JANE AUSTEN: THE NOVELIST AS AN IRONIST

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JANE AUSTEN

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Contents

PREFACE

The novels of Jane Austen have been approached by the critics down the ages from various viewpoints. Some critics have examined Austen's works in terms of social context and social vision, their religious dimension etc. Another group of critics have analysed her novels in relation to the question of women's education and province of womanhood while others have evaluated them from the perspective of politics and French Revolution. There are still some aspects in her novels which, I think, have not received their due critical attention. It is now being increasingly felt that Austen is an ironist in a more subtle way than earlier perceived and her novels offer a fascinating subject of study in this direction. Although it is not altogether an unexplored subject, I feel there is still some scope to show how exactly the device of irony becomes an instrument and driving force at Austen's hands in order to drive the basic themes of her novels. Hence the main thrust of the dissertation is to project Jane Austen as essentially an ironist to trace in whatever detail possible the uses of irony of different shades and meanings in her novels.

In writing this dissertation I am greatly indebted to the works of all my illustrious predecessors in the field whose names have been duly mentioned in the footnotes. I am grateful also to many others whom I have failed to include in the list. A select bibliography has also been appended to the work.

Above all, I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of respect and gratitude to my teacher, Dr. Suhas Kumar Roy Moulick, Professor, Department of English, University of North Bengal, but for whose guidance and inspiration this humble work of mine could never have been completed. I am also indebted to Dr. Parbati Charan Chakroborty, Professor of English, University of Burdwan, for offering me many helpful suggestions in preparing this thesis, and aslo for helping me in choosing its title.

My thanks and gratitude are also due to my father-in-law Sri Debendra Chandra Choudhury M.A.B. Ed, Senior Ex-Teacher of English, Alipurduar Higher Secondary School, Alipurduar for the keen interest he has taken and the inspiration and active co-operation he has extended to me in my research.

I would also like to thank the personnel of North Bengal University Central Library and the National Library, Kolkata for the excellent co-operation I received from them at all stages of my work. My thanks are also due to my family, especially to my wife, Debjani, who suffered a great deal to keep me going, and to my son, Kaustav, who patiently waited for me to finish the work. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge my obligation to my colleagues and well wishers at Raiganj for their constant co-operation and encouragement.

All references to Jane Austen's novels are from *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* of Rupa Classics published by Rupa & Company, New Delhi, 2000. The work has been done in strict adherence to the guidelines prescribed in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Joseph Gibaldi, Fifth edition (First East-West Press Edition 2000), Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.

Pradip Kumar Roychowdhury

INTRODUCTION

One can not but marvel at the high excellence Austen had reached in her use of irony both in quick repartees and surprising turns of situations. Irony is Jane Austen's forte, and much of her humour emanates from her use of irony. An important objective of the work is to trace Austen's departure from traditional approaches to the novel. With no exhibitionist critical apparatus, such as Fielding's theory of the comic epic, no pretentiously announced moral purpose such as Richardson kept repeating, Jane Austen is primarily known for her method of portrayal which is based upon acute observation and a quiet but incisive irony.

The novels of Jane Austen have received attention from a wide range of reviewers and critics. In fact, there are quite a number of relevant books and we can only mention a few. Most of these works introduce the readers to the varieties of opinion among professional critics. For example, one may refer to *'Jane Austen and the French Revolution'* by Warren Roberts (London, Macmillan, 1979), and *'Jane Austen in a Social Context'* by Dravid Monaghon (London, Macmillan, 1981) that consider Austen in historical and social perspectives

respectively. Then there are titles dealing with Jane Austen and the Woman Question, e.g. *'Jane Austen and the Question of Women's Educaion'*, by Barbara Horwitz (New Yok, Lang, 1991). However, there hardly exists any full-length work on Jane Austen as an Ironist. Relevantly, Mr. Peter Conrad in his 'Introduction' to *Pride and Prudice* (Everyman's Library, 1991) and Nicholas Marsh in his book *How to begin Studing English Liteature* (Macmillan, 1995) have made some references to the element of irony in Austen's novels. In this connection we may refer to two other titles containing chapters or essays on Austen's art which may bring an illuminating angle to bear upon her writing : first, *An Understanding of Jane Austen's Novels: Character, Value & Ironic Perspective,* by John Odmark (Oxford : Black Well, 1981), and secondly, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity,* by Roger Gard (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992).

There is no denying the fact that irony constitutes one of the major charms of Austen's novels. In other words, it is the very soul of her novels. Hence the chief objective of the work is to show how the ironic vision of the author has got its exposition through the weaving of the ideal and reality.

It will be quite pertinent here to discuss the five lettered small word 'irony'. It baffles us like anything eluding our attempts to comprehend its essence with the help of our known parameters. Notwithstanding the great difficulties one would come across in understanding the real significance of irony, the chief aim here would be to make an analysis of the modus operandi of irony in Austen's novels. Here the introductory chapter aims at presenting a general survey of irony – its growth, development and the characteristic features of its different types. In the succeeding chapters an attempt has made to trace Austen's characteristic use of irony with reference to each of her six novels. As for example, in *Northanger Abbey*, the first written of all her published novels, which presents the unpretentious story of a rather ordinary girl, the irony is sometimes a little crude in comparison with what Jane Austen showed she could do in later novels, but it is always carefully poised and well-directed. The tone is not mock-heroic or burlesque; a note of affectionate understanding runs together with the irony.

To one who has first become acquainted with Austen's maturer novels, *Sense and Sensibility* is lacking in subtlety and quiet irony. Here the ironical situations are rather restricted in its object. The

characterization is limited to the needs of the plot and of the ironic intentions, and the plot itself is rather awkwardly contrived. While a kind of unsentimental realism informs the presentation of Marianne. In presenting her Austen rather appears to be an affectionately ironic observer of the relations between society and individual personality. The adolescent energy and earnestness of *Sense and Sensibility* give place to a flow of detached ironic humour, not a new medium for Austen, but hitherto handled bluntly and somewhat unskilfully.

Jane Austen characteristically finds ways of subordinating her part as narrator; irony is not merely an attitude, it is a method of presentation, organization, analysis and judgment. Her skill in irony is at its greatest in *Pride and Prejudice* and also in *Emma*, where she can be serious without even being solemn. The irony and a good deal of the comedy of the first part of *Pride and Prejudice* come from the difference between what Mr. Darcy means and what Elizabeth thinks he means, between what Elizabeth's replies intend and how they appear to Darcy. The misunderstanding is all Elizabeth's doing, though the speeches of both are most skilfully ambiguous. Dramatic irony of this kind abounds in the novel. There is always a sharp contrast between knowledge and truth, between what the characters

understand and what the reader understands, between intention or expectation and fulfilment.

Austen's mastery of the art of ironic exposure is equally evident in *Emma*. Here there is irony in the dialogue, irony in the situation and a deliberate conscious irony in the technique of characterization. The three major narrative movements in the novel are built on irony. Of the highest importance is, however, the verbal irony, with which the novel seems to be permeated.

One of the major objectives of this approach is to trace how Jane Austen has projected her comic vision through the ironic treatment of situations, episodes and characters. Significantly, Austen's ironic world-view is an important contribution to the English novel. The irony of *Sense and Sensibility* is that the claims of sense and sensibility are irreconcilable. It is equally interesting to examine how far Austen's sense of the ironic is aroused by her reaction against the absurdities of the sentimental and Gothic novels she encountered. Her dissection of snobbery, bourgeois morality and hypocrisy in an understated manner may be viewed in terms of a relief from the excesses of many of her contemporaries.

We take our next example from *Mansfield Park* in which the irony provokes the readers to think about the different implications and attitudes they find. Thus the concluding sentence of *Mansfield Park* provokes thoughts and questions : Has Fanny forgotten all her sufferings at Mansfield Park? Does Fanny now believe the male and oppressive authority of Sir Thomas to be perfect? Has Fanny become short-sighted and narrow minded as she has now the man she always wanted? The simple irony of Fanny's uncritical attitude in this concluding sentence of *Mansfield Park* has given rise to far-reaching questions. These questions invariably touch on the themes of the novel and on the philosophy of the author.

The ironical implication is also significant in *Persuasion* in which Jane Austen allows many of her characters to be seen through Anne's eyes, but she is not content to do this consistently and adds her own coldly ironic gaze at frequent intervals. There is a colder irony in *Persuasion* than in any other of Jane Austen's novels. Sir Walter Elliot is very different from the well-meaning if pompously unimaginative Sir Thomas Bertram who is summed up in the opening of the novel, *Mansfield Park*. In the same way, one finds, *Persuasion* opens with a character-sketch of Sir Walter Elliot which is obviously ironical and

thus a source of much humour and amusement. He is described as having a great respect for himself because he combines the blessings of handsome looks with the blessing of a baronetcy.

Hence, Jane Austen has projected her comic vision through the ironic treatment of situations, episodes and characters. Significantly, Austen's ironic world-view is an important contribution to the English novel.

VARIED FACETS OF IRONY

Irony is a figure of speech in which what is actually said is the opposite of what is intended. It is an old literary device, achieved by the use of hyperboles, litotes, sarcasm, satire and understatements. In literature, irony is a technique that indicates a discrepancy or contrast between what is said and what is meant. Cicero defined irony as 'the saying one thing meaning another'[1]. According to Hoakon Chevalier, 'the basic feature of every irony is a contrast between a reality and an appearance'. In other words irony is a contradiction or incongruity between expectation and reality. This disparity may be manifested in a variety of ways. A discrepancy may exist between what someone says and what he or she actually means, between what someone expects to happen and what really does happen, or between what appears to be true and what actually is true. Furthermore, the term *irony* may be applied to events, situations, and even structural elements of a work, not just to statements.

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1. Cicero, De Orators, *2nd Volume* (Trans. E.W. Sutton), London: Heinemann, 1942.

Irony comes from the Greek *eiron*, which itself derives from *eironeia*, meaning "dissembling". In Greek drama, the *eiron* was a character who, although weaker than his opponent, the braggart *alazon*, nevertheless defeated him by misrepresenting himself in some way. The *eiron* often acted foolish or stupid *alazon*. Meiosis, or understatement, was perhaps the *eiron's* most potent – and to the audience, humorous – weapon.To this day, irony often depends on understatement, which requires the audience to recognize that the author, speaker, or character has purposely described something in a way that minimizes its evident significance.

Irony has been called the subtlest comic form. Although understatement may give rise to raised eyebrows or even out right laughter, irony that evokes these reactions is more likely to be achieved through the use of hyperbole, or overstatement, which involves deliberate exaggeration. Irony should not be confused with either sarcasm or satire; although both sarcasm and satire frequently employ irony, the terms are all distinguishable. Sarcasm, which often involves an exaggerated form of irony, is at once more obvious, blunt and nastier; a sarcastic remark is typically directed at a specific person, with the intent to wound and to ridicule. Irony is often directed toward

a situation rather than toward a specific person; even when directed toward a person, irony generally lacks a hurtful aim. Furthermore, whereas sarcasm typically operates by heaping crude – and unfelt – praise on the individual, irony often employs blame. Irony must also be distinguished from Satire, which ridicules human weaknesses in order to spur reform. The satirist derides humanity primarily in an effort to better it. Satire may involve irony, but irony typically lacks satire's ameliorative intent.

So far as modern discourses on irony are concerned, it may be classified into three broad categories: verbal irony, situational irony and structural irony. Verbal irony, also called rhetorical irony, is the most common kind of irony. It is saying one thing but meaning the opposite. In it one meaning is stated but a different, usually an antithetical meaning is intended. It was defined, in other words, as 'saying the contrary of what one means', as 'praising in order to blame and blaming in order to praise'. Verbal irony is nothing but a statement in which the implied meaning is in sharp contrast to the meaning apparently expressed. In an understatement what the speaker means to state is mild, but what he means is intense. In an overstatement the opposite is true. Often a statement becomes ironic due to the

demand of the context. Again, irony may proceed from an explicit or implicit contradiction. It will be quite pertinent to refer to the following lines after sir Plume, urged by the ladies, has stammered out his incoherent request for the return of the stolen lock of hair, the Baron answers him:

"It grieves me much", (replied the Peer again),

who speaks so well should ever speak in vain."[2]

Here we have a straight forward instance of an ironic reversal of the surface statement and there are patent clues in the foregoing circumstances that the Peer is not in the least aggrieved and that poor Sir Plume has not spoken at all well. In Jane Austen's novels verbal irony is the effect of the ironic implication of her narrative. The very opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* offers a beautiful instance of verbal irony:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."[3]

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2. Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock;* Canto IV; ed. B.V. Sundaram. Macmillan India Ltd. Lines: 131-32. 1980.
3. *Pride and Projudice*; Ch-1; P-231.

The meaning intended in this sentence and gradually revealed by the action is just the reverse of the surface meaning; partial implication of the irony here is that a single woman is in want of a rich husband.

Situational irony, also called irony of situation, derives primarily from events or situations themselves, as opposed to statements made by any individual, whether or not that individual understands the situation as ironic. It typically involves a discrepancy between expectation and reality. Literary examples of situational irony include O. Henry's *"The Gift of the Magi"* and the mythic story of King Midas. In *"The Gift of the Magi,"* both husband and wife give up their most prized possession. The woman sells her beautiful long hair to buy a platinum fob chain for the man's watch; the man sells his watch to buy the woman tortoise shell combs to hold up her hair. In the story of King Midas, Bacchus grants the King's wish that everything he touch be turned to gold; much to his chagrin, the king finds that this power does anything but enhance his true wealth when he hugs his beloved daughter, thereby turning her to gold as well.

Three types of irony – dramatic irony, tragic irony and Socratic irony – can be classified as situational irony. The term 'dramatic irony' may be used to refer to a situation in which the character's own words come back to haunt him or her. However, it usually involves a discrepancy between a character's perception and what the reader or audience knows to be true. The reader or audience possesses some material information that the character lacks, and it is the character's imperfect information that motivates or explains his or her discordant response. Dramatic irony occurs in a wide variety of works, ranging from the comic to the tragic. Tragic irony is a type of dramatic irony marked by a sense of foreboding. As with all dramatic irony, tragic irony involves imperfect information, but the consequences of this ignorance are catastrophic, leading to the character's tragic downfall. The reader or audience experiences a sense of foreboding while anticipating this downfall. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (430 B.C.), for instance, Oedipus, the King of Thebes, vows to find the murderer of the prior King, only to find out something the audience knew all along: that Oedipus himself is the guilty party.

Incidentally, the plots of Sophocles' plays illustrate the irony implicit in human situation, in which man acts contrary to his

intention, or attains result that is the opposite of what he expected to attain. The catastrophe is due less to the protagonist's character than to circumstances contrived by the gods. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus insists more than once that no part of his tragedy was of his own choice. Shakespeare, on the other hand, allows his characters independence of thought and movement, but at every step they find that their hopes were lies and their knowledge was ignorance. In *King Lear* not only Lear and Gloucester but also other characters discover that they stumbled when they saw. Othello's tragedy may be described as a journey from ignorance about himself, his wife and Iago to complete knowledge which not only brings about his ruin but also gives him illumination. Irony does not spare even the devilish Iago, who in spite of his precautions is betrayed by the unexpected loyalty of his foolish wife. The most pervasively ironical play, is, of course *Macbeth* in which every act is followed by a consequence that is the opposite of what was intended or expected.

Sophoclean irony is deeper than the common view of it that *"what a character says has one meaning for himself and another, more sinister meaning, for those who know the plot."* [4]

4. C.M. Bowra: *Sophoclean Tragedy*

Bradley in his lecture on *Macbeth* confines himself to this verbal aspect of the Sophoclean irony when he concentrates on the utterances of the characters which acquire a sinister meaning not intended by them. Such, for instance, is Duncan's comment on the treachery of Cawdor:

> *"There's no art / to find the mind's construction in the face..."*[5]

Which is interrupted by the entrance of the traitor Macbeth, the Thane of Cawdor, who is received with effusive gratitude. The porter imagines himself to be the keeper of the hell-gate little suspecting how apt this description of himself is! Duncan and Banquo praise the present situation of Macbeth's Castle which is to turn shortly into a slaughter house. In a sense, the abundance of Sophoclean irony in the plot of the play and the predominance of the mysterious forces which seemed to influence human actions bring the play very near to the classical tragedy. *Macbeth*, more than any other tragedy of Shakespeare, shows how man is led on to his doom by some unseen power, we may call it 'Destiny' if we like, and whatever

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5. *Macbeth*, Act - I; Sc. IV; Lines: 12-15

happens in the play is contrary to the intention of the protagonist who himself is the worst victim of irony of fate.

There is also an instance of dramatic irony in Homer when the Suitors in *Odyssey* express their confidence that Odysseus will never return though he has already returned and is there in the hall disguised as a beggar. We find an excellent example of dramatic irony in the dialogue of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, when Iphigenia thinks she has been brought to Aulis to be married to Achilles. Her father Agamemnon can not disclose to her that it is at his command that she has been brought there to be sacrificed. Thus, in dramatic irony we find a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or the readers share with the author the knowledge of a character that often remains in the dark. The character expects the opposite of what is going to happen, or makes an observation, but not at all in the way that he means it. The classical Greek tragedians made frequent use of this device. Sophocles's *Oedipus* is a very complex instance of tragic irony. Dramatic irony appears more efficacious when not only the audience or reader, but also someone in the play or narrative is aware of the victim's ignorance, as in the dialogue of Agamemnon and Iphigenia as mentioned above. The efficacy of dramatic irony is greatly

heightened when the victim's words, unknown to him, are appropriate to the real situation about which he is in the dark. An excellent instance is, without doubt, Oedipus's curse upon himself:

"And it is my solemn prayer
that the unknown murderer,
and his accomplices.
If such there be, may wear the
brand of shame.
For their shameful act, unfriended,
to their life's end".[6]

There may be dramatic irony in comedy also. We come across an example in Act II, Sc. V of *Twelfth Night* where Malvolio struts and preens in anticipation of a good fortune, which the audience or reader knows, is based on a fake letter. The dramatic irony is heightened by the fact that Malvolio does not know the presence of the hidden hoaxers who gleefully comment on his ludicrously complacent speech and actions.

