of the letter severely but gradually moves toward a better understanding: "Humph! a fine complimentary opening; but it is his way. . . . He trifles here. Very bad. . . .Playing a most dangerous game. His own mind full of intrigue, that he should suspect it in others. . . .A boyish scheme. . . .You did behave very shamefully. You never wrote a truer line." Emma tells him, "I wish you would read it with a kinder spirit towards him," and he does end on a kindlier note, "Well, there is feeling here. He does seem to have suffered in finding her ill. . . ." Although only one new fact emerges in the letter-reading--that Jane had engaged to go as governess to Mrs. Smallridge--it does not come from the letter proper but from Emma. Moreover, Knightley has learned a great deal from reading the letter: that Frank is more than "the trifling, silly fellow" he had thought him to be. The letter teaches Knightley, who has previously come the closest to the truth about Frank, a kinder and more complex truth. Earlier, he had thought that he knew him. "Mr. Knightley, who, for some reason best known to himself, had certainly taken an early dislike to Frank Churchill, was only growing to dislike him more. He began to suspect

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[4] p. 263.

him of some double dealing in his pursuit of Emma. That Emma was his object appeared indisputable. Every thing declared it. . . .But. . .Mr. Knightley began to suspect him of some inclination to trifle with Jane Fairfax" (p. 343). He catches Frank's slip about the Highbury gossip of the Perry's new carriage. The news must have come from the Bates's household where Jane is staying, for no one else knows it. Frank's lame excuse is that he dreamed it, but Knightley suspects a secret correspondence between Jane and him which had mentioned the community trivia (pp. 346-347).

And so, by being removed from the original fact it echoes, the letter gathers force, for the fact of the engagement has been told at least five times before the letter is presented; the engagement, (of course,) is a fact when the book opens though no one but the principals knows it. Frank confesses it in person to the Westons; Mrs. Weston tells Emma; Mr. Knightley hears of it in London from Mr. Weston; Frank writes to Mrs. Weston the "thick letter" of explanation; and she incloses it in a note to Emma. These repetitions give resonance to the simple fact of the engagement.

The narrator carefully prepares for the function of "the thick letter" to re-open the story. Knightley has come from London to comfort Emma, fearing that the news of Frank's engagement might crush her, but his fears are soon dismissed. "The delightful assurance of her total indifference towards Frank Churchill, of her having a heart completely disengaged from him, had given birth to the hope, that, in time, he might

gain her affection himself" (p. 432). "The work of a moment" accomplishes their engagement. "Within half an hour," everything is settled between them; they will marry. The familiar customs and habits of Hartfield life are stressed: "They sat down to tea--the same party round the same table--how often it had been collected! and how often had her eyes fallen on the same shrubs in the lawn, and observed the same beautiful effects of the western sun!" (p. 434). The repetition of "same"--"the same party," at the "same table" near the "same shrubs"--heightens the contrast between what used to be seen and what is now viewed under the aspect of their new happiness. Now the familiar is different because it is seen from a new perspective. The next morning Knightley arrives "to go over the same ground again. . .literally and figuratively. . .in order to reinstate her in a proper share of the happiness of the evening before" (pp. 435-436). The letter which they will read in this chapter "goes over the same ground"; it tells a familiar story, but with a difference. It will heighten the contrast between what we knew of the engaged couple and what we now feel for them. It will compel us, to paraphrase Shelley's definition of poetry, to feel for Frank and Jane that which we perceived and to imagine that which we already knew.

The letter, then, works to "defamiliarize" Emma and Knightley and the reader with what they are already familiar. According to Viktor Shklovsky, verbal art reorders the world we perceive, by complicating its own structure, by "defamiliar-

izing" what is familiar and what has been cast into perceptual stereotypes and clichés. It must "make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception."[5] In his discussion of the structuralist imagination, Robert Scholes points out the close parallels between it and the Romantic poets' theories of form.[6] He uses Shelley's definition of poetry in the Defense of Poetry to make the comparison, "/it/ purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity. . .it creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration." In Emma, the long letter from Frank Churchill destroys the "film of familiarity" by redirecting the attention of Emma and the reader toward Jane and Frank and forces a reconsideration of the whole story. It turns the story which is happily resolved when the letter is read (and reread) into "plot," as Boris Tomashevsky defines it: "Plot is distinct from story. Both include the same events, but in the plot the events are arranged. . . . In brief, the story is the action itself, the plot, how the reader learns of the action."[7] Although we know in one way that Jane and Frank are and have been engaged since the book began, we know it

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[5]"Art as Technique," Russian Formalist Criticism, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

[6]Structuralism in Literature (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 176.

[7]"Thematics," Russian Formalist Criticism, p. 67.

facilely; we do not know it in the way that Austen intends us to. She increases the length of our perception by means of this letter, making the known "unfamiliar." Wordsworth's demand on art in his Preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads is similar to Austen's: "ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect."[8] Certainly, the letter presents to our minds ordinary things in an unusual aspect.

Frank asks the readers of his letter to "See me, then, under these circumstances, arriving on my first visit to Randalls," and so it takes us back to give another perspective on the entire history of events. It makes "many things intelligible and excusable which /were/ not understood" (p. 398). The letter retells Frank's history in detail, beginning with the secret engagement he contracted with Jane at Weymouth. Then he writes of his delay in coming to Highbury to meet his father's new wife. "You will look back and see that I did not come till Miss F. was in Highbury." We look back to his January visit and see that Emma had been "pleased with his eagerness to arrive which had made him alter his plans, and travel earlier, later, and quicker that he might gain half a day." She had been impressed with his alacrity, at which Knightley rightly scoffs, and also with his gallantry. Before Frank arrives in Highbury, Knightley can sum him up as "well grown and good looking, with smooth plausible man-

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[8]Wordsworth: Selected Poetry, ed. Mark Van Doren, The Modern Library College Editions (New York: Randon House, 1950), p. 667.

ners"; and until he reads the long apology, he maintains this condescending attitude toward Churchill. The next point in the letter concerns Frank's behavior to Emma.

> In order to assist a concealment so essential to me, I was led on to make more than an allowable use of the sort of intimacy into which we were immediately thrown. --I cannot deny that Miss Woodhouse was my ostensible object--but I am sure you will believe the declaration, that had I not been convinced of her indifference, I would not have been induced by any selfish views to go on. Amiable and delightful as Miss Woodhouse is, she never gave me the idea of a young woman likely to be attached; and that she was perfectly free from any tendency to being attached to me, was as much my conviction as my wish. (p. 438)

When Emma had last seen Frank, after his two month absence from Highbury, "her own attachment had really subsided into a mere nothing; it was not worth thinking of; but if he, who had undoubtably been always. . .the most in love of the two, were to be returning with the same warmth of sentiment which he had taken away, it would be very distressing. If a separation of two months should not have cooled him, there were dangers and evils before her: caution for him and herself would be necessary" (p. 315). Emma's blind assumptions that he was "the most in love of the two," that "there were dangers and evils before her," are recalled and corrected by the letter. We learn from the letter that Frank flatteringly thought that Emma "must have penetrated a part" of his secret during his last visit, but when we return to that visit in Chapter I of Volume III, we see her rather more convinced of her power over him. When he had hurried away, "she had no

doubt as to his being less in love--but neither his agitated spirits, nor his hurrying away, seemed like a perfect cure; and she was rather inclined to think it implied a dread of her returning power, and a discreet resolution of not trusting himself with her long" (p. 316). From the letter, she realizes that he was rushing away to see Jane, not to escape the effects of her "returning power." The letter, writes Frank, gives everyone "a key" to his "strange" conduct, and it also provides a key to Emma's egotism.

Then he continues with the mysterious case of the pianoforte which had been delivered to Jane Fairfax. "Of the pianoforte so much talked of, I feel it only necessary to say, that its being ordered was absolutely unknown to Miss F. who never would have allowed me to send it, had any choice been given her" (p. 439). To Emma, the pianoforte had been the proof positive of Jane's "having seduced Mr. Dixon's affections from his wife, Jane's "very particular friend" (p. 168 and p. 202): she surmises, "if she continued to play whenever she was asked by Mr. Dixon, one may guess what one chuses" (p. 202). The purchase of the instrument was accomplished under the guise of "a sudden freak" which seized Frank to go to London to have his hair cut. The air of "foppery and nonsense" in such a whim disturbed Emma at the time, but she never suspected that Frank had given the piano to Jane as the gift from a lover. Her malicious inference from the appearance of the pianoforte is perhaps Emma's worst error.

Frank next comes to the parties at Donwell Abbey and Box Hill where his games and flirtations with Emma almost alienate him from Jane. The games are used to cover up the quarrel between the lovers. At the Donwell gathering, Frank arrives late and is "out of humour." He pretends that he is upset by the June heat, and Emma, glad that she has "done being in love with him," casually relinguishes him to Harriet whose "sweet easy temper will not mind it" (p. 364). Emma at this point is playing games too. As his letter makes clear, it was not the heat that had affected him; he had met Jane as she walked away from Donwell and the torments of Mrs. Elton's plans for her. They quarrel, we assume, over Frank's alliance with Emma against Jane at the last Highbury party; in the word game he had spelled out "Dixon" to the delight of Emma and the indignation of Jane, for he had surely told Jane of Emma's suspicions. Locked as they are in the game of concealment they are playing with Highbury, the quarrel is inevitable. Jane is hurt by his flirtations with Emma which he excuses as a cover for their engagement. Still protecting their secret, she refuses to let him walk her home from Donwell. His angry reaction is to doubt her affection and to behave more outrageously at Box Hill the next day.

Emma thinks that Frank is paying her "every distinguishing attention," when really, as the letter states, his conduct to Jane is "shameful" and "insolent." Frank speaks a double language at Box Hill; he entertains Emma and torments Jane when he comments on the ill luck of marriages like the Elton's

which have been made on short acquaintance and "rued" all the rest of a man's life (p. 372). He goes on with his game by asking, in front of Jane, if Emma will choose a wife for him--one with hazel eyes like Emma's own. In retrospect from a reading of the letter we can imagine Jane as she turns her gray eyes away. Emma thinks that Harriet will do for his wife, "hazel eyes excepted," for Emma is oblivious to what is really happening around her; the letter must recall it and illuminate the situation just as Mr. Knightley has to follow Emma to her carriage to reprove her for her meanness to Miss Bates. Until he points it out to her, we do not have the slightest indication that Emma is in any way aware of the blow she had given to Miss Bates's pride and self-esteem. Both Knightley's remonstrance and Frank's letter "defamiliarize" the day at Box Hill for Emma, for she had, until corrected, been contemptuously familiar with it.

Thus the letter tells us of Jane's anguish, hidden from us for so long, invisible behind her "reserve." It explains the motives behind Frank's games. More importantly, it "defamiliarizes" what has been admirably presented once--the correction of Emma, for Knightley has corrected only her most obvious cruelty, her ridicule of Miss Bates. Just because we have seen Emma's "anger, mortification and concern" after Knightley speaks to her, it does not follow that we, any more than Emma, are seeing all that we should. The letter deepens our perception of Emma's flaws, and we see from it her greater cruelty to Jane Fairfax. In a Wordsworthian way, we can re-

collect in an established tranquillity--all the major couples are now together--and literally review the experience of the story.