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6. Sophocles: *The Theban Plays*, Penguin Books Ltd.(1947); P-32; Translated By E.F. Watling.

Socratic irony, also called dialectical irony, is, loosely speaking, situational in nature. The term stems from Plato's depiction of Socrates. In his early-fourth-century B.C. dialogues, Plato recounts Socrates' habitual practice of acting foolish or naïve when questioning his fellow citizens. Having assumed the role of the 'eiron', Socrates successfully forced his 'opponents ' to recognize the irrationality or preposterous implications of their positions by using their own responses against them.

The third major category of irony is structural irony. Works that exhibit structural irony contain an internal feature that creates or promotes a discrepancy that typically operates throughout the entire work. Structural irony depends on a knowledge of the author's ironic intention which is shared by the reader, but is not intended by the speaker where as verbal irony depends on knowledge of the speaker's ironic intention which is shared both by the reader and the speaker. One may find instances of structural irony in Swift's *Modest Proposal*, Browning's "soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" and in Vladimir Nabakov's *Pale Fire*.

Structural irony should not be confused with situational irony. The former involves some sustained feature that makes up part of the very frame of the work, whereas the latter involves an event or comment keyed to the plot rather than to the work's structure. In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), a misunderstanding about identity serves as the basis of the comic plot and pervades the work. Similarly in *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus' ignorance that a man he murdered in the past was the prior King of Thebes underlies the plot and leads to his tragic fall from grace. Although both of these works are based on their protagonists' lack of crucial knowledge, both involve situational rather than structural irony, for the ironic discrepancies arise from the story line rather than the structure or form of the work itself.

Two types of irony – cosmic irony and romantic irony – can be classified as structural irony. Cosmic irony, also called 'irony of fate', arises from the disparity between a character's belief in his or her ability to shape his or her destiny and the audience's recognition that an external, supernatural force has the power to manipulate or even control that character's fate. Just as the unreliable narrator serves as a structural device giving rise to structural irony, so the

supernatural force of cosmic irony makes the irony structural rather than situational in nature. The use of cosmic irony is more than a matter of plot. It typically involves some powerful deity with the ability and the desire to manipulate or even control events in a character's life. The character subject to this irony believes erroneously in free will. Whether or not the character acknowledges the deity's existence, he or she persists in attempting to control or at least affect events. Cosmic irony inevitably involves a tragic outcome. Ultimately, the character's struggle against destiny will be for naught; he or she will have to succumb to forces larger than himself or herself. Cosmic irony is notably apparent in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d' Urbervilles* (1891), where Hardy's view of the influences which shape the lives of his characters is much less kindly and Hardy concludes the tragedy of Tess with the bitter comment: "The President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess". The echo of Shakespeare's lines, in *King Lear*,

'As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods

They kill us for their sport."

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7. *King Lear* (New Arden Edition); Act IV, Sc-I, 38-39.

is unmistakable. Incidentally, Hardy's irony is not directed at human egotism or at the disparity between assumed and real worth but at the very condition of human existence. His novels are built primarily upon the doctrine of the Irony of Fate as commonly understood. The fault is largely in our stars that we are so. Homer, the first of the ancients, is at one with Hardy, the first of the moderns, in knowing and showing the relentlessness, and hopelessness of Fate.

The term 'irony of fate' suggests a contrast between the protagonist's conscious aspirations and what fate has ordained for him. Cosmic irony shows the contrast between men's feverish endeavours and the nonchalant universe as in Hardy's *The Dynasts*. In his novels too Hardy repeatedly hints at some external force or forces at work, and several important developments are made to hinge on 'those whimsical coincidences' which assume large proportions in his works. If 'coincidences' and 'circumstances' and 'fate' are 'whimsical' at first, with the dual suggestion of quaintness and caprice in the word, the quaintness becomes increasingly ironical as the novels progress. Courses of events initiated by the actions of the characters themselves are being taken over by such 'forces', leaving the men and women powerless and wretched; for example, Fanny Robin's death (in Far

From the Madding Crowd) and the events immediately following illustrate increasingly ironical workings of 'fate'. One may conclude that Hardy sees the hand of fate in the ironical situations – 'the strange conjunctions of circumstances', as Hardy writes – an intentional interference by Destiny in the affairs of men, or a system in which all things tend toward sorrow and irony.

The term 'romantic irony' was principally introduced by Friedrich Schlegel. Other German writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also made use of this form of irony in their writings. By this term they wanted to designate a mode of dramatic or narrative writing in which the author builds up the illusion of representing reality and then shatters it with the revelation that the author, as artist, arbitrarily creates and manipulates the characters and their actions. Romantic irony is the irony of the fully conscious artist. It was Laurence Sterne whose use of a self-conscious and wilful narrator in *Tristram Shandy* has much to do in the development of this concept. Byron persistently uses this device in his great narrative poem *Don Juan* for ironic and comic effect.

Although irony constitutes the mark of Austen's excellence, opinions differ as to the nature of this irony. Andrew Wright holds that her irony arises from her world view. According to him, irony is the juxtaposition of two mutually incongruous views of life. In Kierkegaard's opinion, true irony is always present in a writer and is something which he cannot assume or put off at will. Jane Austen has a perception of the contradiction in human experience and she is, in fact, concerned with both aspects of the contradictions as she perceives. Chevalier says, irony is, "a mode of escape from the fundamental problems and responsibilities of life". He further says, "irony characterises the attitude of one who, when confronted with the choice of two things that are mutually exclusive, chooses both". This is only another way of saying that he chooses neither. He cannot allow himself to abandon one for the other, and, if necessary, he abandons both. But he reserves the right to derive from each the greatest possible massive enjoyment. And this enjoyment is 'irony'. On the other hand, no ironist can be an unpractical theorist nor can he or she offer a clear and present answer. Vigour, humility, sympathy – are all three in the ironist's search; and finally there is judgement, but never serene certainty. Irony springs as the result of the quest for meaning in the universe, as the result of human experience. This

result is the divided vision – the vision of Chaucer, Cervantes, Swift and Jane Austen.

It is no exaggeration to state that irony is Jane Austen's forte and much of her humour emanates from her use of irony. Of course, it is not necessary that irony should always be incorporated in comedy. The co-existence of irony and humour is not also axiomatic. Rather, high tragedy and irony are often found to go hand in hand. An ironist recognizes the direct opposite in human experience. His or her interest is objective and he or she is detached or isolated, but not indifferent. The ironist is withdrawn but not removed. The ironist is a passive observer of the human scene and so may be moved to compassion or sympathy, disgust or laughter, disdain or horror, and uniquely combines complexity, distance and implication in a rare and artistically fruitful manner.

In this connection one may refer to Chaucer's use of Irony through the devices of understatement and insinuation as illustrated in the portrait of the Monk in *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*:

"And I say his opinion was good;

what should he studie, and make him selven wood,

Upon a boke in cloistore always to pore,

Or swinken with his hands and laboire,

As Austin bit? how shall the world be served?

Let Austin have his Swink to him reserved."

In a sense *The Prologue* is replete with Chaucerian irony. We have the description of Madame Eglantyne's French which was not the correct French as spoken in Paris but the French of an English finishing school — which of course was a very different matter!

"And French she spak ful faire and fetisly,

After the scole of straitford atte Bowe,

For French of Paris was to her unknowe".

Chaucer's jest is obvious in the case of the Merchant who was always talking of his profits:

"This worthy man full well his wit beset,

And no one ever guessed he was in debt."

Chaucer's irony is crystal clear when he says that the Lawyer was the busiest man in England— 'and yet he seemed busier than he was'. Chaucer remarks about the Doctor of Physik are equally ironical:

"For gold in physik is a cordial

Therefore he lovede gold in special".

Irony is visible in the much-married Wife of Bath. She had enjoyed happines with five husbands, and she was quite prepared for a sixth. There is an ironical remark about her hood:

"Her coverchiefs ful fyne were of ground;

I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound."

When the inconsistency between what one is and what one should be is 'unconscious', Chaucer's irony is the mildest —though not less hilarious for its mildness. The Prioress is a good example. The poor innocent lady does not know that most of her habits and activities — like keeping small hounds, feeding them so richly, putting on a gold brooch with an ambiguous motto, her excellent table – manners, French pronunciations, etc—are not so integral a part of

nunhood as she supposes. But she takes all these quite seriously and Chaucer, 'taking' them with an almost equal seriousness, shows the irony of her life.

The use of irony can also be seen in the presentations of Reeve, Pardoner, Summoner and Friar. In fact, Irony has passed through the whole gallery of portraits; in neither of these cases is Chaucer violent or really satirical. He is simply ironical and he makes us feel that it is the weakness or foolishness of others — the desire to commit sin and get away as lightly as possible in one case, and the desire to purchase salvation at a low price in another — that inspires or gives opportunity to these men to be what they are. As a result, his presentations are devoid of spite and cynicism, and are irradiated by a genial kindliness and a consummate knowledge of human nature.

But a work like Fielding's *Jonathan Wild The Great* is not truly ironic, only because the irony in it is not thematic but at best rhetorical. In this connection it may be remarked that to Fielding irony has surely been congenital. We find such irony practically in every page of *Tom Jones*. One may cite here only a few prominent examples. There is the irony of the famous scene in Molly Seagrim's

bedroom. Amidst Molly's protestations of love for Tom, the curtain falls, and Squire, "the professed champion of the rule of right and the eternal fitness of things" is discovered in a ridiculous posture. His affectation and pretension is thus exposed, and he appears in his true colours, a hypocrite. There is also the irony of Captain Blifil's falling dead of apoplexy at the moment of his meditations, "on the fine state that would accrue to him at Allworthy's death, and taking the measure of that piece of land which was to suffice him for all times to come". Many of the chapter headings themselves are ironical e.g. the one entitled, "A receipt to Regain ths lost affections of a wife". It is only in *Jonathan Wild* that his irony becomes, "grim, relentless and terrible". Equally important are Fielding's dexterous uses of *dramatic ironies of situations and motives in Tom Jones. To cite some* examples: Sophia jumps to the conclusion that her aunt has detected her fondness for Jones, and tries to put her off the secret by showing the utmost sprightliness towards Blifil. The squire was delighted; the aunt was not altogether so pleased. For Sophia overacted her part, that her aunt was at first staggered, and began to suspect some affectation in her niece. "Did you think, child, because you have impressed upon your father, that you could impose upon me?" So she dexterously wheedles out a frank avowal of Sophia, and to their

mutual consternation the clever aunt finds that her niece meant Jones and the niece that her aunt meant Blifil. The thrice-refined irony of these misconstructions reminds us that a dozen years ago the author had been adopting Molie're to the English stage. And there are more instances of dramatic ironies – of like nature at bottom – of many other incidents, paradoxical situations, misunderstandings and mental somersaults in *Tom Jones*.

Although Jane Austen and Swift are dissimilar in most respects, they are perhaps the greatest ironists in English literature. Swift's irony is savage and destructive but Austen's is gentler and keener. An ironist should not assume an air of superiority. Jane Austen's irony is blended with humour, but Swift's is rarely humorous. His satirical purpose is too pronounced ~~where as~~ Whereas Jane Austen is more interested in drawing out entertainment from society than in reforming it. It is the strength of this woman novelist that she is less inclined to lose touch with life and ordinary human experience than her predecessors. In fact, Jane Austen's novels constitute a criticism of life.

The novels of Jane Austen give us primarily a view of middle class people in the daily rounds of family life in provincial towns. She knew these classes of society through and through, and for her such a strip of society was a world in itself in range and diversity of character. Austen was neither a social philosopher nor a romancer, but only intent on the comedy of human nature. So it was practically an inexhaustible source for her. By presenting this quite mode of life Jane Austen explores human experience in her characters with all the thoroughness possible to the comic mode she has chosen. Significantly, it is an ironic, unillusioned and yet sympathetic view of human nature and its flair for comic incongruity that informs Austen's works at her mature level. It is her quiet but incisive irony that has helped her present the characters, not as types but as individuals.

Significantly, Jane Austen descended from a neo-classical tradition of the comedy of manners; while harking back to the 18th century tradition, she rejected those parts of it which anticipated Romanticism. It is as a witty and ironic observer of human inconsistencies and ludicrousness, rather than a painstaking recorder of consuming passions and elements of emotions that Austen represents the 18th century, particularly, in its neo-classical aspects.

In this connection, it is equally important to note that in any passage from her maturer work, whether narrative, descriptive prose, or dialogue, the reader's mind is made to operate actively on at least two levels – first, the level of the obvious, where Jane Austen states what is, or seems to be, immediately apparent to everyone, and secondly, a level of implied criticism, even of denunciation, which uses the very same words to suggest that in a properly and justly ordered world this very same accepted state of affairs would not be tolerated or allowed to go unchallenged.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

In *Pride and Prejudice* the chief aim of the novelist is to exhibit the distinction between appearance and reality so as to make her readers conscious of the need of discovering reality at every step of their life. Austen's narrative technique is full of such irony as comes to expose the incongruity underlying the apparent or surface harmony which makes her style rich enough in subtlety and complexity for which Henry James welcomed her as the first modern novelist. In technical excellence she seems to be second to none because of the taut and coherent structure and dramatic skill employed in her novels, particularly in *Pride and Prejudice.*

A close analysis of the plot of the novel reveals Austen's masterly use of irony. Almost at every stage of the novel Austen lays stress on the difference between appearance and reality. The seemingly refined and cultured man turns out to be villainous and the boorish one as refined gentleman. Though Mrs. Bennet's effort is always directed at catching the suitors, she in reality scares them away. The effort of Lady Catherine and Miss Caroline is intended to sabotage the prospect of union of Elizabeth and Darcy, but this ultimately turns out to be

the catalytic agent in their happy union. Moreover, Miss Bingley maligns Elizabeth to degrade her in Darcy's eyes. She thinks that this will help her to secure Darcy for herself. Little does she know that her efforts are blasting all chances of matrimonial alliance between them. Besides these, there are other fine instances of use of irony. Elizabeth was terribly mortified when Lydia eloped with Wickham as she thought that the case of the elopement shall spell a disaster to her union with Darcy. But in reality the opposite only happened as it facilitated their union in the long run.

The whole plot of the novel deals with the contrast between intricacy and simplicity at an ironic level. The two sets of characters, so to say, Darcy and Elizabeth, and Jane and Bingley, represent this ironic contrast. The first two are intricate characters while the last pair are simple. Intricacy and simplicity are two desirable aspects of character, but they are mutually incompatible and here lies the irony. On this basis, we find in the title of the novel an ironic interpretation of the theme dealt within this novel.

Austen's narrative technique is spun with superfine threads of irony adding subtle humour throughout the novel. She has her

comments very cleverly contrived, of course, with a meaning lurking beneath the calm surface, yet always forcing the readers to find their own meaning. The first chapter of the novel is so finely done that no less a critic than Bradley had to say that had she written only the first chapter of the novel and nothing else, she could have claimed immortality in English fiction.

Verbal irony pervading the whole novel makes it much too admirable. Let us take the beginning line as an example. It reads:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."[1]

Reading this initially we think that the great universal truth is the theme of the novel but the last section of the sentence declares that the truth is nothing more than the common social problem of marriage. The irony is that the young man does not really search after a young girl, but truly the young girls in the locality are desirous of getting such a partner of life. He is, in fact, the 'rightful property' of

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1. *Pride and Prejudice*; Ch-1; P-321.

a lucky young lady. The ironic tone of the novel is thus established at its very outset.

The novel is replete with such verbal irony. Let us take the example of Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst as in chapter IV. It reads:

"They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank, and were, therefore, in every respect entitled to well of themselves and meanly to others".[2]

The irony becomes transparently clear when we find them proud, snobbish and utterly selfish. Let us recapitulate the remark of Mr. Bennet about Mr. Wickham in a later chapter:

"I am prodigiously proud of him. I defy even Sir William Lucas himself to produce a more valuable son-in-law".[3]

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2. Ibid; Ch-4; P-238
3. Ibid; Ch-53; P-429.

We can well appreciate the impact of this irony when we know that the so-called valuable son-in-law is none other than the seemingly stupid Mr. Collins.

Further, all the events and situations in this novel have been ironically contrived, a few of such things have already been discussed. Irony of characters is yet another point of interest. We see Elizabeth Bennet boasts of her perception and calls in question Jane's who is alleged to be blind to realities. But she is unaware of the fact that she herself is blinded by prejudices. Again, Darcy's claim to be a gentleman is tarnished by his ungentlemanly proposal to Elizabeth. Bingley Sisters hate the Bennets being unrefined while they prove themselves to be such. Jane Austen was very much amused by the contradictions inherent in human nature which she painted nicely to amuse her readers. In chapter VIII where the Bingley Sisters refer to Elizabeth's "low connections" and thereby indicate the social difference between Darcy and Elizabeth, readers wonder if Darcy's remark about Elizabeth's poor chances of marrying "a man of any consideration in the world" will not prove to be ironic. Again towards the close of chapter XI, we find Darcy is aware of his growing attractions for Elizabeth: "He began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention."