At the beginning of the novel, Frank's letters are covers and substitutes for his absence from Randalls where his new stepmother waits, but at the end, his long letter throws the light of retrospection and truthfulness over the story. He is first introduced to Highbury through his letters. "Now was the time for Mr. Frank Churchill to come among them; and the hope strengthened when it was understood that he had written to his new mother on the occasion" (p. 18). Mr. Weston tells Emma, "Frank comes tomorrow--I had a letter this morning --we see him tomorrow by dinner-time to a certainty" (p. 188). But we must wait for a third of the story to meet Frank, though his letters have kept his existence before us. "For a few days every morning visit in Highbury included some mention of the handsome letter Mrs. Weston had received. 'I suppose you have heard of the handsome letter Mr. Frank Churchill had written to Mrs. Weston? I understand it was a very handsome letter, indeed. Mr. Woodhouse told me of it. Mr. Woodhouse saw the letter, and he says he never saw such a handsome letter in his life'" (p. 18). Finally, Frank's letter promises him "tomorrow," but he comes the day the letter does, a day earlier than the letter said he would. The letter as a reliable conveyor is again invalidated as we have seen in the earlier novels. A new function for the letter will be articulated in Frank's last and only honest letter.

Until it suits him to come to Highbury, a "highly prized letter" to the Westons has to suffice for Frank's presence. What Mr. Woodhouse recalls of the letter is the extent of our acquaintance with the mysterious Frank until his final letter fleshes him out. It is very appropriate that from start to finish Frank Churchill, the deceiver, is best depicted in letters, for he does not change in the course of the novel, except to get richer at the death of Mrs. Churchill. Our perception of him changes. The letters suggest, as they did in Pride and Prejudice, the consistency of character even though we have not known what Frank Churchill was. All that Mr. Woodhouse can recall of one of Frank's early letters is that, "it was an exceeding good, pretty letter. . .I remember it was written from Weymouth, and dated Sept. 28th--and began "My dear Madame," but I forget how it went on; and it was signed "F. C. Weston Churchill." I remember that perfectly'" (p. 96). Mr. Woodhouse's lapse of memory of "how it went on" prefigures and describes what will be the quality of Frank's presence when he finally does come to Highbury--a flourish of address and signature, word games that conceal messages like the word that he spells our for Jane's eyes alone and that Knightley tries to make out before she sweeps it off the table. Mr. Weston says that "every letter has been full" of his wanting to come to Randalls, "but he can not command his own time." So the letters make it seem. Mr. Knightley is the only one who can read Frank's letters correctly. "He can sit down and write a fine flourishing letter, full of professions and false-

hoods, and persuade himself that he has hit upon the very best method in the world of preserving peace at home, and preventing his father's having any right to complain. His letters disgust me" (pp. 148-149). But while he can read correctly, he cannot read deeply. He is right only in a limited way; Frank's final letter will expand Knightley's perception of him.

After the terrible day at Box Hill, "a few lines" bring Frank "a tolerable account of Mrs. Churchill"; this is the only good account of her health in the book, and this is the one time that Frank could stay longer at Randalls without fear of her dying. Strangely enough to everyone but Jane Fairfax with whom he has quarrelled, he "resolved to go home directly." The next day "brought news from Richmond to throw every thing else into the background. An express arrived at Randalls to announce the death of Mrs. Churchill. Though her nephew had had no particular reason to hasten back on her account, she had not lived above six and thirty hours after his return" (p. 387). It seems that Frank's game with letters has caught up with him. They cover up the real condition of Mrs. Churchill's health, one day bringing good news, the next the news that she is dead. Frank, unlike the more naive Westons, does not abide by the commands carried in letters, for he is expert at manipulating them to his advantage. It is one of the smaller ironies of the novel that when his quarrel with Jane calls for a good excuse to go immediately to Richmond to attend the great lady on her sick bed, a letter

arrives announcing her recovery. The letter no longer has a function of documentation.

If Frank Churchill is seen through letters, Emma's need for development is presented with letters also. Robert Martin early in the book writes a letter of proposal to Harriet Smith, and she brings it to Emma. She grudgingly admits that it is a "good" letter, but then denies that it is a just reflection of Robert Martin of Abbey Mill Farm. She decides that this "very good letter" must have been written by Martin's sister. Her appreciation for the "vigorous and decided" letter is not strong enough to overcome her prejudice against the farmer who wrote it. Austen is mocking the representational, imitative function of the letter, for even when it does tell the truth, it is liable to the caprices of interpretation. Emma "throws improvement" into the reading of the letter just as she had done when she drew Harriet Smith as a taller woman than she is. The letter is not accepted as evidence by Emma:

> The style of the letter was much above her expectation. There were not merely no grammatical errors, but as a composition it would not have disgraced a gentleman; the language, though plain, was strong and unaffected, and the sentiments it conveyed very much to the credit of the writer. It was short, but expressed good sense, warm attachment, liberality, propriety, even delicacy of feelings. (p. 51)

Emma's powers of "improvement" are not permitted within the limits of representational functions; she cannot read Martin's letter without transforming it, nor can she draw Harriet as she is. These transforming powers are presented by Austen as energies outside the range of the representational and imitative function of forms.

At another point in the novel, Emma's immaturity is measured by her imaginative construction of a letter. At Box Hill, Frank Churchill and Emma carry on a flirtation as Jane and Knightley watch.