The irony is that Elizabeth, who thinks that Darcy still dislikes her, and does not, therefore, even try to interest Darcy, is actually attracting him by her sharp wit, intellect and spirited repartees. Again in the portrayal of Lady Catherine de Bourgh's pride and good breeding, two of the themes of the novel, are treated ironically. We see that this highborn lady has really poor manners and her treatment of others betrays her lack of taste and principles of decorum.

The dialogues of *Pride and Prejudice* have been rendered effective by verbal irony. Mr. Bennet is in the habit of speaking ironically to his wife, and this is evident when he says that he has no compassion on her poor nerves:

"you mistake me, my dear, I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at last."[4]

It is a beautiful instance of verbal irony and we have no difficulty in understanding that he means the very opposite of what he says.

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4. Ibid; Ch-1; P-232

Actually he means that she has complained about her nerves incessantly ever since their marriage, and he finds the mention of her 'nerves' intensely irritating or ridiculous. More importantly, Mr. Bennet's words prepare the readers for some authorial remarks:

"Mrs. Bennet was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper, when she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news."[5]

Significantly, Mrs. Bennet's appearance (her good looks) conceals from Mr. Bennet her reality (her mean understanding and illiberal mind) but when he discovers it, he is disillusioned and loses interest in his life. The misery of Mr. Bennet's life emphasizes the importance of making a timely distinction between appearance and reality.

Again, one is aware of the irony hidden in Darcy's statement about Elizabeth. When Mr. Bingley asked Mr. Darcy to dance with Elizabeth, he looked for a while at Elizabeth and coldly said:

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5. Ibid; Ch-1; P-232

"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men."[6]

We relish the ironic flavour of this statement much later when we reflect, in retrospect, that the woman who, in Darcy's eyes, was not handsome enough to dance with was really good enough to marry.

Another fine example of irony may be taken from the description of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst:

"They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased nor in the power of being agreeable when they choose it; but proud and conceited."[7]

Here the ironic implications of the expression 'very fine ladies' become clear as we are acquainted with their pride, snobbery and selfishness. But Jane is not very discriminating in her judgment of character. She never sees any fault in anybody and therefore considers even the proud conceited Bingley sisters charming. Elizabeth, on the

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6. Ibid; Ch-3; P-236
7. Ibid; Ch-4; P-238

other hand, is able to see through their conceit. Darcy also understands the distinction between appearance and reality only gradually. To him, in the beginning, lower middle class people belonging to the countryside appear to be vulgar and unrefined whereas refinement and culturedness appear to be the attributes of aristocracy. He gradually learns better and subsequently realizes that Jane and Elizabeth are refined whereas Lady Catherine and Bingley sisters are utterly alien to good manners.

Jane Austen's instinctive attitude is that of a humorist. Her first impulse was humour. The follies and foibles, illusions and self-contradictions of human nature were a joy to her for their own sake. She would have found little zest in an ideal world so perfectly cured of folly as to be completely deprived of matter for laughter.

The technique of ironic statement frees Jane Austen from the necessity of making involved commentaries on her character. It is left to the reader to understand the full force of the irony, and to make the criticism himself. 'Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth — and it was soon done — done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire.' Taken at its face value this is merely a statement of

fact—while Mrs. Bennet stirred the fire, Mr. Collins decided to marry Elizabeth instead of Jane. But there are implications behind Jane Austen's statement brought out by phrases such as 'had only to change', 'soon done'. Mr. Collins is considering a serious step, *i.e.* marriage, yet the woman involved is of so little importance to him as a person that he can change his mind in a second. And as yet he knows nothing of the feelings of either sister towards him. This is an aspect of Jane Austen's technique of ironic comment —a statement which does not seem to involve the author in any judgment, but which illuminates a character without unnecessary comment.

But these ironic statements are all made by Jane Austen *about* her characters. A further technique of irony is to put a speech into a character's mouth which is not intended by the speaker as irony but becomes ironic in effect. In this case, *the character* is made to say more than he intends, though it is left to the reader to notice the implications.

On Lydia's elopement with Wickham, Mr. Collins writes to Mr. Bennet:

"I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station or refrain from declaring my amazement, at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them as a Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing."

It is left to the reader to reflect upon the deficiencies of Mr. Collins' Christianity.

Of all her novels perhaps, *Pride and Prejudice* makes us laugh most. Jane Austen's problem was to draw a true picture of life which should also amuse us. She lived through the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, but no shadow of their storm is permitted in her finest pictures of the sunny side of life. *Pride and Prejudice* is presented with the atmosphere of sunshine and hilarity. The immortal creation of Mr. Collins is the main source of humour in the novel. The man is ridiculous but the humour which he produces is quite unconscious. He takes everything seriously, but makes other people laugh at his words and deeds. The character of Mrs. Bennet is also a

rich source of humour. She is a gross fool and her husband a fastidious one.

Apart from these humorous characters, *Pride and Prejudice* is full of humorous situations as well. The crowning example of such a humorous situation in the novel is the pompous stupidity of Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet. The humour created by Mr. Collins gives a clue to the particular type of Jane Austen's humour. Her humour is not boisterous like that of Dickens or Fielding, nor it is bitter like that of Swift. It is delicate and ironical. But her irony is more subtle than is to be found in the writings of Addison. An especial characteristic of her humour is that it pervades the whole novel. Now satirical, now ironical, now mocking, now amusing and mock-serious, her humour changes forms according to the characters she deals with. The remarkable qualities of her humour are good sense, restraint and balance.

In her novels Austen chose to use irony as a stylistic device. The point derives support from Andrew H. Wright who rightly observes in his book *Jane Austen's Novels — A study in Structure* that "Jane Austen likewise often uses irony as a stylistic device and for quite

un-ironic purposes----to flay, to poke fun, to underline a decided judgement — when there is no real contradiction involved."[8] "Pride and Prejudice and Emma are Jane Austen's great 'detective' novels; in Emma the underlying mystery is kept up longer, but the plot of Pride and Prejudice till the moment of Darcy's declaration, affords even more wonderful opportunity for irony and misunderstanding,"[9] —mentioned R. Liddel in his writings regarding ironical portrayal in Jane Austen's novels.

In *Pride and Prejudice,* there are a lot of ironical situations too which provide twists and turns to the action of the novel. Mr. Darcy remarks about Elizabeth that "she is not handsome enough to tempt me...". Here, one can easily understand the ironic implication of this statement that the woman who was not handsome enough to dance with was really good enough to marry. He removes Bingley from Netherfield because he considers it imprudent to forge a marriage alliance with the Bennet family, but himself ends up marrying the second Bennet sister. Collins proposes to Elizabeth when her heart is full of Wickham and Darcy proposes to her exactly at the moment

8. Andrew H. Wright: *Jane Austen's Novels--- A Study in Structure;* P-174; Penguin Books, 1964.
9. Robert Liddell: *The Novels of Jane Austen,* P-49; Longmans, 1963

when she hates him most. Elizabeth tells Mr. Collins that she is unable to reject the first proposal and accept the second but she does exactly this when Darcy proposes a second time. The Lydia – Wickham episode may seem like an insurmountable barrier between Elizabeth and Darcy, but is actually instrumental in bringing them together. Lady Catherine, attempting to prevent their marriage, only succeeds in hastening it.

In *Pride and Prejudice* irony is of a complex character. It presents the novelist's world-view in regard to the two types of human personality—simple and intricate. There are four central human pairs in the novel. At the centre there are Elizabeth and Darcy, both of whom are intricate characters. Their intricacy has both its virtues and vices. Jane and Bingley are simple and unexceptionable. Lydia and Wickham are again intricate, though woefully lacking in the breadth and humanity of the first pair. Charlotte and Collins who form the last pair are again intricate from another angle, that of the pursuit of worldly gain. Austen puts all these pairs in the milieu of love-making and brings out the contradictions in them, and sometimes through objective account, sometimes through indirect comments and sometimes through authorial remarks highlights the inseparable

admixture of intricate and simple characteristics in a human being. Herein lies the excellence of her ironic import and she imbues her novels – their subjects, structures, characterization and style – with this import. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the best novels ever written with an ironic world-view.

With reference to Austen's use of dramatic irony in this novel one may refer to chapter 43. Mrs. Reynolds says that she does not know when her master Mr. Darcy will marry since —

> *"I do not know who is good enough for him."*[10]

She is innocently praising him. But in Elizabeth's ear must be echoing Mr. Darcy's words:

> *"She is not handsome enough to tempt me."*[11]

Mrs. Reynold's words, in the light of these words of Mr. Darcy and his recent proposal to Elizabeth get imbued with many ironic

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10. *Pride and Prejudice*; Ch-43; P-378
11. Ibid; Ch-3; P-236.

implications of which poor Mrs. Reynolds must be totally unaware. We may also consider Mr. Bennet's words to Elizabeth in chapter 24 when Mr. Bingley has departed from Netherfield ——

"So Lizzy, your sister is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives her a sort of distinction among her companions. When is your turn to come? Let Wickham be your man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably ..."[12]

In the words 'pleasant fellow' is hidden a dramatic irony at the expense of Mr. Bennet, for this pleasant fellow, i.e. Mr. Wickham, is destined to make a considerable dent in Mr. Bennet's complacency.

Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* is known for her wit, fine sense of humour and the spirit of caricature and ridicule. It is this sense of humour which sustains her through trials and difficulties. Darcy does not find her sufficiently pretty to tempt him. Elizabeth overhears this remark made by Darcy and she tells the story among her friends, because she has a lively sense of humour and enjoys anything that is

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12. Ibid; Ch-24; P- 314

ridiculous. While talking to Miss Bingley and Darcy, Elizabeth herself confesses that she loves to laugh at stupidity and nonsense —

"Nothing so easy, if you have but the inclination," said Elizabeth. "Tease him—laugh at him. Intimate as you are. You must know how it is to be done".

"Mr. Darcy is not to be laughed at!" cried Elizabeth. "That is an uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it would be a great loss to me to have many such acquaintances, I dearly love a laugh."

"Miss Bingley," said he, "has given me credit for more than can be. The wisest and the best of men, nay, the wisest and best of their actions, may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke ."[13]

There is an under-current of sarcasm in the above conversation. Elizabeth has inherited this habit of making sarcastic comments from her father Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet is witty, but often cynical and

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13. Ibid; Ch-11; P- 264-65

pungent. Elizabeth's wit pleases with a true aesthetic pleasure, but it seldom hurts. In the sharpness and brilliance of her wit, she is comparable to Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* but in its innocence and ingenuity, she is like Rosalind in *As You Like It.* There runs a strain of innocent raillery in all her conversations.

In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen emphasizes the characters' misapprehension of themselves and their experiences. In a sense it is a complex study of human deception and self-deception. Throughout the book, characters are deceived by appearances, fool themselves and others, pretend to be what they are not. Their expectations are mistaken: their actions grounded in false premises. The author reveals the motives and consequences of these failures in perception by having their false understanding culminate in actions whose effects are the opposite of what is intended. This *Sharp contrast* between knowledge and truth, between what the characters understand and what the reader understands, between *intention or expectation and fulfillment* is called *dramatic irony.*

Dramatic irony may have an objective or a subjective foundation, or both. Appearances may lie, may suggest the opposite of what

actually is. Thus, Wickham's "appearance was greatly in his favour" (XV) and Darcy's proud bearing seems to imply a thoroughly bad character. But appearances are misleading: "One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it" (XL). Jane's modesty belies her ardent love for Bingley (VI, XXXVI). Georgiana's shy demeanor conceals a surprising capacity for passionate impulse (XLIII). Charlotte's attentions to Collins seem to be only common courtesy (XVIII, XX, XXI) for which Elizabeth is grateful, but she is actually stalking a husband (XXII). Because of what she has said of him in the past, Elizabeth is thought to despise Darcy (LVII, LXIX), when actually she is in love with him. In each of these situations things are not as they would seem. Reality wears a mask that solicits mistaken judgments.

But although there are objective occasions for superficial (and erroneous) opinion, a more cautious scrutiny of the facts would sometimes avoid this *discrepancy between estimation and actuality.* For example, Mr. Bennet is ignorant of Elizabeth's true feelings about Darcy. What he takes for the truth (that he will amuse Elizabeth with the absurdity of Collins's suggestion that she is engaged to a man she dislikes) is directly contrary to the truth (LVII). The source of her

father's ironic error, however, lies in the circumstances rather than in himself. On the other hand, Elizabeth is wrong about Wickham and Darcy because she has disposed herself to be deceived. Her offended pride (V) has blinded her judgment (VI). Things are the opposite of what she supposes (not only does she misread their characters, but Darcy admires rather than dislikes her). The irony here is compounded because Elizabeth prides herself on her intelligence and perception. When ignorance thus pretends to knowledge, it is evidence of a moral failure. When Mr. Collins understands Elizabeth's refusal of his proposal as an encouragement of his pursuit – a covert acceptance (XIX) – his blindness to the plain reality is a comment on his egotism, his snobbish exaggeration of his social importance. In these last two cases, the irony is more emphatic because deception is self-deception.

In order to dramatize comically the sham and pretense of many of the persons in her book, the author juxtaposes their interpretations of themselves and their actual behaviour. Lady Catherine's pride in her social status is repeatedly shown by her petty mind and "ill-breeding" to be without foundation. Caroline Bingley implies that she is socially superior to the Bennet family, but her crude pursuit of

Darcy exposes the flimsiness of her pretension to refinement. Mr. Collins continually announces his importance, and simultaneously betrays his moral, social, and intellectual unimportance, and The *pretensions* of these characters are the *inverse* of what their behaviour shows them really to be. Because characters take appearances for reality, deceive themselves or are deceived, they act on wrong premises, look forward in error. Things turn out contrary to their anticipations. Their actions produce effects *opposite* to those intended. Thus, Darcy seeks to prevent a connection with the Bennet family (he has misjudged the power of the girls' attractions), and he ends up marrying a Bennet himself. Lady Catherine acts to prevent a marriage and she becomes the cause of it (LX). Mr. Bennet permits his daughter to go to Brighton in order to keep peace in a family that he regards with ironical detachment. But this results in his greater involvement and in a disruption of the family peace. Caroline acts to arouse Darcy against Elizabeth, but succeeds only in reminding him of the intimacy they share (XLV). Misled by appearances to believe that Darcy dislikes her, prevented by her prejudice against him from seeing the truth, Elizabeth tries verbally to rebuke him; but in doing so she actually makes herself more attractive to him (VI, IX, X, XI, XVIII, XXXI, LX). By allowing events directly to contradict the judgments, expectations

and intentions of the characters, the author clarifies their limitations. The reader (aware of the actual situation) is made to see reality mock and punish pride, vanity, and failures in awareness. Dramatic irony thus becomes a way of dealing out a kind of natural retribution and revealing the surprise and complexity of experience.

In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen's irony has developed into an instrument of discrimination between the people who are simple reproductions of their social type and the people with individuality and will, between the unaware and the aware. The defensive—and destructive—weapon of *Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility* has her been adapted directly to the theme through the personality of Elizabeth Bennet, who reflects and illustrates her author's vision without ever becoming (except in her malice toward Lydia) merely her author's advocate. The irony is internal, it does not take disturbing tangents towards the author's need for self-vindication : even self defensive, it is internal and consistent – Mr. Bennet's shying from the consequences of his disastrous mistake, Elizabeth's provocative parrying of Darcy. And if this new control over her irony permits Jane Austen only to be more clever (and not particularly more

persuasive) in avoiding a commitment, by Elizabeth in love, for example :

"... Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe it must date from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."

Another intreaty that she would be serious, however, produced the desired effect; and she soon satisfied Jane by her solemn assurances of attachment.

the characteristic block of Jane Austen's against direct emotional expression has occasion only very rarely to operate in *Pride and Prejudice* : above all, in the talk and atmosphere of Darcy's proposals, and in his letter—passages which most nearly reproduce the flat and melodramatic textures of *Cecilia*, without any lift of emotion or of irony either. The moment is soon over; and irony is not only back, but back at its proper task of discrimination.

Irony in Austen's novels is a composite of varied attributes. Unlike the satirists, she does not openly, directly and violently attack the foibles and follies of the people but evokes a smile by exposing their folly. She is never angry with her characters and the subtle instances of irony give artistic touches of perfection to Austen's work. "By the mere tone of her voice," says David Cecil,

"she sets drab reality dancing and sparkling with the sunlight of her comic vision."[14]

Undoubtedly, irony, humour, satire go hand in hand in her novels.

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14. David Cecil: *A Portrait of Jane Austen*. London & New York, 1978.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Sense and Sensibility, the earliest of Austen's social comedies, marks the true beginning of Jane Austen's fictional career. It is a mixture of a mature and an immature Jane Austen. Her mature style is most evident in her treatment of individual scenes and her portrayal of some of the secondary characters. Her less mature style is suggested by the melodramatic developments in the plot. *Sense and Sensibility* is Jane Austen's important piece of work which is more thickly populated novel than the simple *Northanger Abbey*. Among Jane Austen's six novels *Sense and Sensibility* is unique in having two heroines, and that in itself posed problems of story-telling.

In the beginning one may find an ironic account of the devices which Mrs. Fanny Dashwood employs in order to deprive her mother-in-law and her three daughters of whatever monetary help her husband John Dashwood wanted to render to them. When John Dashwood tells his wife that he would give three thousand pounds to his step-mother, Fanny does not approve of his intention at all and he says –

"He did not stipulate for any particular sum, my dear Fanny; he only requested me, in general terms, to assist them, and make their situation more comfortable than it was in his power to do."[1]

Here Austen ironically says that to take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy Harry would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. Fanny begs her husband to reconsider his intention. This ironic account lasts till Fanny is able to convince her husband that no monetary help need be given at all to his step-mother and his step-sisters. At the end of the fact John Dashwood made a decision that it is really not necessary for him to do anything more for his step-mother and step-sisters than such neighbourly acts as have been proposed by his wife.

Austen's ironic mode is noticeable also in her portrayal of Sir John Middleton and Lady Middleton. As for example, there is an obvious use of irony in Jane Austen's telling us that Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother, that he 'hunted and shot', while she 'humoured her children'. Here the irony continues when Jane

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1. Sense and Sensibility; Ch -; P-4

Austen says that Lady Middleton had the advantage of being able to spoil her children all the year round, while Sir John's independent employments were in existence only half the time-

"Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children; and these were their only resources. Lady Middleton had the advantage of being able to spoil her children all the year round, while Sir John's independent employments were in existence only half the time". [2]

Critics have opined that *Sense & Sensibility* in comparison with other novels of Jane Austen is far from being perfect both structurally and artistically. However, the design of the novel appears to be more ambitious than that of *Northanger Abbey*. What is more, it has a grave theme to deal with. As W.A. Craik very aptly observes :-

"Her manner is serious, a straight forward retail of facts, and it will soon be plain that, although there are plenty of ironic comments and of humorous characters, there is a serious treatment of a serious theme."[3]

Although our perusal of Jane Austen's novels is a pleasurable exercise, it is essentially serious as to the purpose of the novel. The

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2. Ibid; Ch -; P-19
3. *Jane Austen: The Six Novels* (University Paperbacks): W.A. Craik; P-32; Methuen & Co. Ltd. London.

seriousness of the theme is realized through a systematic use of irony which is an essential instrument in revealing characters and situations. But it is rather curious that the theme of the novel, *Sense and Sensibility* is itself ironic.

Another incisive irony behind Jane Austen's description of flattery by the Steele Sisters is to be found in the portrayal of the Steele sisters. Both the sisters have a natural aptitude for flattery; and they demonstrate this aptitude fully in their relations with Lady Middleton whose children, though very mischievous, naughty and troublesome are admired by the Steele Sisters for being the nicest children in the world –

"And what a charming little family they have! I never saw such fine children in my life. – I declare I quite dote upon them already, and indeed I am always distractedly fond of children".

"I should guess so', said Elinor with a smile, 'from what I have witnessed this morning".

"I have a notion', said Lucy, 'you think the little Middletons rather too much indulged; perhaps they may be the outside of enough; but it is so natural in Lady Middleton; and for my part, I love to see children full of life and spirits; I cannot bear them if they are tame and quiet."[4]

Lucy Steel shows this aptitude for flattery later in her relations with Mrs. Ferrars too. Indeed she is such an adept in this art that even a harsh and stern lady like Mrs. Ferrars softens towards her in view of her (Lucy) ingratiating manners and blandishment.

Sense and Sensibility, though it deals at length with tearful and sentimental girls, has an unmistakable streak of irony. One example will suffice in this regard. Colonel Barndon who is thirty five, has been considered by Marianne as a most unromantic man beyond 'all possibility of love'. But there is a deep irony in her thinking so. As Ian Jack observes –

"By neat stroke of irony, it is Colonel Barndon whom she herself is destined to marry, not because his 'taste in every point coincides with her own' but because (by the end of the book) she has begun to grow up."[5]

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4. *Sense and Sensibility*; Ch-21; P-73.
5. *Sense and Sensibility:* Ian Jack; Notes on Literature, P-3; British Council, London.

Sense and Sensibility, despite its being a production of Jane Austen's early period, has got some intrinsic qualities characteristic of her mature art. The characters are studied with subtlety. Elinor may seem to be priggish by nature, but eventually she comes out as a sober and altruistic woman posing a sharp contrast to Marianne who is essentially imprudent and lacking in common sense.

That Jane Auten is acquiring a sureness of touch in writing prose is evident from the extract which describes Mrs. Ferrars very strikingly. Here her prose has the sparkle of Pope's satiric poetry –

"(Mrs. Ferrar's) features are small, without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong features of Pride and ill nature. She was not a woman of many words; for, unlike people in general, she proportioned them to the number of her ideas."[6]

Austen's ironic mode in *Sense and Sensibility* is perhaps at its best in the episode of Robert's marriage to Lucy Steel. Mrs. Ferrars has strongly been opposed to receiving Lucy as a daughter-in-law.

6. *Sense and Sensibility;* Ch-34; P-139

Robert, because of his concern about his family prestige, has been pleading with Lucy to withdraw her claim to marry Edward:-

"Perhaps you mean – my brother – you mean Mrs. – Mrs. Robert Ferrars'.

"Mrs. Robert Ferrars!' – was repeated by Marianne and her mother, in an accent of the utmost amazement; - and though Elinor could not speak, even her eyes were fixed on him with the same impatient wonder. He rose from his seat and walked to the window, apparently from not knowing what to do; took up a pair of scissors that lay there, and while spoiling both them and their sheath by cutting the latter to pieces as he spoke, said, in an hurried voice'.

"Perhaps you do not know – you may not have heard that my brother is lately married to – to the youngest – to Miss Lucy Steele."[7]

In this connection, Robert has held a number of meetings with Lucy in order to urge her to give up long-standing claim to marry

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7. Ibid; Ch-48; P-215.

Edward; and she has been giving Robert the impression that she would try to accede to his request. But Lucy has been talking to Robert in such a cunning manner that at the end Robert finds himself trapped by her as her would-be husband. At this turn of events our mirth reaches its height when we learn that the two have got married without the knowledge of Mrs. Ferrars, and that they had eloped in order to get themselves married. The irony here arises from the glaring contrast between what was expected by everybody, and even by us, and what actually happens.

An example of insipid irony is to be found in John Dashwood's talk with his sister Elinor, when he explains how hard it is to meet all the demands upon his large income, is almost as good as the famous debate with his wife already cited -

"We must live at a great expense while we are here'.

'He paused for her assent and Compassion; and she forced herself to say, 'your expenses both in town and country must certainly be considerable, but your income is a large one."[8]

8. Ibid; Ch-33; P-134

on the other hand, the irony becomes tragic in Marriane's:-

"Happy, happy Elinor, you cannot have an idea of what I suffer".[9]

–to her whom she fondly thinks providentially immune from the miseries of her own lot.

When Elinor's false situation as the beloved but not the betrothed of Edward, and the bleeding heart that she has been nursing through all Marriane's woes, may no longer be hid, Jane Austen can hardly bring herself to write more than a line or two of dialogue:-

"Four months! – Have you known of this four months?' – Elinor confirmed it.

'What! – While attending me in all my misery, has this been on your heart? and I have reproached you for being happy!"[10]

And then she falls back on cold prose.

Jane Austen is a novelist who delights also in satire. Satire is an element in which she lives and enjoys her real life; but there is no

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9. Ibid; Ch-29; P-109
10.Ibid; Ch-37; P-155

trace of the savage indignation in her writing. Her attitude as a satirist is best exposed in the words of Elizabeth when she says-

"I hope, I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and non-sense, whims and inconsistencies, do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can."[11]

Each novel of Jane Austen has a motive covert as well as overt. *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* satirise that romantic philosophy which was sweeping the world in the early 19th. Century and which relied on the instinctive movements of heart and imagination. In these novels, satire is all- pervading. It mainly takes the form of being able to copy the voice of the sentimental novelist's peculiar phraseology. *Sense and Sensibility* is satirical in tone. With subdued irony Jane Austen ridicules sentimentalists. Elinor represents sense and her sister Marriane stands for sensibility. The satire is mostly directed against sensibility and sentimentality depicted in the characters of the Dashwood sisters. Jane Austen also ridicules the selfishness and worldly wisdom of Mrs. Dashwood and her henpecked husband, John.

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11. Pride and Prejudice; Ch-11; P-265

The potrayal of the Palmers has its share of irony too. Mrs. Palmer came with a smile, smiled all the time of her visit, except when she laughed, and smiled when she went away. Mr. Palmer is described as entering the room with a look of self-importance slightly bowing to the ladies without speaking a word, and after briefly surveying them, picking up a newspaper from the table and reading it as long as he stayed in the room. And Jane Austen's portrayal of Mrs. Jennings is even more ironic. She pokes fun at Mrs. Jennings's loquacity, her propensity to idle gossip and her habit of match-making as if she thought it her foremost duty to unite all the unmarried people in marriage. In connection with her habit of proposing matrimonial alliances, the author says that she missed no opportunity of projecting marriages among all the young people of her acquaintance. Having seen both her daughters respectably married, she had now nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world and in the promotion of this subject, she was 'zealously active'.

One of the most conspicuous examples of irony occurs in the situation in which Mrs. Jennings thinks that Colonel Brandon is proposing marriage to Elinor when actually he is telling Elinor that he has decided to offer the Delaford living to Edward Ferrars. Mrs.

Jennings has overheard only a few concluding words of the conversation between Colonel Brandon and Elinor; and those few words are completely misunderstood by her. After Colonel Barandon has left, Mrs. Jennings congratulates Elinor on what that gentleman had been saying to her. Now Elinor wrongly thinks that Mrs. Jennings has congratulated her on Colonel Brandon's generous offer of the Delaford living to Edward through her (Elinor). Thus there is a double misunderstanding here. The reader, of course, knows the real situation and the irony here arises from the contrast between the reality as known to the reader and the wrong notions of it which both Mrs. Jennings and Elinor have formed. Subsequently when the misunderstanding is cleared, both the ladies enjoy a hearty laugh, as we too do.

We have another example of the use of irony when Jane Austen speaks of a certain resemblance between Lady Middleton and Mrs. Fanny Dashwood. Here we are told that there was a kind of 'cold-hearted selfishness on both sides' which mutually attracted them. Of course, there is no irony in this remark; but irony occurs in the next remark which reads as follows: "And they sympathized with each other in an insipid propriety of demeanour and a general want of

understanding". And then we have irony in Lucy's presumption that Mrs. Ferrars's politeness towards her at the previous night's party was a sure sign of Mrs. Ferrars's being kindly disposed towards her. Here the irony arises from what Lucy thinks is the case and what we know to be really the case. Lucy is, of course, mistaken in her interpretation of Mrs. Ferrars's politeness towards her because at the time Mrs. Ferrars does not know that Lucy is a candidate for the position of her (Mrs. Ferrars's) daughter-in-law.

There is a lot of irony in the way in which the relationship between the two brothers, Edward and Robert, has been depicted in the way in which the relationship between Mrs. Ferrars and her two sons has been presented, and in the way the relationship, which develops between Robert and Lucy, is depicted. Mrs. Ferrars's treatment of her two sons, and her over indulgence towards Robert and her quick forgiveness towards Lucy have ironically been described by the author; and the two relationships have also been dealt with in the same way. In the closing stages of the novel, we are told that, at one point, after John Dashwood has left the room, Elinor is left alone with Robert Ferrars "to improve her acquaintance with that young man"; and here we are also told of Robert's gay unconcern, and his

happy self-complacency of manner while enjoying an unfair division of his mother's love and generosity to the prejudice of his banished brother. We are also here told that Robert had earned his mother's favour through his dissipated course of life, and at the cost of his brother's integrity. There is obvious irony in the manner in which the traits of Robert's character have been specified here because these are not "qualities" but "defects" in the nature of apparent virtues.

One of the distinguishing marks of excellence of Austen's novels is the comic mode. In fact, the comic spirit is all-pervasive in her novels though some of the situations and events in them are too sad and even painful to allow any intrusion of humour and wit. A keen eye was always active for the absurdities and oddities of human beings, and comedy almost always proceeds from human absurdities and singularities. It may here be pointed out also that comedy in her novels is mostly of the ironic kind, and this is amply illustrated in *Sense and Sensibility* despite the fact that the plot of this novel is, on the whole, serious and sad. While the five leading characters, namely Elinor, Marriane, Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon and even John Willoughby, have been treated with a high degree of seriousness and earnestness almost all the other characters have been portrayed in

the ironic mode so as to bring to our notice their absurdities, follies, and oddities, and thus to amuse us. There is hardly any person among these figures at whom we do not laugh up our sleeves. In other words, one is all the time secretly amused at the limitations of these characters. Such a character at the centre of the novel is Mrs. Jennings, an extremely loquacious person who is never short of subjects and topics to speak on, and who is never short of words. Every event and every incident provokes some comment form her, and her comments are often a never-failing source of sheer amusement. As for example, it does not matter to her whether a particular person would suit her most admirably as a husband. At this stage, she does not realize that Colonel Brandon is seventeen years older than Mafriane, and that Mafriane would rather not marry at all than marry this elderly man who wears a flannel waistcoat.

Then there is John Middleton. He amuses us by his excessive hospitality and his excessive desire to have guests whom he can entertain to dinner or to lunch at his house. He is either fond of hunting or of holding dinner and lunches at his house and inviting all sorts of persons, especially women and young girls to his house. He welcomes the Steele Sisters as heartily as he welcomes the

Dashwood sisters. He is fond of fun and sport and his mirth and laughter are boisterous. In this respect, he closely resembles his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings. If sir John amuses us by his excessive hospitality and high spirits, Lady Middleton amuses us by her sullenness and ill-temper. Her chief interest in life is her children. She is a mother par excellence.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, there are other two other characters who are equally important so far as they go on to exemplify Austen's comic mode. They are Mr. and Mrs. Palmer. Mrs. Palmer is somewhat a stupid woman, and stupidity is certainly something comic. Mr. Palmer is well aware of his wife's stupidity and often snubs her. The way, in which he snubs her, is quite amusing and he snubs her wife's mother, Mrs. Jennings, too. He does not hesitate to say that his wife's mother is an ill-bred woman. On the other hand, the way in which Mrs. Palmer is first introduced to us by the author, is particularly amusing.

Jane Austen often makes use of comic irony and she has a genius for it. Her description of the devices employed by Fanny Dashwood to deprive her mother-in-law and the latter's three

daughters of whatever John Dashwood wanted to give them has ironically been presented. This description is among the most amusing portions of the novel. A conspicuous example of comic irony is to be found in the situation in which Mrs. Jennings imagines that Colonel Brandon is proposing marriage to Elinor when actually he is telling Elinor about his decision to offer the Delaford living to Edward Ferrars. Perhaps even more striking is the irony in the situation in which Robert is trapped by Lucy as a husband for herself when she was originally engaged to marry Robert's elder brother, Edward. Here the irony arises from the fact that Robert gets trapped precisely when he is trying to dissuade Lucy from marrying Edward on the ground that she does not have the necessary social background and the necessary financial status to marry a young man of the Ferrars family, who is both wealthy and holds an important position in the society.

NORTHANGER ABBEY

Austen was a precocious talent and irony was the lethal weapon which she could make ample use of with flawless dexterity in her literary creation. Austen became awfully discontented with the unwholesome disproportionate show of romantic Gothicism of Mrs. Radcliffe and her followers. Her approach here resembles that of Fielding and burlesque and irony become the most appropriate tool in her hand to cudgel the objects of her dislikes. In order to understand the stimulus behind the creation of *Northanger Abbey* we are to take into account a historical perspective of the second half of the 18th century. Michael Sadleir (a Critic)[1] presents statistics which demonstrate that Gothic novels were fairly popular before *'The Mysteries of Udolpho"* was published but still far outnumbered by novels of sentiments and sensibility which flooded the market in the later half of the 1790's. Already in an earlier chapter we have referred to Austen's exceptional faculty of parodying and one hardly disagrees with Marvin Muddrick when he remarks in relation to *'Love and Friendship':*

1. Michael Sadleir: *Jane Austen* (Published, 1930).

"In 'Love and Friendship' Jane Austen parodied the lachrymose novel by reproducing its characters and situation and then allowing them both to overreach themselves into absurdity: the action of the parody was single and internal, with no reference but an implicit and general one to the actual world."[2]

In *Northanger Abbey,* the projected world picture obviously written with a positive parodying intention does not reflect anything lachrymose obviously outer manifestations of sentiments and sensibility. To make dig at this issue Austen arranges a different scenario in her another novel, *Sense and Sensibility.* Burlesquing happens to be the main spirit *in Northanger Abbey* as it is with her other novels but the target of her attack here is exclusively the Radcliffian world of Gothicism much fan-fared by Mrs. Radcliffe in *'The Mysteries of Udolpho'.* In a sense *Northanger Abbey* is replete with irony. The structural pattern of the novel holds throughout an ironical frame.