> To amuse her, and be agreeable in her eyes, seemed all that he cared for--and Emma, glad to be enlivened, not sorry to be flattered, was gay and easy too, and gave him all the friendly encouragement, the admission to be gallant, which she had ever given in the first and most animating period of their acquaintance. . .in the judgement of most people looking on it must have had such an appearance as no English word but flirtation could very well describe. "Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted excessively." They were laying themselves open to having it sent off in a letter to Maple Grove by one lady, to Ireland by another. (p. 386)

We know that this flattering scenario is enacted only in Emma's mind, for the narrator knows, as Emma does not, that Jane Fairfax would hardly write a letter to her friend in Ireland saying so easily and carelessly that "Mr. Frank Churchill . . .flirted excessively." It would have been too painful a thing to write flippantly even if it could appear in a gossipy letter about one's own fiancé. So Emma is seeing herself written about in a letter, in other words, represented as she intends that she should be seen. But we know from Frank's last letter how wrong she is. No letter giving such a witty summary of the party could be sent off to Ireland. Maybe Mrs. Elton would dash off a letter to Maple Grove, but her phrasing would be much more vicious than Emma can imagine. Sending such a description in a letter would capture only one dimension of what is really happening at Box Hill; none of

the "deeper games" could be described, none of the secrets told in such letters to Ireland and Maple Grove. The narrator's use of the letter metaphor to capture the way Emma sees herself emphasizes her blindness to the dynamics of her own personality and to the feelings of others. These postulated letters, even assuming that Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Elton would write such unlikely accounts, would represent what is essentially false, as Harriet's portrait and Emma's reading of Martin's letter do. Certainly no other "English word but flirtation" could serve to describe Mr. Churchill and Miss Woodhouse's actions, but there are dimensions behind English words, dimensions behind letters and portraits that must be confronted.

Austen dramatizes the limitation of the letter as well as other "outmoded" forms when they are intended to function representationally. However, the fact that a function is proved to be inadequate does not mean that the form is to be discarded; it means that the function needs to be redefined, and Austen does so in her treatment of Churchill's "thick letter." Its function is not to represent; it is to "defamiliarize" what has already been represented. It does "throw improvement" over the story by forcing its readers to review what has been told. It makes us appreciate the hidden substrata of a truth we had taken to have been previously represented to us in the telling of the story of the young woman who saw herself as "handsome, rich, and clever." Emma has grown in her understanding since her reading of Robert Martin's

letter. Although Frank's character does not change, our understanding of it does. And we are taught about our own perception what Emma is taught about hers--that it can be defamiliarized and therefore deepened.

Chapter VII

Persuasion: Austen's Return to the Letter

When Jane Austen rewrote the conclusion of Persuasion, she embedded a letter in it: Wentworth writes Anne a letter of proposal at the White Hart Inn as they sit in the same room within easy earshot of each other. In the original ending which survives as the only existing manuscript of Austen's major novels, Anne is forced by Admiral Croft's polite insistence to step into his parlour where she is surprised to find Wentworth. This contrived face-to-face meeting is not successful, for Anne must stifle her feelings as she has had to do throughout the novel. "Equally unexpected was the meeting on each side. There was nothing to be done, however, but to stifle feelings, and be quietly polite. . ." (Vol. V, p. 255). In this manuscript version, the meeting is presented as a trap; decorum, the duteous visit, exacts quiescent submission. It is too clearly a repetition of Anne's and Wentworth's history. In the revised meeting, however, they are allowed to find an expression for their feelings within the rules of decorum and visiting. Wentworth listens to Anne defend the fidelity of women as Anne has listened to his discussion of "firmness" with Louisa Musgrove. Wentworth and Anne reach one another within the conditions that have always prevailed for them--"the same circle" of demanding friends and relatives. There is no need to exaggerate their sense of being trapped or isolated as the original ending does. In the revision, they are allowed to find their way to each

other without obviating any social code. Southam is right to point out that the flaw in the original ending is "the discordant element of broad comedy,"[1] but he only mentions the letter of the final conclusion, relegating it to a parenthesis. Norman Page calls the letter "the most fervent declaration of love in the Austen canon,"[2] and Litz says the letter "emphasizes the difficulty of communication which has been the novel's major thems."[3] Mudrick singles out personal feeling as "the new element" in Persuasion.[4] I think that these judgments are relevant, but these critics neglect Austen's deliberate return to the convention of the letter and the significance of it as the vehicle of feeling.

The letter of proposal is Austen's skillful accommodation of a traditional form to the nineteenth-century view that truth must find a new private language in order to be protected. By inserting a love letter written in the untoward circumstances of the public inn, Austen invests an old convention with new meaning for she proves with the happy choice of the letter that conventions can be returned to, that a change in function can make the return very different from mere imitation of an old device. This letter does not function as evidence, as documents presented to the public; it is not "a return to a Richardsonian convention," as Norman Page calls it.[5] It func-

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[1]Southam, p. 93.

[2]The Language of Jane Austen, p. 53.

[3]Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development, p. 160.

[4]Irony as Defense and Discovery, p.

[5]p. 52.

tions as an "affective gesture."

Wentworth's letter bridges the distance, only a few feet, between Anne and himself. It shows by "such means as are within reach," pen and paper, that social forms--here the letter--need not crush the spirit, but can be put to new use in order to serve the human heart. A letter, a love letter at that, written in a cheerful and crowded public room, to a woman one hopes but is not sure returns that love, redefines the function of the letter of the eighteenth-century novel. There the letter had its origins in private closets and chambers, but was directed outward toward a public consciousness. Here the letter originates in a public situation --eavesdropping in a crowd--but is directed toward a private consciousness. The sending of the letter only "a few feet" emphasizes its new function, for it points out the psychological chasms that exist within the walls of a room, even though a family is gathered, and good friends are present. It also functions to re-evaluate the past, a past that cannot be recovered. Loss is the given of the novel--the loss of "bloom" and youth--but returns can be made if the loss is admitted and taken into account. The loss can be compensated for, and abundantly so, according to Wordsworth:

> That time is past
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, not mourn nor murmur; other gifts
> Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompense.

Throughout the novel social forms and imperatives are presented as forces antagonistic to personal feeling and as

absolutes which cannot be obviated. In Chapter VIII of the final Volume, Anne and Wentworth attend a concert. This scene dramatizes the difficulties of their relationship, the very ones which will be resolved by the letter in a similar setting in the revised ending. Anne, "in spite of all the various noises of the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through," learns that Wentworth's heart is "returning to her." His unfinished sentences, uttered in the midst of the noises of the crowd during the intermission, declare his love for her, but Anne wonders how she can respond to unspoken declarations. "How was the truth to reach him? How, in all the peculiar disadvantages of their respective situations, would he ever learn her real sentiments?" (p. 191). How can Wentworth return to Anne after so many years? How can the truth about their feelings reach each other in spite of the authority of the past? How can feeling survive or penetrate social forms? The great scene rewritten for the end of the novel uses the letter as the formal answer to these questions. The letter functions as a rendering of a return to traditional social forms, a return which reinterprets and re-evaluates traditional modes.

When Austen revised the ending, the penultimate chapter of the original draft became two chapters, and the final chapter was retained in the ending of the novel as we know it. The revision is significant; the letter replaces the surprised encounter at Admiral Croft's in the original. At the concert, although Anne and Wentworth understand each other's feelings,

they are cut off from each other by Anne's deference to a code of manners just as they had been separated eight years ago in 1806 by Lady Russell's persuasions. Anne turns away from Wentworth to translate an Italian song for her cousin. Her acquiescence to the request seems to Wentworth to be a recapitulation of the course of their love--interruption by deference to persuasive forms of politeness. No wonder Wentworth thinks, "there is nothing worth my staying for." History seems to be repeating itself; the past is asserting itself as a model for the present. The scene at the concert appears to be an re-enactment of what happened more than eight years ago. The letter in the revision breaks the cycle.

The structure of the novel depends on a change in Wentworth's sense of time. He asks Anne, "Was not the very sight of /Lady Russell/. . .the recollection of what had been, the knowledge of her influence, the indelible, immoveable impression of what persuasion had once done--was it not all against me?" (p. 244). Anne reproves him, "You should have distinguished. . .. You should not have suspected me now; the case so different, and my age so different." She, unlike Wentworth, is a character who can distinguish between the past and the present. He must move from seeing the past as a model, of fearing that history will repeat itself, to denying its tyranny. We are told that Anne "thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen" (p. 29). But Wentworth allows the past to overwhelm and bury the present. He confesses to Anne, "I could not derive benefit from the late knowledge I had acquired of your character;

I could not bring it into play; it was overwhelmed, buried, lost in those earlier feelings which I had been smarting under year after year. I could think of you only as one who had yielded, who had given me up, who had been influenced by any one rather than by me" (p. 245). Anne can look back at the persuasions that have delayed her marriage for nine years and find compensation for her loss.

> I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered by it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however, I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides. . . .But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. (p. 246)

Finally, in the revised ending of the novel, Wentworth does manage to rescue his "late knowledge" of Anne from being "overwhelmed, buried and lost" in the past. When he writes in his letter to her, "Tell me not that I am too late, that such feelings are gone forever," he has learned that the past is not the fixed and absolute model for the future. There is abundant recompense for their loss of early love: "they returned to the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps in their reunion, than when it had first been projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting" (pp. 240-41). The letter signals Wentworth's acknow-

ledgement of their loss and thus prepares him for the joy to come. "I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago" (p. 237).

Another instance of "returning" in the novel is the episode of Mrs. Smith, considered by some critics as extraneous to the story.[6] The renewal of Anne's relationship with the old school friend whom she meets in Bath--the "re-establishing and rekindling" of their friendship--prepares for the renewal of Anne and Wentworth's love. This return involves the device of the included letter also. Mrs. Smith has saved letters from William Elliot to her husband that confirm Anne's suspicions about Elliot and harden her against Lady Russell's latest persuasions to marry him. The letters reveal his "cold civility" and "hard-hearted indifference" to Mrs. Smith's plight after the death of her husband whom Elliot had "ruined." (p. 209). The letters complemented by Mrs. Smith's "oral testimony" reassure Anne that she was right to reject Lady Russell's most subtle and dangerous persuasion to repeat the past by becoming, as her mother had been, Lady Elliot of Kellynch. The visit to Mrs. Smith and the letters that "document" Elliot's character destroy the last vestige of the bewitching nostalgia. Her refusal to be persuaded again by Lady Russell as she had been eight years ago indicates that the past no longer represents authority to Anne, but the assertion of her will against the temptation to repeat the past has not been easy.

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[6]Wiesenfarth, The Errand of Form, p. 166.