Austen begins her anti-romantic mode with a moderate projection of her heroine in the opening line of the novel:

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2. Marvin Mudrick: *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense & Discovery*; P-39

"No one who had ever seen Catherine Moorland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine."[3]

Throughout the first chapter of the novel, Austen persistently highlights the mediocrities and commonalities of her heroine. Not only that she is more intent to enlighten us about Catherine's incapabilities and negative faculties:

"Her greatest deficiency was in the pencil. There she fell miserably sort of the true heroic height."[4]

If we look at the plot of *Northanger Abbey*, the ironical tone of Austen becomes apparent and we must appreciate that she is not abashed to exhibit it, rather she feels some elation's in her ironical gesticulations. If we make a thorough survey of the novel, the grab of irony over the whole novel becomes explicit to us. Irony is there and it is all irony-ridden. With a precise artistic finesse Austen places her plot on two different geographical stations — Bath and Northanger. In *Northanger Abbey*, irony overtly juxtaposes the Gothic and the

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3. *Northanger Abbey*; Ch-1; P-1063
4. Ibid; Ch-1 P-1065

Bourgeois worlds and allows them to comment on each other. In the moulding of the plot Austen purposively transports her heroine, Catherine at first from Fullerton to Bath under the managerial supervision of the chaperon, Mrs. Allen, a good neighbour of the Moreland family. With curiosity we notice that after the ironic function which as per Austen's plan the Bath scenario is scheduled to perform, with a not unnatural manipulation the novelist whisks our heroine from Bath to Northanger to perform her function in the same ironical role in a different perspective.

Had *Northanger Abbey* been a faint-copy of the Radcliffen novel? We would expect to come across in the heroine a replica of the heroine found in a Gothic novel. But we must appreciate that Austen never makes the heroine's sensibility the centre of action. In *Northanger Abbey,* the heroine's function is doubled with the doubling of the action. There is irony even in its internal point of view: in fact, that its two worlds must originate, converge and be finally discriminated in the limited consciousness of that most ingenuious and domestic heroine, Catherine Moreland. And Marvin Mudrick to highlight the point ironically remarks:

"the double-burden seems almost too much for so lightweight a mind."[5]

The ironical tone of the author is discernable even in the opening part of the novel. At the out-set, nobody but the novelist knows that Catherine is deigned to be a potential Gothic heroine:

"No one who had ever seen Catherine Moreland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine. Her situation in life, the character of a father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her."[6]

Again Austen states that Catherine 'had a thin awakard figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark, lank hair and strong features'. Nor are her abilities those of a heroine:

"She never could learn or understand anything before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid."[7]

The ironical tone of Austen vis-à-vis Catherine's not getting a partner for love romance inspite of attaining the age of seventeen is highlighted in the following lines:

5. *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense & Discovery;* Ch-II; P-40. Title: The Literary Pretext Continued: Irony Versus Gothicism.
6. *Northanger Abbey;* Ch-1; P-1063.
7. Ibid; Ch-1; P-1063

"She had reached the age of seventeen without having seen one amiable youth who could call forth her sensibility; without having inspired one real passion, and without having excited even any admiration but what was very moderate and very transient."[8]

Though the main light unfaulteringly is projected on Catherine, Austen takes every opportunity to shift her focus now and then on the minor characters as well, so that her ironical perspective may take a ubiquitous dimension. To strengthen the point that Catherine does not have any attribute of the heroine of a Gothic romance, the incongruity of her family situation and her social milieu has been ventilated. In the portraiture of Mrs. Moorland, we failed to notice the projection of a heroine's mother:

"Mrs. Moreland knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspicious of danger to her daughter from their machinations."[9]

In the portrait of Mrs. Allen the same ironical tone is noticeable. Mrs. Allen is 'one of that numerous class of females, whose society

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8. Ibid; Ch-1; P-1065.
9. Ibid; Ch-2; P-1066.

can raise no other emotion than surprise at their being any man in the world who could live them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The year of a gentle woman, in active good temper and trifling turn of mind were all that put account for her being the choice of a sensible intelligent man like Mr. Allen'.

We must notice that as the plot of *Northanger Abbey* advances, Austen retreats to the rear shoving Henry Tilney to the front to enact as her representative. Since the first appearance of Henry, he is presented as an anti-hero. But there the matter does not end. Among the male characters he is the single one who plays the vital function in both the two world of Bath and Northanger to present the Gothic ideology upside-down and make an effective ironical review of the unsustainable Gothic Illusions. We fully endorse the view of Muddrick when he says:

"Not only is Henry within the two actions of the story, but he becomes our chief observer and interpreter of both."[10]

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10. Marvin Mudrick: *Irony as Defense & Discovery;* Ch-II; P-43

To focus the ironical temperament of Henry, Austen is as solicitous as anything. Perhaps the detonation of a bomb would cause less damage to a populous place than what Henry does vis-a-vis *'The Mysteries of Udolphs'* in his following observation:

"My dear Eleanor, the riot is only in your brain. The confusion there is scandalous. Miss Moreland has been talking of nothing more dreadful than a new publication which is shortly to come out, in three duo-decimo volumes, two hundred and seventy six pages in each, with a frontispiece to be first, of two tombstones and a lantern — do you understand? And you Miss Moreland — my stupid sister has mistaken all your clearest expression. You talked of expected horrors in London; and instead of instantly conceiving as any rational preacher could have done, that such words could relate only to a circulating library, she immediately pictured to herself a mob of three thousand men assembling in St. George's Fields; the Bank attacked, the Tower threatened, the streets of London flowing with blood..."[11]

Perhaps no greater scathing on the Gothic romances could be made. We must notice that while all other characters of the novel excluding the Tilney family happened to be the functional characters bound in some kind of bondage and preserved in the volt of a Gothic

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11. *Northanger Abbey*; Ch-14; P-1125

romance, Henry appreciates the whole situation with an ironist's enjoyment.

In the Bath scenario, it is Isabella Thorpe who first explicitly introduces the Gothic theme. Isabella parades herself as a heroine and Catherine dazzled by the show is quite willing to play the confidante to this paragon of beauty and sensibility. After the introductory phase intimacy grows between the two girls and Catherine gets infatuated with the spa of Isabella's personality. Plunged into all this self-conscious heroism, Catherine has no difficulty in accepting Isabella's protestations of affection, altruism and constancy. Catherine is moving stably toward the Gothic world. Her ingenuousness and ignorance have prevented her from suspecting Isabella's indefatigable coquetry, her malice toward women, her large foolish generalisations abut men. Strange enough, Catherine yet does not detect that it is not Isabella but she who has been destined for the role of heroine. To make the Gothic atmosphere complete, we are expected to find in the Bath world insinuation of a villain or two, and a recognisable Gothic setting to consolidate herself delution. Burlesquing of the Gothic world Austen wants to achieve through her usual ironical overtone. A Gothic romance invariably would import

in its fold a dreadful villain. Austen also imports the same in her book in the shape of John Thorpe. But how different he is from the Gothic type! Against the malice, hypocrisy, treachery and wickedness at Udolpho, Jane Austen invents in her novel an ironical counterpart. She provides a villain but her irony prompts her to project the same in a dimished scale with puncturing of the grandiose pretentions of the Gothic Villain. Austen, the ironist in the character of John Thorpe places an anti-type of the Gothic villain and a proto-type of the real one, contemptible in all earnest. The ironical note prevalent in the novel is rightly appreciated by Marvin Muddrick when he remarks:

"The most interesting novelistic fact about all these characters is that – whatever else they may be – they are consistently, even rigidly functional. They perform the special task of parody within a domestic setting of action beside action: they behave as the author knows that bourgeois types behave, and in their behaviour they suggest the corresponding Gothic types by being so different, by displaying the Gothic qualities reserved and contracted."[12]

It has already been observed that the characters in *Northanger Abbey* are consistently functional characters, and their functions are

12. M. Mudrick: *Irony as Defense & Discovery*, P-47

to illustrate the double irony of Jane Austen. Firstly, she shows that the Gothic world does not correspond to human nature as it may be seen at Bath and secondly, that the human nature as it may be seen at Bath is not necessarily more agreeable or more trustworthy than the Udolpho variety.

In contrast to the rest, Henry stands in the novel as a distinctive luminary who is no doubt a functional character, but at the same time more than that. He may be viewed as the Gothic hero reversed. With him, irony is here and there and everywhere. At the first instance, he accepts Catherine as heroine, but does not fall in love with her at the first sight. He is not seen to be engaged in act of chivalry to redress the heroine from the villain's clutch. He is full with worldly pragmatism and it is he who ultimately delivers our heroine from the colourful meshes of her romantic delusions. We must appreciate that in no other novel after *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen has been so conspicuously absent from the inner and outer functional scenario of the plot. Till the end of the novel, Henry Tilney is posted as an over seering mentor ever engaged in rectifying the ingrained delusions of Catherine.

For the ironical observation of the author vis-à-vis the world of Gothic romances spatial shift of the plot becomes a necessity and on that account the plot is moved from Bath to Northanger:

"Mr. and Mrs. Allen were sorry to lose their young friend, whose good humour and cheerfulness had made her a valuable companion, and in the promotion of whose enjoyment their own had been greatly increased. Her happiness in going with Miss. Tilney, however prevented their wishing it otherwise; and as they were to remain only one more week in Bath themselves, her quitting them now would not long be felt." [13]

The Journey that takes Catherine to Northanger Abbey, the ancestral house of the Tilney family creates a congenial prefatorial atmosphere for our coming across ironical lambasting made to the heroine by the novelist's representative. The gap between what Catherine expects to view at Northanger and what really the picture is, has been repeatedly highlighted during the conversation between Catherine and Henry during their onward journey to Northanger. With psudo seriousness and urchin like trickery he aggravates the suspension and fear in the mind of Catherine as to her expectation of

13. *Northanger Abbey;* Ch-20; P-1148

fulfilment of a Gothic romance narrative. The following statement of Henry is resplendent with unmitigable irony:

"And, are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that building such as what one reads about may produce? Have you stout hurt? Nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?"[14]

Jane Austen did not intend to make Catherine a female Sherlock Holmes but on her arrival at Northanger heart is shaken both with an elation on the thought that here she will view a real handiwork of Gothic romance and simultaneously the thought encumbers her with a fearful shakiness at heart. And we notice more than once ignoring civility and crossing the barrier of decorum, she makes surreptitious lone adventures to different nooks and corners of the Abbey to explore if anything marrow shivering can be discovered, either in the closed chest or behind the closed doors of a not long-used-room. Everytime her romantic expectations are miserably tentalised and everytime Henry with a mentor's psychology comes to her rescue. And the Austenian irony gains the sharpest edge in the closing part of the

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14. Ibid; Ch-20; P- 1150

novel where after Catherine's sneaky entrance to the deserted room supposed to be inhabited by dead Mrs. Tilney fills Catherine with the impression that the dead woman was a victim of Captain Tilney's cruelty and she succumbed to her death because of her husband's prolonged prosecution. But her line of thought well nourished by her study of the Gothic romances experiences a traumatic shock when Henry explains to her the cause of Mrs. Tilney's death, which was certainly a natural one with no incriminatory role played by Captain Tilney in this behalf.

We must admit that the second part of *Northanger Abbey* which we term the Northanger Abbey episode, is built by Jane Austen with the positive purpose of disillusioning Catherine of her romantic notions about an Abbey and its mysteries:

"The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened. Henry's address, short as it had been, had more thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies than all their several disappointments had done. Most grievously was she humbled. Most bitterly did she cry."[15]

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15. Ibid; Ch-25; P- 1175

When our approach is to investigate the ironical twists dispensed by Austen to show her temperamental penchant, we cannot fail to note Austen's perspicuous toying with the prevalent social mannerisms especially in the feminine world. Though the marital issue between a man and a woman of two different social status has been the main focus in *Pride and Prejudice,* the marital issue never has been absent from the world of fiction of Jane Austen. Austen was no femininist and no where did she cry Jehad against the unjust social persecution meted out to the female class, nor did she enact the role of a social reformer. As in other novels in *Northanger Abbey* as well, she portrays two different social milieus — one conspicuously petit middle class and the other, the aristocrat. Here unlike *Pride and Prejudice,* the clash between the two classes never sits on the steering. Rather in the Bath-world scenario, we come across a happy social intercourse between the two. But the tone in this behalf adopts an ironical air when Mrs. Allen and the like-go-on making perpetually the meaningless efforts to pose as women of the higher class than they really were. Particularly in the conduct and manners, gestures and gesticulations of Isabella, we experience a timid rehearsal of the Manners drama. The whole first part till Catherine is transported to Northanger Abbey the cohortive role of Isabella in the life drama of

Catherine is purposively projected in a parodial tone with a view to fecilitating Austen's ironical weaponry. Isabella with her urban cleverness and undesirable insolence in the Baths social world surrogates herself in the position of the lead female role and though not at the centre of any young barron's attention. To Catherine she airs such an impression and the sharp irony of Austen unmasked to us the romantic hallucinatory world Catherine is prone to live in. Though no young man pays any attention to her she fabricates a concocted story of being the object of worship of a dozen of young men. The very sight at her near vicinity of James Moorley, a victim of John Thorpe's friendship induces Isabella to entrap him in her love meshes. We would be really happy if this love of Isabella would be her first love and the last one. Meanwhile, we would find her with an engagement of James an ideal parodying of the grammar of love. But contrary to her declaration that constancy is the other name of woman she dallies with her pre-fixed love relation with Moorley at the very first opportunity of making love hob-nobbing with Frederick Tilney. Here the ironical jibe of Jane Austen mercilessly falls upon the women like Isabella and the like in the following comment of Henry at the back of Catherine's observations:

"Though she has behaved so ill by our family, she may behave better by yours. Now she has really got the man she likes, she may be constant."[16]

Henry Tilney in reply utters:

"Indeed, I am afraid she will: I am afraid she will be very constant, unless a Baronet should come in her way; that is Frederick's only chance". [17]

In all the novels of Austen irony plays Constantly in a larger scale over every person and situation in the novel. It is not the less cleverly managed because it seldom leaves the level of literary joke. The novel, *Northanger Abbey* is a minor masterpiece, particularly fine in its presentation of Catherine Morland. It is she who satisfies the requirements of anti-romance, but goes beyond it to become an embodiment of honesty, spontaneity and moral fastidiousness that is convincing and attractive.

As a whole, it is unified and the novel contains a mixture of immature and of extremely skilled elements. The satiric interests

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16. Ibid; Ch-25; P- 1180
17. Ibid; Ch-25; P- 1180

behind its brisk take off of popular novel genres. It quite evidently belongs to Jane Austen's juvenile satires on various Kinds of contemporary literature. It provides a structural framework and a basis for characterisation in a novel whose chief interest is psychological rather than satiric. It centres upon Catherine Moreland's metamorphosis from immature child to responsible adult:

"Soon were all her thinking powers swallowed up in the reflection of her own change of feelings and spirits since last she had trodden that well-known road. It was not three months ago since, wild with joyful expectations, she had there run backward and forwards some ten times a day, with a heart light, gay, and independent; looking forward to pleasures untasted and unalloyed, and free from the apprehension of evil as from the knowledge of it. Three months ago had seen her all this, and now, how altered a being did she return![18]

It is this 'alteration' in Catherine. This alteration is a part of the natural process of growing up, that the novel is about. The use of satiric elements in *Northanger Abbey* seems to suggest that the process of rewriting and revision built up the development of Catherine's

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18. Ibid; Ch-29; P- 1198

character. Her method of using satire in this novel has a sureness and poise that seems to belong to her most mature work:

"The anxiety which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity."[19]

The novel, *Northanger Abbey* as a whole may be expected to be a little more than a burlesque, but in reality it is found to be a tender and perceptive exploration of the limits of good sense. Catherine is essentially a girl. She is illusioned only in some areas that the novel of terror has distorted. She becomes a good friend of Isabella Thorpe, only because it is a Gothic convention that a confidante is indispensable, but John Thorpe is so ridiculously rustic that he cannot even be a Gothic hero and Catherine dislikes him as soon as she sees him. And soon she sees through the shallowness of Isabella even. She also does not hesitate to like Eleanor Tilney for 'her good sense good breeding'. But the novel surpasses the boundaries of common

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19. Ibid; Ch-31; P- 1206

sense and takes on a dimension beyond it, because the attribute of commonsense does not allow Catherine to manage adequately her summary dismissal from Northanger Abbey. That attribute of common sense does not allow her to console herself completely, when she can not expect to marry Henry Tilney any longer. On her returning home, she finds that there are some situations of the human mind in which good sense has very little power. So, *Northanger Abbey,* starting as a burlesque, ends as a critique not only of the sentimental Gothic novel, but also of common sense which Austen so highly regards, but whose limitations she is not afraid to set forth.

MANSFIELD PARK

It is common knowledge that Jane Austen is a humorist whose favourite weapon is irony. Her novels are all comedies in which she exposes the absurdities and failings of her characters. Her attitude to life is essentially that of a comic artist and her vision is ironical and satirical. It may also be noted that there is little malice in her attitude, though a note of bitterness occasionally creeps into it.

While irony is all-pervasive in *Emma*, the use of irony in *Mansfield Park* is very limited. Irony as a device of character delineation in *Mansfield Park* is used mainly in the portryal of Mrs. Norris, and to a lesser extent in the case of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price. In the presentation of Mr. Rushworth, Mr. Yates and Mrs. Grant also irony is employed as a means of suggesting some of the traits of their characters and also some remarks which are ironical in the light of later events. It is, however, the irony of situation that seems to be pronounced in the present novel.