> For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of "Lady Elliot" first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home forever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist. Lady Russell said not another word, willing to leave the matter to its own operation. . . .(p. 160)

> Anne could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry him, as made her shudder at the idea of the misery which must have followed. It was just possible that she might have been persuaded by Lady Russell! And under such a supposition, which would have been most miserable, when time had disclosed all, too late? (p. 211)

The visit to Mrs. Smith re-establishing their friendship provides an attack on a classical sense of time, one that accepts the authority of the past,[7] for it is her friend's "elasticity of mind," "the choicest gift of heaven," that so impresses Anne when she hears her painful history. "She had been very fond of her husband,--she had buried him. She had been used to affluence,--it was gone" (p. 154). Her "elasticity of mind" denies the power of the past to "overwhelm, bury, or lose" the present. She has achieved what Anne and especially Wentworth must attain in order to be reunited. When Wentworth writes his letter to Anne, he has relaxed his rigid acquiescence to the past, and his spontaneous letter contrasts in every way to the cold civilities of Elliot's. Wentworth's letter is an affective gesture to Anne who "prized

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[7]Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1957), p. 12.

the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped" (p. 161). His letter is hasty, warm and sincere; there is nothing documentary about it. Elliot's character, like Wickham's in Pride and Prejudice, has been unfolded in letters functioning as documents of evidence.

Wentworth's letter not only emblemizes the return to the relationship so long interrupted, it also emphasizes the given conditions the couple faces--isolation and publicity. Both Anne and Wentworth have been isolated and at the same time trapped by and in relationships, crowds, and conventions. They are prisoners in "social commonwealths." Their happiness depends on their being able to establish one of their own. Austen is careful to reconcile them in the setting of a crowded room, in a public place, in order to show how they have achieved a privacy within an acknowledged public world. The included letter, inherited from a "public" form, the epistolary novel, and changed in its function, reconciles the lovers.

Formidiable obstacles have prevented Anne and Wentworth from reaching each other. They are usually isolated but in the same room. After Wentworth's return to Somersetshire, after more than eight years absence, he and Anne are "repeatedly in the same circle" and often "once more in the same room." Both are afflicted with the contradictory anguish of

being lonely in claustrophobic rooms and gatherings. Anne plays country dances for hours, but "she knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself; but this was no new sensation. . .she had never. . .known the happiness of being listened to. In music she had always used to feel alone in the world" (p. 47). In her own family especially, she has no consequence. In Chapter I, she is introduced as "nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; she was only Anne." Similarly, Wentworth is the victim of the paradox of public indifference, for although he is much sought after as the eligible bachelor, his feelings are ignored. He is "alive, /but/ not at liberty." "He found that he was considered by his friend Harville as an engaged man. The Harvilles entertained not a doubt of a mutual attachment between him and Louisa; and though this to a degree was contradicted instantly, it yet made him feel that perhaps by her family, by everybody, by herself even, that same idea might be held, and that he was not free in honour, though if such were to be the conclusion, too free alas! in heart" (p. 260). This account of his dilemma is from the cancelled chapter; the italics suggest the strain of dramatizing the conflict between the public world and the private self. In the revised version, the letter relieves the strain put on the narrator; Wentworth can speak for himself after writing the letter in less melodramatic tones, but with more eloquence: "I was hers in honour if she wished it" (p. 242). Wentworth must learn what Anne already

knows: "She acknowledged it to be very fitting that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse" (p. 43). The letter written at the White Hart establishes its own discourse for Anne and Wentworth's "little social commonwealth"--the point toward which Austen wished to bring her story. The last sentence of the novel constructs just such a system of private worlds contained within the larger (and less important) public world. "She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance." As soon as they are alone after Anne reads the letter, they enter into their commonwealth: "And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, nor nursery-maids and children, they could indulge in those retrospections and acknowledgments, and especially in those explanations of what had directly preceded the present moment, which were so poignant and so ceaseless in interest" (p. 241).

In the revised ending, Austen sets out the problems of "social commonwealths" more clearly than in the cancelled conclusion. The hero and heroine are trapped and isolated within sight and earshot of each other. They find themselves again in a crowd--the Musgroves, the Crofts, and Captain Harville--and again cut off from each other. Wentworth is at "a distant table" with his back to Anne. They are both on the fringes

of other people's conversation. Anne has "to submit. . .to that inconvenient tone of voice which was perfectly audible while it pretended to be a whisper. Anne felt that she did not belong to the conversation, and yet. . .she could not avoid hearing many undesirable particulars" (p. 230). The trap they are in, the crowded room, is much more fully realized than it was in the original scene in Admiral Croft's parlour. At the White Hart, both Anne and Wentworth are "nothing beyond their own circles" until the letter establishes their own "discourse" and "commomwealth." Before the letter is written, they listen to the conversation of Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft about "long and uncertain engagements." At this point, "Captain Wentworth's pen ceased to move, his head was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look--one quick, conscious look at her." A few minutes later, Anne and Captain Harville begin their earnest discussion of who loves longer--men or women. Wentworth's pen falls down, and it is here, as we later realize, that he must have stopped his commissioned letter for Harville to begin his letter to Anne. The commissioned letter may be said to represent the old public function of the letter of epistolary fiction; the letter to Anne represents the new private discourse that is the language of little "commonwealths." Wentworth writes:

> I can listen no longer in silence.
> I must speak to you by such means
> as are within my reach. You pierce
> my soul. I am half agony, half hope.
> Tell me not that I am too late, that
> such precious feelings are gone for

> ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan.-- Have you not seen this? Can you fail to understand my wishes?--I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others.-- Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating in
>
> "F. W." (p. 237)

We can tell from the letter that it is written in response to what Wentworth hears Anne saying to Harville. When she says it is not in the nature of any woman to forget the man she truly loved, Wentworth writes his answer, "Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman." When she admits that men's feelings are the "strongest," Wentworth writes, "Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice indeed." The letter responds to a public voice, Anne's conversation with Harville, and in so doing, creates another dimension to what is happening publically in the crowded room. The letter is Wentworth's side of a dialogue, but he could not speak without violating the rules and conventions of decorum. He must speak silently--in the letter--and privately so as not to disturb

the social and public imperatives which have been imposed on him throughout the novel. Having read the letter, Anne, faced "with all the restraints of her situation" and with the "absolute necessity of seeming like herself," knows that the truth has at last been communicated.

In The Heart of the Midlothian, written two years after Persuasion, Scott like Austen recognizes the limitation of the letter's function as public record. Jeannie Deans refuses to write a letter to the Queen pleading the case of her sister.

> We must try all means. . .but writing wunna do it. A letter canna look and pray and beg and beseech, as the human voice can do to the human heart. A letter's like the music that the ladies have for their spinets--naething but black scores, compared to the same tune played or sung. It's word of mouth maun do it or naething.

Austen's embedded letter in the revised ending of Persuasion redefines the function of the letter of "black scores," of effective document. A letter like Wentworth's can "look and pray and beseech, as the human voice can do to the human heart."

The letter addressed to the "human heart" is different from one addressed to the public. It is a silent utterance, more powerful than speech, and Anne's most powerful response to it comes before she reads it: "The revolution which one instant had made in Anne, was almost beyond expression." The writing is "hardly legible." The fact that Wentworth has at last gestured toward Anne is more important than what he writes. Like the precious letter-fragment from Edmund to Fanny in Mansfield Park, this letter functions in a supra-

linguistic way, for here the public constrictions preclude any spoken and open declarations. Wentworth "can hardly write"; like Charles Bingley in Pride and Prejudice, he can only write a hasty and spontaneous letter full of dashes and blots. The warmth and intensity of the letter concealed in the public "arrangements" mark it as "gesture" not as "document." "While supposed to be writing only to Captain Benwick, he had been also addressing her!" Anne must read the letter secretly: "Mrs. Musgrove had little arrangements of her own at her own table; to their protection she must trust."

Private truths like Anne and Wentworth's must establish their own "social commonwealth," must find protection from the assaults of a public crowded room. The letter protects those truths--like Mrs. Musgrove's "little arrangements"--by encasing them in a redefined convention. The letter echoes in formal terms the theme of return in the novel. Anne's bloom returns at twenty-seven; Wentworth returns from the sea after eight years; Mrs. Smith, Anne's old school friend, returns to her; William Elliot appears again. Like the return to the device of the letter, each returning in the novel carefully discriminates between the past and the present. To return is not, after all, to repeat. To use a letter is not simply to return to a Richardsonian model and all its implications of public evidence.

Conclusion

In the last year of her life, Jane Austen began her seventh novel. In the fragment called Sanditon, the crisis in family order which had been central to her fiction worsens. Although in Persuasion the family estate has been abandoned for apartments in Bath, there is a semblance of transplanted family order--an order kept alive by Anne Elliot who believes she was right to have submitted to the wrong judgment of Lady Russell because she stood "in the place of a parent." There the letter functioning as a private affective gesture does no violence to the rules and conditions of society. But in Sanditon, private consciousness, the very heart of society, has shriveled into eccentricity which recognizes no corrective standards. Family and community have become real estate deals. The letter in this work functions as an affective gesture carried to the extremes of neurotic expression. Individuals are alienated from their family and exist in solipsitic confinement, and the privacy so sought after and richly cherished in Persuasion has become a prison of idiosyncracy. Language threatens to become an unintelligible personal idiom. The letter is used as a device to measure the dangers and absurdities of such extremes of privacy.

The family of the good parent is a lost pastoral ideal represented by the long-settled Heywoods of Willinden who are first seen in a field of sweet new-mown hay and who disappear after the first two chapters. Their daughter Charlotte, however, visits Sanditon and brings to it a standard of good

sense. Confronting the ruins of familial affection in the person of Lady Denham who brags of having honored the dying request of her husband to give his nephew his gold watch and of having invited her neice to take lodgings instead of staying with her in her empty mansion, Charlotte thinks, "I can see no Good in her. And she makes every body mean about her. This poor Sir Edward & his Sister. . .And I am Mean too, in giving her my attention, with the appearance of coinciding with her.--Thus it is, when Rich People are Sordid" (Vol. VI, p. 402).

The Parkers are everything the Heywoods are not: mobile, accident-prone, hypochondriac, enthusiastic. The Heywoods "never left home. . ./for/ the maintenance, Education & fitting out of 14 Children demanded a very quiet, settled, careful course of Life--& obliged them to be stationary and healthy" (pp. 373-74). They rescue the Parkers of Saniton whose carriage has overturned on the quixotic search for a surgeon for their town. It is ironically appropriate that a surgeon is never found for Sanditon where "self-doctoring" prevails and that the only cure in the story takes place at the Heywood home in Sussex; Mr. Parker's sprained ankle is treated there. But the Heywoods cannot cure the obsession with Sanditon.

> Sanditon was a Second Wife & 4 Children to him--hardly less Dear--& certainly more engrossing.--He could talk of it for ever.--It had indeed the highest claims; not only those of Birthplace, Property, and Home,--it was his Mine, his Lottery, his Speculation & his Hobby Horse; his Occupation his Hope & his Futurity. (p. 372)

His promotion of Sanditon as a seaside health resort has alienated him from his family. His obsession is typical of Sanditon's small population who speak a Babel of jargons ranging from that of hypochondria to real estate salesmanship to sentimental novels. These people cannot understand each other; what is worse, they cannot know themselves, speaking as they do the private jargons of their obsessions. Mr. Parker, for example, introduces himself to the Heywoods: "Mr. Parker's Character & History were soon unfolded. All that he understood of himself, he readily told, for he was very open hearted;--and where he might be himself in the dark, his conversation was still giving information to such of the Heywoods as could observe" (p. 371). Heywood keenness is needed to penetrate the darkness of the obsessed personality.