As in *Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park* too, the chief interest lies in the structural irony and it is well evidenced by the Fanny-

Edmund plot. In this connection it seems relevant to note that some eminent scholars have referred to a marked absence of Austen's characteristic irony in *Mansfield Park*. Professor Lionel Trilling, for example, observes,

> *"but there is one novel of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park (Published 1814), in which the characteristic irony seems not to be at work. Indeed, one might say of this novel that it undertakes to discredit irony and to affirm literalness, that it demonstrates that there are no two ways about anything. And Mansfield Park is for this reason held by many to be the novel that is least representative of Jane Austen's peculiar attractiveness."*[1]

Nevertheless, there are critics who seem to disagree with Trilling and hold that "the structure of Mansfield Park as a whole is ironic,"[2] and "the central irony of the plot is that Fanny is indeed not their equal, though not in the sense suggested by Mrs. Norris, who never misses an opportunity of reminding Fanny of her inferiority. Fanny shows herself superior to all the other characters by constantly respecting and actively trying to uphold to traditional values symbolized by Mansfield Park."[3]

1. *Jane Austen and Mansfield Park From Blake to Byron*, Pelican Guide to Eng. Literature 5 (Penguin 1957); P-113
2. John Odmark: *An Understanding of Jane Austen's Novels*; P-13
3. Ibid

The difference between the external and the internal, the circumstantial and the moral, obviously is a central source of irony. The irony in Austen's novels determines the course of the action and we can locate it in the structure of the plot. The structural irony in *Mansfield Park* lies in the initial notion of a man's growing relationship with a woman when they are cousin brothers and sisters as a 'mischief'. Significantly, one remembers how Darcy's scornful comments about Elizabeth early in *Pride and Prejudice* sets the action on its ironic course; and in the same way, Mrs. Norris's uncalled for advice to Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* discovers the facts of the novel's ironic course of action:-

"you are thinking of your sons; but do not you know that of all things upon earth that is the least likely to happen, brought up as they would be, always together like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible. I never knew an instance of it. It is, in fact, the only sure way of providing against the connection. Suppose her a pretty girl, and seen by Tom or Edmend for the first time seven years hence, and I dare say there would be miischief. The very idea of her having been suffered to grow up at a distance from us all in poverty and neglect, would be enough to make either of the dear, sweet-tempered boys in love with her. But breed her up with them from this time, and suppose her even to have the beauty of an angel, and she will never more to either than an sister."[4]

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4. *Mansfield Park*; Ch-1; P-471

Mansfield Park opens with a descriptive narration of situation regarding the marriage of the three ward sisters and this makes us glance backward over thirty years. In the social context, the marriage in Austen's novels is a crucial event. The 'Situation' in life of the three sisters is determined by the performance of choosing husbands. This narrative portion reflects the author's ironical vision in terms of the social context:-

"About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the country of Northamton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a Baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income. All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the match, and her uncle, the lawyer himself allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to it."[5]

What is significant about the above quoted passage is Austen's satirical twist and its calmest and most deadly way and Austen here seems to suggest rather ironically that marriage is a transaction.

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5. Ibid; Ch-1; P-471

Early in the novel we get the impression that Mrs. Norris has a sympathetic nature. She has taken an initiative that Fanny is brought from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park to stay there as measure of economic relief and assistance to Mr. And Mrs. Price who have a large number of children. However, in accomplishing this commendable deed, she takes every precaution to make sure that she does not have to incur any expenditure herself. The manner of her refusal is comic and it reveals her parsimonious nature and her resolve never to spend a penny on anybody even out of charity. While urging Sir Thomas for maintaining Fanny she offers all kinds of plausible reasons, meeting all his objections in this regard yet she has an assumption to say:-

"Whatever I can do, as you well know, I am always ready enough to do for the good of those I love; and, though I could never feel for this little girl the hundredth part of the regard I bear your own dear children, nor consider her, in any respect, so much my own, I should hate myself if I were capable of neglecting her. Is not she a sister's child? And could I bear to see her want while I had a bit of bread to give her? My dear Sir Thomas, with all my faults I have a warm heart; and poor as I am, would rather deny myself the necessaries of life than do an ungenerous thing."[6]

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6. Ibid; Ch-1; P-471-72

The author here expresses her motive that Mrs. Norris's love of money was equal to her love of directing affairs, and she knew quite as well how to save her money as to make her friends and relations spend their money. Mrs. Norris is a talkative woman with a fertile mind making suggestions which involve no financial expenditure on her own part. Mrs. Norris is drawn ironically throughout the novel. When, at a later stage it is suggested to her that she should now take over the responsibility for the maintenance of Fanny, her reply is as follows:-

"Me! never. I never spoke a syllable about it to Sir Thomas, nor he to me. Fanny live with me! The last thing in the world for me to think of, or for anybody to wish that really knows us both. Good heaven! What could I do with Fanny? Me? A poor, helpless, forlorn widow, unfit for anything, my spirits quite broken down; what could I do with a girl at her time of life? A girl of fifteen!"[7]

These lines are full of self-pity. Nevertheless, they are very amusing because they clearly reveal Mrs. Norris's hypocrisy and her determination never to spend any money on anybody. In fact, she

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7. Ibid; Ch-3; P-484-85

repeats the same arguments in different words in the course of the discussion on this subject, saying to Lady Bertram:-

"Dear Sister, if you consider my unhappy state, how can she be any comfort to me? Here am I, a poor desolate widow, deprived of the best of husbands, my health gone in attending and nursing him, my spirits still worse, all my peace in this world destroyed, with hardly enough to support me in the rank of a gentlewoman, and enable me to live so as not to disgrace the memory of the dear departed - what possible comfort could I have in taking such a charge upon me as Fanny?"[8]

It was described by Mrs. Norris to her sister Lady Bertram. Mrs. Norris was a hypocrite in nature and her hypocrisy is emphasized when she says to her sister:-

"My object, Lady Bertram, is to be of use to those that come after me. It is for your children's good that I wish to be richer. I have nobody else to care for; but I should be very glad to think I could leave a little trifle among them worth their having."[9]

What she means to say is that whatever money she can save in her life will be left to Lady Bertram's children and she further says-

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8. Ibid; Ch-3; P-484-85
9. Ibid; Ch-3; P-485

"Well, Lady Bertram, I can only say that my sole desire is to be of use to your family."[10]

These ironical expressions are intended to convey to us Mrs. Norris's parsimonious nature. When Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, Mrs. Norris takes pleasure in the thought that she has been instrumental in the girl's being brought there, she feels very self important. It is she who welcomes Fanny first of all and then recommends her to the kindness of the Bertram family. Here, Jane Austen seeks to emphasize Mrs. Norris's feeling of self-importance in an ironical manner. It is also an ironical and amusing manner of conveying to us some traits of Mrs. Norris's character. When Mrs. Norris has succeeded in bringing about the engagement of Maria and Mr. Rushworth, we find that the intercourse between the Bertram and the Rushworth families was carried on without restraint, and that no other attempt was made at secrecy than Mrs. Norris's talking of it every where as a matter not to be talked of at present. This is again an ironical remark. The irony here arises from the contrast between the attempted secrecy and Mrs. Norris's talking of the matter

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10. Ibid; Ch-3; P-486

everywhere. When the theatricals are decided upon, the author ironically tells us that Mrs. Norris took great pleasure in the decision as "the whole arrangement was to bring very little expense to anybody, and none at all to herself, and as she foresaw in it all the comforts of hurry, bustle, and imprtance."

In this connection, an eminent critic remarks about Mrs. Norris:

"Mrs. Norris is no amusing 'extra' in a crowded cast of characters, but the person directly responsible for the principal development in the novel: she has supervised her nieces, upbringing, encouraged two of them in the selfish pride that causes their ultimate downfall, and bullied the third into the spirit of humble resignation that ensures her ultimate happiness." [11]

What Sir Thomas Bertram observes after a short pause reflects a deeper understanding of the situation and also a more thoughtful resolve-

"Yes, let her home be in this house. We will endeavour to do our duty by her, and she will at least, have the advantage of companions of her own age, and of a regular instructress."[12].

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11. *Jane Austen:* Yasmine Gooneratne, Ch-7; P-113; Cambridge Univ. Press
12. *Mansfield Park*; Ch-1; P-473

The comments contain a careful approach of ironical device meant for Mrs. Norris, which she understands with remarkable alertness:-

"Very true", cried Mrs. Norris, which are both very important considerations ; and it will be just the same to Miss Lee, whether she has three girls to teach or only two – there can be no difference. I only wish I could be more useful; but you see, I do all in my power. I am not one of those that spare their own trouble; and Nanny shall fetch her, however, it may put me to inconvenience to have my chief counsellor away for three days. I suppose, sister, you will put the child in the little white attic, near the old nurseries. It will be much the best place for her, so near Miss Lee and not far from the girls and close by the house maids, who could either of them help to dress her, you know, and take care of her clothes, for I suppose you would not think it fair to expect Ellis to wait on her as well as the others. Indeed, I do not see that you could possible place her anywhere else."[13]

What strikes one in the above quoted passage is the characteristic irony which Jane Austen often shows in portraying the characters in her novels. Mrs. Norris strikes us as an interesting woman and in the first place, she is a woman of action. She has some spirit of activities that drives her to suggest to Sir Thomas that

13. Ibid; Ch-1; P-473

something should be done to remove or relieve the financial distress of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Price. One of the most striking characteristics of Mrs. Norris which has been ironically described by the author that she is very careful not to incur any financial responsibilities herself or to undertake any financial burdens. Here, Mrs. Norris shows her moral courage acknowledging her own deficiency. She resumes the advisory role without any loss of face. She has a fertile mind for making suggestions which involve no financial expenditure on her own part. In this way, the character of Mrs. Norris is drawn through ironic suggestions by the author throughout the novel. The rest of the dialogue has been quoted for the consideration of possible problems of adjustment in accommodating a child in the Bertram family. Even Sir Thomas Worries:-

"There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris, observed Sir Thomas, as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my daughters, the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin, and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram. I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorise in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they can not be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different. It is a point of great

delicacy, and you must assist us in our endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct."[14]

Here we find Thomas Bertram's secure position in society which projects a clear perception. Although he can do nothing for Lieutenant Price, now he is prepared to extend his patronage where he can to assist those connected with him by family ties.

In chapter 4 of *Mansfield Park*, the main events are the return of Tom from Antigua and the introduction of three new persons in the social circle of the Bertram Family. On the other hand, in their absence (Sir Thomas and Tom), Mrs. Norris took a good deal of interest for her nieces, helping them in their toilettes, displaying their accomplishments, and looking about for their future husbands. All is arranged for a matrimonial alliance between Mr. Rushworth and Maria. This is also an ironical and amusing manner of conveying to us some traits of Mrs. Norris's character. The following extract reveals:-

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14. Ibid; Ch-1; P-474

"The earliest intelligence of the travellers' safe arrival in Antigua after a favourite voyage, was received; though not before Mrs. Norris had been indulging in very dreadful fears, and trying to make Edmund participate them whenever she could get him alone; and as she depended on being the first person made acquainted with any fatal catastrophe, she had already arranged the manner of breaking it to all the others, when Sir Thoma's assurances of their both being alive and well, made it necessary to lay by her agitation and affectionate prepatory speeches for a while."

"The winter came and passed without their being called for; the accounts continued perfectly good; and Mrs. Norris in promoting gaieties for her nieces, assisting their toilettes, displaying their accomplishments, and looking about for their future husbands, had so much to do so, in addition to all her own household cares, some interference in those of her sister, and Mrs. Grant's wasteful doings to overlook, left her very little occasion to be occupied even in fears for the absent."[15]

There is also an example of the use of irony in chapter 12 when Mrs. Norris expresses the view that Henry Crawford would soon marry Julia. The irony arises from the fact that we already know, and we believe, with Fanny, that Henry has a preference for Maria. Evidently Mrs. Norris is too thick-headed to see the reality even though an elderly woman like her should have been expected to show more

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15. Ibid; Ch-4; P-488

discernment in a matter like this. The irony here is to be found in Mrs. Norris's misreading of the situation or in the contrast between appearance and reality.

When the staging of the play has been decided, the author ironically tells us that Mrs. Norris took great pleasure in the decision as the whole arrangement was to bring every little expense to anybody and none at all to herself, and as she foresaw in it all the comforts of hurry, bustle, and importance. Here we find another example of the use of irony in the portrayal of Mrs. Norris. When Sir Thomas feels somewhat disappointed with Mrs. Norris because she had not tried to prevent the theatricals from being held in his house. The author here ironically tells us that it is Mrs. Norris's 'greatest support and glory was in having formed the connection with the Rushworths'.

The author has used the episode of the play to dramatise her attitude toward her art. Among other things, the rehearsals are a kind of metaphor for her own former irony. Acting in a play is a means of being another self, of speaking with another voice and irony and wit are dramatic in the same respect. But in *Mansfield Park*, she is shedding her ironic voices to speak what is predominantly her own.

Here her irony has served the same purpose for her and her characters as the rehearsals have for the young people at the park.

Later, we find an important development in the plot in chapter 21, and that is Maria's marriage to Mr. Rushworth to whom she has been engaged for quite some time. Maria has never been in love with Mr. Rushworth, and she marries him only after she finds that Henry Crawford, the man with whom she has really been in love, does not care much for her and has only been flirting with her. Indeed, she (Maria) has the feeling that Henry, by his attitude of indifference towards her after having shown a preference for her, has destroyed her happiness. She does not want to let him know that she has been longing for him, and so she marries Mr. Rushworth to produce an impression that everything is all right with her.

The marriage of Maria and Rushworth is described by the author in a comic and ironical manner. Thus we read:-

"It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed – the two bridesmaids were duly inferior; her father gave her away; her mother stood with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated; her aunt tried to cry; and the service was

impressively read by Dr. Grant. Nothing could be objected to when it came under the discussion of the neighbourhood, except that the carriage which conveyed the bride and bridegroom and Julia from the church door to Sotherton was the same chaise which Mr. Rushworth had used for a twelvemonth before. In everything else the etiquette of the day might stand the strictest investigation."[16]

On this occasion, the behavior of Mrs. Norris really gives us pleasure. She is very happy in performing the duties of the occasion. She spends the whole day at Mansfield Park to support Lady Bertram's spirits. She drinks a couple of extra glasses of wine to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth; she feels happy indeed on this occasion because it was she who had made the match. Moreover, she has no doubt at all that the couple would lead a perfectly happy life. There is irony behind these words because later we shall find that the marriage, far from proving happy, turns out to be a disaster for both of them.

As in other novels of Austen, in *Mansfield Park* also one finds many occasions of authorial comments pregnant with ironic suggestions. One such situation is evident in the twenty-sixth chapter when we see that Sir Thomas decided to arrange a ball at Mansfield

16. Ibid; Ch-21; P-591

Park for his niece and nephew (Fanny and William). It has been arranged by Sir Thomas to have the pleasure of dancing. Even without the proferred help of Mrs. Norris, the date has been fixed and the invitations had already been sent to some neighbours. Thus we read:-

"Ah, my dear Sir Thomas!" interrupted Mrs. Norris, "I knew what was coming. I knew what you were going to say. If dear Julia were at home, or dearest Mrs. Rushworth at Sotherton, to afford a reason, an occasion for such a thing, you would be tempted to give the young people a dance at Mansfield. I knew you would. If they were at home to grace the ball, a ball you would have this very Christmas. Thank your uncle, William, thank your uncle!"

"My daughters", replied Sir Thomas, gravely interposing, "have their pleasures at Brighton, and I hope are very happy; but the dance which I think of giving at Mansfield will be for their cousins. Could we be all assembled, our satisfaction would undoubtedly be more complete, but the absence of some is not to debar the others of amusement."

"Mrs. Norris had not another word to say. She saw decision in his looks, and her surprise and vexation required some minutes silence to be settled into composure. A ball at such a time! His daughters absent and herself not consulted! There was comfort, however, soon at hand. She must be the doer of everything: Lady Bertram would of course be spared all thought and exertion, and it would all fall upon her. She would have to do the honours of the evening; and this reflection quickly restored

so much of her good humour as enabled her to join in with the others, before their happiness and thanks were all expressed."[17]

Through the above extract, Mrs. Norris expresses her unhappiness over Sir Thomas's decision about the ball at Mansfield Park. But soon we realise that she consoles herself with the thought that she would, after all, get another chance to show her importance. She told firmly that she would be the doer of everything and she would do the honours of the occasion. It became a repose in her mind that she would restore her good humour. In other words, it is clear to us that Mrs. Norris actually does not want the ball which should be held in honour of Fanny and William, but she adapts herself to the situation with the thought that she would get another opportunity to show her importance at Mansfield Park. This is also an ironical remark by the author who enjoys it through the representation of her creation in making the situation in her novels.

Before closing our discussion about *Mansfield Park*, we shall go one step further to discuss the ironical portrayal of the character

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17. Ibid; Ch-26; P-622

of Lady Bertram, the wife of Sir Thomas Bertram. She was a girl of great beauty when Sir Thomas married her. It was approximately thirty years before the story of the novel begins. Early in the novel, she is described as a 'woman of very tranquil feelings and a temper remarkably easy and indolent'. Indeed, these are the special traits of Lady Bertram's character which frequently come into our discussion in the course of the novel. We also find that she was completely a lethargic woman sitting nicely dressed on a sofa. She does some needle work which is of no use and beauty. She thinks more of her dog than her children. She is always guided in everything important by Sir Thomas and in other smaller concerns by her sister, Mrs. Norris. This is an ironical way of mentioning her indolence and lack of the sense of responsibility as a mother. Lady Bertram's inability to take any decision and her complete dependence on her husband even any futile matter are ironically explained to us by the author. In this regard, we may cite here an example used by the author : when she was playing cards at the parsonage, she asks her husband whether she should play speculation or whist, and ultimately decides to play speculation because it was suggested by her husband, Thomas Bertram. When Fanny was sent to her parents' house at Parsonage in respect of an invitation, she asks her husband whether she can spare

Fanny for the day and ultimately allows her (Fanny) to go as the hints are given to Lady Bertram by her husband in the positive. There are such lot of examples which we find in the novel in the course of the action.