Sanditon has one long letter in it--a letter from Miss Diana Parker to her brother. This letter epitomizes the disease that has reached epidemic proportions in Sanditon: ignorance of the self beyond one's obsession as a promoter, invalid, seducer or "complete heroine"--roles played by Mr. Parker, Miss Parker, Sir Edward Denham and Clara Bereton. The letter also shows how absurd situations become when they proceed unchecked from the vacuum of a radical privacy, that is, from a role instead of a human being.

When Diana Parker appears in Sanditon, her letter has preceded her, complaining of a "Spasmodic Bile." It is so terrible that she could "hardly crawl from /her/ Bed to the Sofa." She writes that it is "quite an Impossibility" to

come to Sanditon where the sea air would "be the death" of her. She also writes that she has recruited "two large Families, one a rich West Indian from Surry, the other, a most respectable Girls Boarding School, or Academy, from Camberwell" (p. 387). She has sold Sanditon to the large families through contacts or, as she puts it so well, "wheel within Wheel." The "short chain" of people who knew other people stretches back through four friends of friends to strangers, Fanny Noyce, Miss Capper, a Mrs. Darling, to "Mrs. Griffiths herself." Later a letter from a Mrs. Charles Dupuis makes it clear to us, but not to Miss Diana Parker, that the two large families are actually one small group of four people. The myth of the two large families which has its source in this letter sets off a series of speculations: Lady Denham plans to sell Asses milk for the French boarding school; the "West Injins" will "raise the price of consumeable Articles, by such an extraordinary Demand for them & such a diffusion of Money" (p. 392). Miss Parker's frenzy is unchecked by the fact that there is only one Mrs. Griffith and only one family: "There must be two Families.--Impossible to be otherwise. 'Impossible' and 'Impossible' was repeated over and over again with great fervour" (p. 419). Just as she has given up "the medical tribe" forever because she wants to diagnose her own illnesses, so she rejects any intrusion of fact into her world which must remain absolutely private if it is to remain intact. The narrator clarifies what has happened so that "the rich Westindians and the young Ladies Seminary

could enter Sanditon in two Hack chaises."

> All that had the appearance of Incongruity in the reports of the two, might very fairly be placed to the account of the Vanity, the Ignorance, or the blunders of the many engaged in the cause by the vigilance and caution of Miss Diana P.-- Her intimate friends must be officious like herself, and the subject had supplied Letters and Extracts and Messages enough to make everything appear what it was not. (p. 420)

Miss Diana Parker's letter emblemizes a privacy that can "make everything appear what it was not." It is an affective gesture carried to the extremity of being a nervous tic; its language is an automatic expression of obsession.

The story breaks off in Chapter 12. Charlotte and Mrs. Parker are walking to Lady Denham's when Charlotte looks through the mist and the "clusters of fine Elms" and sees "something White & Womanish." Stepping closer, she sees that it is indeed Clara Bereton and Sir Edward Denham "sitting so near each other. . . /and/ so closely engaged in gentle conversation." It is clear to her that "Privacy was certainly their object" (p. 426). This is a different kind of privacy from that of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth; this one is a conspiracy against society. It is economically motivated, for both Clara and Sir Edward are dependent on the niggardly Lady Denham who intends that Sir Edward will marry an heiress. But their deception runs deeper; they are not establishing a "little social commonwealth" of their own as Anne and Wentworth do. Earlier the narrator has summarized their relationship making it clear that there is no feeling between this

"Lovelace" and his "complete heroine": "Sir Edw:'s great object in life was to be seductive. . . .it was Clara alone on whom he had serious designs. . . .Clara saw through him, & had not the least intention of being seduced--but she bore with him patiently enough to confirm the sort of attachment which her personal Charms had raised" (p. 405). They must be deceiving each other, pretending to each other to be "Secret Lovers" having a "stolen Interview," when Charlotte sees them. As the letter from Diana Parker makes "every thing appear what it was not" and is a comic rendering of privacy, so this scene hidden in the mist from Charlotte Heywood presents in more serious terms the dangers of privacy.

In Sanditon, we see the degeneration of the family and community into private cells of obsessions. Here again, Jane Austen uses the included letter as a function of the retreat from social cohesiveness and public meaning. In the course of her career, she changed the functions of the letter from the traditional one of public document expressing a community ethic to innovative functions expressing family and social disintegration. She abandoned the letter-structure with its implications of order and trust in public authority for a narrative strategy that allowed her to explore a community whose order had been shaken. The included letters in the novels function to show the loss of community, the decadence of the family, the shift from a Lockean to a Kantian world view, and the assertion of private value against public authority. Using the letter as a device to discriminate between

static and developing characters, between Italian and English Gothics, and between theatrical and real language, Austen demonstrates the variety of functions for letters embedded in narratives. From Love and Freindship where the letters document public standards to Persuasion where the letter becomes an affective gesture, we can see the redefinition of an important literary device. Because of her skill in exploring the potentiality of the included letter, later novelists were made aware of the relationship between epistolarity and narrative. Thackeray, Emily Bronte, Hardy, Conrad, and especially E. M. Forster use included letters in important narrative jointures. Jane Austen's handling of the letter, of lifting it out of a traditional context to express new complexities, needs to be added to the sum of her recognized achievements.

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