Another ironical remark comes on the occasion of the ball, when Fanny appears very elegant and well-dressed. It is demanded by her (Lady Bertram) that the credit completely goes to her only. Describing Fanny's elegance on this purpose, she had sent Miss Chapman, her maid to help Fanny in getting dressed. The actual fact is that Fanny did not take any help in getting dressed herself for the ball. The irony here arises from the contrast between Lady Bertram's claim and the actual fact.

Finally, there is the irony of situation. Edmund takes Fanny into confidence about his love for Mary. He wants support and sympathy from Fanny, not knowing at all that Fanny herself is in love with him. The irony here arises from the contrast between appearance and reality. This reality is that Fanny is in love with Edmund, but apparently she is only Edmund's confidante. Another ironical situation develops when Edmund earnestly exhorts Fanny to

accept Henry's proposal of marriage. Here again the irony arises from the contrast between appearance and reality. Edmund gives this advice to Fanny as Fanny's well-wisher, but he does not know that Fanny herself is deeply in love with him.

EMMA

That *Emma* is a major work of Austen's fictional excellence, both positively and otherwise, can hardly be denied.' So far as texture is concerned, it is hardly less light and sparkling than *Pride and Prejudice*. Its craftsmanship is excellent, but it is partly manifest, partly well- below the surface. It is free from such faults as are found in other novels of Jane Austen. It was perhaps due to the fact that Jane Austen had taken "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like."[1] Until the end of the incident at Box Hill, which is the emotional climax of the book and the beginning of Emma's regeneration, she has been guilty of much that is reprehensible in both thought and deed. *Pride and Prejudice* is, no doubt, a complex and subtle work of art, but *Emma* is much more complex and subtler than even *Pride and Prejudice*.

Emma is unquestionably a charming character, but not without some faults in her. It is due to these faults that the author gets full scope for exercising her free-ranging irony. The earlier section of the

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1. *Memoir;* Ch-10; P-157

novel is charged with this characteristic irony. Through direct narration Austen introduces us to the heroine:

"Emma woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition, who seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."[2]

Use of irony is all-pervasive in *Emma*. We have the first suggestion of it in the opening chapter. It is much in evidence when it is found that Emma is often distressed and vexed – particularly when she is engaged in match- making schemes and these schemes always misfire. The irony gains in force when Emma is emotionally entangled with hard-headed Kinightley. An ironical twist is also there in the way she sizes up Mr. Elton. Emma thinks Mrs. Elton to be "self important, presuming, familiar, ignorant and ill-bred". Now some of these faults are there among Emma's own characteristics also. We have found her to be self-important and presuming though not familiar or ignorant or ill-bred. In the structure of the novel, Jane Austen

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2. *Emma;* Ch-1; P-763

devises a series of scenes of ironic parallel and contrast where, without any direct comment from herself, she illustrates her theme. The danger of Emma's total ignorance of her own nature is emphasized by showing us how much Emma has in common with Mrs. Elton. Emma dislikes Mrs. Elton so much that she can hardly be polite to her, while at the same time Emma is shown to be infected with many of the same traits though not in so crude a form. What Mrs. Elton does in a vulgar, loud way, Emma does in a more refined and ladylike manner. Emma too is snobbish, self-complacent, presuming and malicious. And perhaps a further ironic hint is that Mrs. Elton, however unpleasant, has not been harmful to anybody, whereas Emma causes active harm to some of the persons around her.

The novel is almost replete with irony. In it, there is irony in the situation, there is irony in the dialogue and there is a deliberate conscious irony in Jane Austen's technique of characterization which reveals not just social flaws but moral flaws too. The three major narrative movements in the novel are built on irony. It is the irony of situation.

Examples of irony in dialogue are found plentifully in *Emma.* Emma in answer to knightley's protest at her meddling in forcing a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton remarks:

"Were you, yourself ever to marry, she is the very woman for you."[3]

A statement extremely ironic in view of Emma's later fears. There is lively irony, when Emma exclaims at Mrs. Weston's suggestion of possible intimacy between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax:

"My dear Mrs. Weston, do not take to match-making, you do it every ill. Jane Fairfax, mistress of the Abbey? Oh no, no- every feeling revolts. For his own sake, I would not have had him do so mad a thing."[4]

To accuse Mrs. Weston of the crime of which she (Emma) herself is guilty is transparently ironic. Ironically it is she (Emma) who has partial knowledge, it is she (Emma) who commits all the blunders, even the indiscreet one of confiding her conjectures about Jane and Dixon to Frank Churchill. We have this comic irony in Knightley when he says:

3. Ibid; Ch -8; P-800
4. Ibid; Ch -26; P-899

"I should like to see Emma in love and in some doubt of a return, it would do her good."[5]

Emma is in doubt but knightley too is in doubt whether his love is returned by Emma. Thus the dialogues in the novel are permeated with irony.

The ironical design that we find in the novels of Austen has been formulated by other critics. Marvin Mudrick in *his Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* finds out the source of the irony in a contrast between the values the author intends to uphold and those prevailing in the actual world. Mudrick's theory of irony comes close to Douglas Bush's moralistic approach in so far as it focuses on the author's personal value judgements. John Odmark in his *An Understanding of Jane Austen's Novels* analyses the structure of the novel and considers the ironic vision to be the principle which determines the structure. He says that as a rule irony in Jane Austen's fiction has been defined primarily in terms of content. What Odmark wants to draw attention to is the fact that irony is above all a

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5. Ibid; Ch -5; P-785

structuring principle that determines the shape of all the novels. In the specific context of *Emma,* Odmark notes the principle of irony as the definitive force that shapes both the plot and the characters.

Though the satire and irony of Swift remind one of Jane Austen, his indignation, hatred and violence were too direct and exploit the same technique of deflation of character and motive. It involves sometimes a partial deception of the reader who is lured and persuaded to approve of the seemingly good.

The most moral of English novelists, Samuel Richardson, is also the least ironical and witty. It was his detailed study of states of mind and feeling rather than his comparatively crude treatment of morals, that provided Austen with a model. Pamela, accepted without irony by Richardson as an embodiment of virtue, supplied hints for the satirical portrayal of Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility.*

Emma offers a clear example of the plot pattern which repeates itself several times as Emma's growth to self Knowledge progresses. We have chosen two groups of passages from this chapter for analysis which illustrate two movements of this kind. The first group, from

near the beginning of the novel, concerns Emma's relationship with Harriet; the second, from later in the book, illustrates her growing recognition of her feelings for Mr. Knightley. As we have said, we are interested in exploring techniques–especially irony–which persuade us into making particular judgements.

We are going to start by booking at two views of the friendship between Emma and Harriet, beginning with that of Emma herself when she first meets Harriet:

"She was not struck by anything remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging – not inconveniently shy, nor unwilling to talk and yet so far from pushing, showing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of everything in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense, and deserve encouragement. Encouragement should be given. Those soft blue eyes, and all those natural graces, shold not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury and its connections. The acquaintances she had already formed were unworthy of her. The friends from whom she had just parted, though very good sort of people, must be doing her harm. They were a family of the name of Martin, whom Emma well knew by character, as renting a large farm of Mr. Knightley, and residing in the parish of Donwell – very creditably, she believed; she knows Mr. Knightley thought highly of them; but they must be

coarse and unpolished, and very unfit to be the intimates of a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect. She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintances, and introduce her into good society; she would from her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers."[6]

Mr. Kinghtley, however, thinks that the friendship can only damage Harriet, as he tells Mrs. Weston:

"She will grow just refined enough to be uncomfortable with those among whom birth and circumstances have placed her home. I am much mistaken if Emma's doctrines give any strength of mind, ortend at all to make a girl adapt herself rationally to the varieties of her situation in life. They only give a little polish."

"I either depend more upon Emma's good sense than you do, or am more anxious for her present comfort; for I cannot lament the acquaintance. How well she looked last night!"

"Oh, you would rather talk of her person than her mind, would you? Very well; I shall not attempt to deny Emma's being pretty."

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6. Ibid; Ch -3; P-774-75

"Pretty! Say beautiful rather. Can you imagine anything nearer perfect beauty than Emma altogether – face and figure"?

"I do not know what I could imagine, but I confess that I have seldom seen a face or figure more pleasing to me than hers. But I am a partial old friend."[7]

The first passage is here elaborately discussed very much from Emma's point of view, following the progress of her thoughts very closely. At various points, for example, we see her drawing conclusion 'she must have good sense; they must be a coarse and unpolished'. Actually, we know nothing about Harriet, but by this stage in the novel we have formed some opinion of Emma, so as we read this passage we are both using this new evidence to confirm or change our views on Emma herself, and using our initial impressions to assess Emma's view of Harriet. Emma is pleased with Harriet for showing 'proper' and 'becoming deference', for being grateful that Emma has noticed her, and towards the end of the passage, the repetition of 'she' draws attention to Emma's concern with herself. Emma thinks she is encouraging Harriet for Harriet's good. We begin to suspect that in fact Emma is using Harriet for her own ends. She thinks first,

7. Ibid; Ch -5; P-784

for example, that taking Harriet up will be 'interesting' but only second 'a very kind undertaking' and she sees the relationship as a kind of ornament, highly becoming her own situation. We begin to suspect, then, that Emma's thoughts are being presented ironically. We are aware of a gap between what we see as her real motives and her own view of what she is doing.

Here the second passage offers a different point of view on Emma and Harriet. We can see the same oppositions at work in this second passage, perhaps they will take on thematic importance in the novel as a whole. Rather than confusion, however, Mr. Knightley's judgement of Emma and Harriet is based on careful choice between the various criteria and this contrast between his method of judgment and that of Emma herself clearly affects our view of the heroine.

So the doubts regarding Emma's attitude to Harriet are echoed by Mr. Knightley whose views seem to be based on a firm grasp of distinctions Emma herself does not see, and whose criticism carries even more weight since he is, by his own admission, fond of Emma. Even we go through the novel earlier, we know, of course that Mr. Knightley is proved right, that Harriet does suffer because Emma

gives her expectations above her social position, so that Emma's dismissal of his high opinion of the Martins here carries even greater ironic weight. Our sense that Emma is presented ironically is thus confirmed by comparing one point of view with another within the novel, and Mr. Knightley's moral case is established by the plot.

The next passage and the event that we have chosen for analysis is from the scene in which Emma draws Harriet's portrait in an effort to secure Mr. Elton's interest in her. Emma is pleased with the portrait after the first sitting:

"..... and as she meant to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance. She had great confidence in its being in every way a pretty drawing at last, and of its filling its destined place with credit to them both"...[8]

Here the scene, as a whole, again allows the reader to stand back slightly and judge her. It is made quite clear that Emma's portrait is not in fact an accurate likeness of Harriet, that she has intentionally given 'a little improvement to the figure' in the interests of furthering

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8. Ibid; Ch -6; P-789

her match with Mr. Elton. Emma sees this as perfectly justified, though the reader might want to disagree. And then Emma's friend comments on the portrait in various ways, again offering the reader the chance to compare different views:

"Miss Woodhouse has given her friend the only beauty she wanted", observed Mrs. Weston to him, not in the least suspecting that she was addressing a lover. "The expression of the eye is most correct, but Miss Smith has not those eyebrows and eyelashes. It is the fault of her face that she has them not."

"Do you think so?" replied he. "I can not agree with you. It appears to me a most perfect resemblance in every feature. I never saw such a likeness in my life. We must allow for the effect of shade, you know".

"you have made her too tall, Emma', said Mr. Knightley.

Emma knew that she had, but would not own it; and Mr. Elton Warmly added:

"Oh, no – certainly not too tall – no in the least too tall. Consider, she is sitting down, which naturally presents a different – which in short gives exactly the idea – and the proportions must be preserved, you know. Proportions, for shortening – oh, no! it gives one exactly the idea of such a height as Miss Smith's – exactly so, indeed."

"It is very pretty", said Mr. Woodhouse. "So prettily done! Just as your drawings always are, my dear. I do not know anybody who draws so well as you

do. The early thing I so not thoroughly like is, that she seems to be sitting out of doors, with only a little shawl over her shoulders; and it makes one think she must catch cold."[9]

We are again involved in judging between different opinions – here of Emma's portrait and therefore, implicitly, of her treatment of Harriet. This kind of scene, in which we see different characters' reactions side by side, is quite common in Jane Austen's fiction. It is sometimes called a touchstone situation, because by showing characters responding to the same thing it offers a kind of comparative test of their reactions. In other words, it tells us as much about the characters themselves as about the object of their attention. Here, for example, Mr. Knightley is most critical; offering simply the curt comment, "you have made her too tall"- he is right but seems perhaps oversevere. Mrs. Weston recognizes that the portrait has improved Harriet's eyes but blames Harriet's face rather than Emma for the change—'it is the fault of her face that she has them not', turning her accurate vision of the portrait, a measure of her good sense into much more indulgent and short sighted praise of Emma.

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9. Ibid; Ch -6; P-789-90

As readers we are concerned with both to decide whether to accept any of these positions and to supply motives for what the various characters say. This makes the comedy of Mr. Elton's reactions more complicated. On a second reading irony again comes into play since we know that it is Emma and not Harriet whom he is trying to flatter through his uncritical admiration of the portrait.

Thus we find that Jane Austen's comic spirit is clearly revealed in the personal relationship in ordinary life. The ironic contrast is between what Emma believes herself to be, what others believe her to be and what she really is. The story is rounded off with the reconciliation of Harriet and Mr. Martin. This provides an ironically comic contrast with that of Emma and Mr. Knightley. The revelation of the full details about Harriet's illegitimate birth completely deflates all the illusions of Emma. The way Mr. Woodhouse is made to agree to the marriage of Emma with Mr. Knightley also adds to the comedy at the close. He is prompted by fear and not love. He gives his consent because the robbing of poultry houses makes him feel the need of having somebody at Hartfield. When Mr. Elton gives his blessings to the marriage we find the last ironic touch which is a little modified by the envious and ill-tempered comments of his wife.

At last, we find in the novel that Mr. Elton's real feelings are revealed, and Emma's treatment of Harriet reaches its crisis, when he proposes to Emma herself. She is forced to recognize that her plans for Harriet have been misguided and Emma reflects on what she has done:

"The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more."[10]

How are we to judge Emma's self-criticism here? Her ability to see that she has been wrong is clearly in her favour, but how serious is she? How long will her resolution 'to do things no more' actually last?

If we have read the novel before, judgement is easier. We know that Emma still has a long way to go before she understands the full

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10. Ibid; Ch -16; P-846

implications of her self-centredness; so we are quicker to respond here to any clues that her remorse is as yet limited. The first word she uses to describe her 'error' is 'foolish', a fairly mild term of moral disapproval. She sees what she has done as a 'trick' and at the end of the paragraph, she is described as being 'quite concerned and ashamed'. These terms of mild criticism tend to suggest that when Emma does use a stronger word, describing what she has done as 'wrong'. She is not fully aware of what that term really implies.

Emma's view of her fault is very specific; she focuses on her role as match-maker rather than seeing this as part of her general influence over Harriet, and the opposition which she uses to describe her mistake – 'making light of what ought to be simple' – do not really coincide with the more serious kinds of moral confusion illustrated by Mr. Knightley's judgements which we looked at earlier.

We are going next to a passage under chapter 38, which suggests Emma's feelings for Mr. Knightley even more clearly. It occurs during the ball. Emma dances with Frank Charchill for most of the evening, though she is by now sure, she is not in love with him, but she is worried by the fact that Mr. Knightley is not dancing:

"There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing, not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who where pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up, so young as he looked! He could not have appeared to greater advantage perhaps anywhere, than where he had placed himself. His tall, firm, upright figure, among the buly forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men, was such as Emma felt must draw everybody's eyes; and, excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared with him. He moved a few steps neared, and those few steps were enough to prove in how gentleman like a manner, with what natural grace, he must have dancer, would he but take the trouble. Whenever she caught his eye, she forced him to smile, but in general he was looking grave. She wished he could love a ball-room better and could like Frank Churchill better. He seemed often observing her. She must not flatter herself that he thought of her dancing; but if he were criticizing her behaviour, she did not feel afraid. There was nothing like flirtation between her and her partner."[11]

On a first reading of this passage, we are concerned here, like Emma, to work out characters' feelings and motives from limited evidence. Along with Emma we are tying to account for the feelings responsible for Mr. Knightley's grave looks; but we are interested primarily in the feelings of Emma herself.

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11. Ibid; Ch -38; P-961

What impression do we form from her observation of Mr. Knihtley here? What the above-quoted passage seems to emphasize is Mr. Knightley's powerful physical presence, his 'tall, firm, upright figure,' his 'natural grace'; and, as used here, 'gentlemanlike' seems to refer primarily to physical characteristics. Like Colonel Brandon and Mafriane in *Sense and Sensibility,* Mr. Knightley is considerably older than Emma and one might find it difficult to come to terms with their marriage at the end of the novel because of this. Unlike Mafriane's view of Colonel Brandon, however, Emma's view of Mr. Knightley here, her inability to take her eyes off him, provides ample evidence of her strong sexual attraction. It is anything but right to think that Jane Austen's novels are without any reference to sexuality just because they do not deal with it in an overt manner. Like the interconnection between Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice,* this passage seems to have strong sexual associations, both on Emma's part as this analysis suggests and on Mr. Knightley's – as the end of the novel makes it clear. His 'grave' looks here may be attributed to this jealousy of Frank Churchill.

The irony of the passage lies in Emma's unawareness of the real state of her feelings, we strongly suspect on a first reading and

which are confirmed at the end of the novel. She shows no sign of understanding why it is that she is so worried by Mr. Knightley's not dancing. There is thus an ironic opposition between her ignorance of her own emotional state and the self-awareness on which she prides herself. Her use of 'gentlemanlike' to describe his appearance, particularly after her criticism of Mrs. Elton for misusing the term, is an indication that she is attracted by moral qualities as well and at the end of the passage, she implicitly recognizes him as a moral authority in her suspicion that he is actually criticising her behaviour. It is this moral authority which is stressed later in the novel when, on an outing to Box Hill which is an important crisis in the novel, Emma is rude to Miss Bates and Mr. Knightley points out to her how wrong that was:

"While they talked they were advancing towards the carriage; it was ready; and before she could speak again, he had handed her in. He had misinterpreted the feelings which had kept her face averted, and her tongue motionless. They were combined only of anger against herself, mortification and deep concern. She had not been able to speak; and, on entering the carriage, suck back for a moment overcome; then reproaching herself for having taken no leave, making no acknowledgement, parting in apparent sullenness, she looked out with voice an hand eager to show a difference; but it was just too late. He had turned away, and the horses were in

motion. She continued to look back, but in vain; and soon, with what appeared unusual speed, they were half-way down the hill, and everything left for behind. She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed – almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she left so forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates? How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! And how suffer him to leave her without saying one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness!"[12]

The above extract presented entirely from Emma's point of view, has the same function as the one we examined earlier in which Emma reflected on her vain attempt to create a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton; in the same way, a crisis has forced Emma to judge her behaviour.

In contrast to her earlier self-criticism, the terms used here to describe Emma's state of mind suggest powerful feelings; 'anger', 'mortification', 'grieved' and 'most forcibly struck'. In the earlier passage Emma's moral language was strikingly mild, such that when she did describe herself as 'wrong' it was doubtful that she fully

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12. Ibid; Ch -43; P-992-93

understood the implications of the word. Here, she immediately recognises her behaviour as 'brutal' and 'cruel'— terms which show her awareness of her own selfishness, her cruel blindness, to others' feelings, and so suggest that she is now much closer to understanding Mr. Knightley's moral criteria. Again unlike the earlier incident, where Emma was soon able to console herself, here she is really suffering as a result of her error. But we still feel that her self-knowledge is limited and that we understand her more fully than she understands herself. So the irony is still operating in this presentation of Emma's remorse.

The whole novel, Emma is steeped in deep irony which is Jane Austen's forte. It is irony of situation that more than anything else pervades this novel. We may refer to an incident that occurs at the Crown Inn in Chapter 38. Dancing is in full swing. While all are enjoying themselves, Emma notices that Harriet is sitting all by herself because she did not find any partner. Observing this, Mrs. Weston asks Mr. Elton senses that Mrs. Weston requests him thus because she is eager to find partner for Harriet. He makes a feeble excuse which clearly indicates that he is not in the least interested in dancing with Harriet. Being much surprised and mortified, Emma considers

an unchivalrous evasion on Mr. Elton's part. This situation is, however, saved when Mr. Knightley volunteers to partner Harriet. This act of Mr. Knightley reveals his genuinely kind-hearted but unobtrusive nature.

The dialogue between Mr. Weston and Mr. Elton shows how he is not in the least interested in Harriet:

"The Kind hearted, gentle Mrs. Weston had left her seat to join him and say, 'Do not you dance, Mr. Elton? to which his prompt reply was, "Most readily, Mrs. Weston, if you will dance with me."

"Me! Oh! no –9 would get you a better partner than myself. I am no dancer."

"If Mrs. Gilbert wishes to dance," said he, "I shall have great pleasure. I am sure; for, though beginning to feel myself rather an old married man, and that my dancing days are over, it would give me very great pleasure at any time to stand up with an old friend like Mrs. Gilbert."

"Mrs. Smith — oh! I had not observed. You are extremely obliging — and if I were not an old married — but my dancing days are over, Mrs. Weston you will

ex. Anything else I should be most happy to do, at your command — but my dancing days are over."[13]

The entire episode of the Elton – Harriet debacle is rich in comic irony. Having decided to make a match between Harriet and Elton, Emma used every opportunity to bring them together. She firmly believed that Harriet and Elton were becoming interested in each other. Emma was much pleased that her scheme to turn Harriet's attention to Mr. Elton was bearing fruit. This belief was strengthened because Elton was very conscious of Harriet's attractions and was warm in her praise of what Emma had done to improve her. But all Emma's ~~all~~ beliefs and efforts proved futile when Harriet was snubbed and slighted by Mr. Elton. ~~He~~ The irony here lays in the amusing discrepancy between what Emma believed she could do and what really happened.

In her fictional art, Jane Austen is much inspired by her predecessors — particularly by Richardson and Fielding. The subtle use of irony mastered by Fielding has not been without its influence

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13. Ibid; Ch -38; P-962

on Austen's novels. But while Fielding has a tremendous zest for life and unbridled vigour of mind. Jane Austen is starkly deficient in these particular qualities. As the story progresses, they emerge in all their depth and complexities. Fielding, however, has not been able to achieve this artistic trick.

The final extract describes the point at which, a few chapters later, Emma does finally realise what she feels for Mr. Knightley. Harriet has told Emma that she is herself in love with him and that she has hopes that he loves her:

"Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling, had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world."[14]

Here, there is a very striking example of irony when Emma discovers that Harriet is in love with Mr. Knightley. The irony here arises from the contrast between what Emma has been thinking and planning and what actually turns out to be the case. Once again, Emma has proved to be absolutely wrong in her assessment of persons and situations and once again we laugh at the absurdity she has committed. In this case, Emma further discovers that she herself has been, or is in love with Knightley. This is a crucial stage in the novel, and the irony behind the events which have led to it, therefore, assumes greater importance.

14. Ibid; Ch -47; P-1012-13

Emma's first moral crisis was the result of discovering that the man she had planned Harriet should marry was in fact in love with Mr. Knightley, now the man she loves appears to be in love with Harriet. The plot neatly reverses the situation and Emma has a taste of her own medicine. The strength of her own feelings shows her how wrong she has been to play with the feelings of others. Mr. Knightley is proved right in the most painful way possible.

The terms in which Emma expresses her faults to herself are again important. She has been 'inconsiderate', 'irrational' led on by 'blindness' and 'madness'. As so often in Jane Austen's fiction, attention to details of vocabulary, to the key words in a passage, is a means of defining the novel's major pre-occupations, and here these terms take us back to the thematic oppositions set up earlier through our discussions. There, Mr. Knightley's views on Emma's relationship with Harriet helped to establish moral oppositions between 'self-interest' and 'disinterestedness' and between judgements based on 'reason' and those based on 'speculation' or 'imagination', and Mr. Knightley's 'clarity' of Judgement was contrasted with the blindness of various other characters. Emma, at last, echoes Mr. Knightley's terms and sees everything 'with a clearness which had never blessed

her before. In the end, Emma runs out of definite terms to describe her fault. She was ready to give it every bad name under the sun, and this provides an interesting contrast with the earlier crisis when she was happy to label her conduct as 'wrong' without really understanding what that meant. Now she fully understands her position and no term of moral disapproval is too strong to describe it.

So, Emma's use of such a strong moral tone is a measure of the strength of her feelings rather than an accurate judgement. Her misuse of the word alerts us to what is perhaps the final irony in her situation. Emma is now aware of her fault and her feelings, but she is only aware of her fault because of her feelings. Her moral and emotional awareness are inseparable, as the beginning of the second paragraph makes it clear: 'Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes'. The question thus arises as to whether Emma would have seen her own selfishness if she had not been in love with Mr. Knightley. In other words, is a kind of selfishness still one of her prime motives? How much has she really changed at the end of the novel?

Apart from moral purpose, the way the novelist has rounded off the story with the excellent touches of irony will always fascinate the readers. An illuminating passage from Frank W. Bradbrook's *book Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge 1966) describes the significance of such mode of ironical implication;

The story ends happily with the reconciliation of Harriet and Mr. Martin, that provides an ironic comic contrast with that of Emma and Knightley. Emma's illusions are completely deflated when the full details about Harriet's illegitimacy are revealed. The incident that persuades Emma's father to agree to her marriage to Mr. Knightley also adds to the comedy of the close of the novel. Emma persuades her father that by having Mr. Knightley in the house as her husband he (her father) will have protection from the chicken-thieves who have been bothering the neighbourhood and it is for this fatuous reason, not for love to his daughter, that Mr. Woodhouse at last gives his blessing to the union of his greatest friend and his dearest daughter. The final irony is, of course, provided by Mr. Elton blessing the marriage of Emma and Knightley.

Jane Austen is gifted with the power of an acute observation together with quiet and incisive irony that helps her portray her characters. She shows an acute grasp of the human mind and human motives and reveals these with great skill. She is not only concerned with the externals of characters, but also with a psychological portrayal of it. She has a keen insight into human psychology, especially into female psychology. As a result, she gives us an abundance of character-portraits.

In *Emma* she presents people from different levels of society. Naturally class-distinction is all the more conspicuous in this novel than in her other works. There are The Woodhouses, The westons, The Knightleys and the Eltons. On the other hand, there are The Coles, The Coxes, The Martins, The Batses and The Perries. They represent the middle-class society of Highbury. And there is the farmer Robert Martin. These are the people in *Emma*. They gossip. They attend social calls and hearty dinners. They take part in merry balls, shopping expeditions and weddings. And these things make an occasional ripple on the placid surface of the country life of Highbury. But what sometimes strikes a jarring note in this even tenor of life is Emma's taste for snobbery and her sudden whims. Her mind is obsessed with

degrees of rank and importance in society. It is on account of her snobbery that she rejects Mr. Martin as a possible husband for Harriet. She thinks Mr. Martin to be beneath the dignity of a girl like Harriet to marry, only because he is a farmer, but thinks it quite suitable for Harriet to aspire to the vicar Mr. Elton. But when Mr. Elton presumes to propose to Emma herself, she is horrified that he should think himself her equal and look down upon Harriet. Emma dismisses the News Mrs. Elton's arriving from Bath because Mrs. Elton has brought 'no name, no blood, no alliance' and has a father in trade. That is the trouble with the Coles too. Emma's snobbery puts her in an embarrassing position with regard to the Coles. She thinks it beneath her dignity to mix with them because they have risen to wealth from a much lower position. However, she does respond to their invitation when they give a dinner party, and she does so because everybody else has accepted the invitation. She is, however, happy in the company of the Westons and Mr. Knightley who happen to be present there. She pays handsome compliments to Mr.Knightley for his coming like a gentleman in a carriage. Emma is quite a snob. But Emma's snobbery creates a really bad situation for her when she says something insulting to Miss Bates at Box Hill. She considers it beneath her dignity to visit the Bateses for their lowly position in society.

Later, however, she realizes after a rebuke from Mr. Knightely, that she has been brutal in her treatment to Miss Bates.

By the above discussions, we may conclude that *Emma* is undoubtedly a comedy, and it is at the same time largely a study of complex personality, namely the personality of the heroine. In other words, it combines the interest of a character study. The novel *Emma* as a whole is conceived in a spirit of irony, and the comic interest proceeds chiefly from the use of irony – irony in the situations or incidents and irony in the characterization.

PERSUASION

Persuasion, the most complex of all Austen's novels, is perhaps the most intimate and most moving of all her love stories. It is a novel of revived love in which courtship is relegated to a distant past and the fable concerns the reanimation of love.

In this novel we find largely two types of characters: those whom Jane Austen portrays sympathetically and those whom she depicts ironically. The portraits having ironic overtones in this novel are Sir Walter, Elizabeth, Mrs. Musgrove, Mary and to a lesser degree the Musgrove sisters, and Captain Benwick. The pervasive ironic tone of the novel is well anticipated in the very beginning of it where Sir Walter is reading from 'the Baronetage'. It clearly indicates that he is obsessed with some past honours and personal vanities which have led him into snobbery. Consequently, this snobbery blinds him to the changing world in which he lives.

Persuasion is considered to be a finished novel of Jane Austen. The tone of the novel is rather a mellowed one and it is marked by a

mature wisdom that sometimes puts one in mind of the last plays of Shakespeare. With regard to this characteristic it has been observed:

"Persuasion may be called an autumnal novel. It is Jane Austen's last work, and the tone is mellow. Even the satire is gentler than in her other works. The book has a certain melancholy thought, even though the final outcome is a happy one". [1]

Jane Austen was the master of comedy, satire and irony. What she primarily aimed at was satire. Hence fools, snobs, hypocrites and ill-mannered people abound in *Persuasion.* In the beginning of the novel, we find a beautiful character-sketch of Sir Walter Elliot and this character sketch is certainly ironical and therefore a source of much amusement. He is described as a handsome man in his youth who still retains his look even at fifty-four. As a man he had a vanity, and situation and his personal appearance are all ironically expressed. Another evidence of ironical expression we find in the presentation of his character after his wife's (Lady Elliot) death:

"Be it known, then, that Sir Walter, like a good father, prided himself on remaining single for his dear daughter's sake. For one daughter, his eldest, he would really have given up anything, which he had not been very much tempted to do." [2]

1. *Masterpieces of World Literature,* Vol.-1; P-735 ed. Frank N. Magill, Harper & Brothers, New York
2. *Persuasion;* Ch-1; P-1212.

He claimed that he has not re-married for his dear daughter's sake. It is quietly disapproved by Jane Austen in an ironic aside. The fact is that he has had one or two private disappointments in his efforts for a second marriage. Significantly, the device of ironic expression helps Jane Austen avoid making involved commentaries on her characters. It is left to the reader to make out the full force of the irony, and to make the criticism himself.

The portrait of Sir Walter with which the novel begins reveals him as obsessed with past glories and personal vanity. It is savagely ironic – the opening passage in particular forms a brilliant expose of a man whose snobbery blinds him to the changing world in which he lives. Jane Austen's description of a father and his three daughters suggests an ironic re-telling of a traditional fairy tale, a Cindrella – type story in which the heroine's true worth is disregarded by her family. Here we find the variety of comic tones that Jane Austen effects in order to highlight the characters ; for instance, Elizabeth's proposal for economy, and also the way in which Jane Austen recreates the speech patterns of reprehensible characters are marked by sheer ridicule and comicality.

One may find another ironical expression in the authorial statement that Sir Walter, blameless as he was, was not only getting dreadfully into debt, but it was bearing of it very often. There is irony, further in the way, Sir Walter is reluctant to offer his mansion to a tenant though he has already agreed to let it out. It clearly presents a contrast between his pretension and the reality of the situation. It is ironical that he is very proud of his baronetcy but actually does little to redeem the honour. He has little sense of duty towards his estate and the people on it and he is pleased enough to amuse himself at Bath. Subsequently, Sir Walter speaks of his reservation in letting out the house. He would not like to let the tenant have the use of the park, the pleasure-grounds and his daughter's flower garden.

"As to all that", rejoined Sir Walter coolly, "supposing I were induced to let my house, I have by no means made up my mind as to the privileges to be annexed to it. I am not particularly disposed to favour a tenant. The park would be open to him of course, and few navy officers, or men of any other description, can have had such a range; but what restrictions I might impose on the use of the pleasure grounds is another thing. I am not fond of the idea of my shrubberies being always approachable; and I should recommend Miss Elliot to be on her ground with respect to her flower garden. I am very little disposed to grant a tenant of Kellynch Hall any extraordinary favour, I assure you, be he sailor or soldier."[3]

3. Ibid; Ch-3; P-1220

He supports his arguments against the navy and that are also ironically stated by Jane Austen. He regards the navy as a means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction. He thinks that a sailor grows old sooner than any other man. He objected the navy with an anecdote about Admiral Baldwin who looked Sixty-two years old though he was only forty-two. His two fold objection to the navy as an occupation is indeed very exaggerated as also his counting the number of ugly faces he has to encounter in Bath during his walk.

Not only is Sir Walter Elliot vain about his looks, but he is also vain about his social position. A position in society is all that matters to Sir walter. He is extremely proud of his title as a baronet which is incidentally the lowest rank of honour that can be inherited and nothing pleases him more than a perusal of the book 'The Baronetcy' which contains the history of his family. When Mr. Shepherd refers to the Curate, Wentworth, as a gentleman, Sir Walter says:

"you misled me by the term 'gentleman'. I thought you were speaking of some man of property. Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember."[4]

4. Ibid; Ch-3; P-1223-24

Snobbery of the same kind is also evident in his preoccupation with social status and in disapproving of Anne's engagement to Captain Wentworth eight years ago he shows his utter disregard for her happiness. It is ironical because inspite of his snobbery he is less of a 'gentleman' less of a 'respectable' man than even the rough naval characters he so often ridicules.

Of all Austen's novels, *Persuasion* is the only one that strikes the reader from the beginning with its unique objectivity of tone. It opens with the action of Sir Walter's reading out from 'the Baronetage'. But it is not Walter's voice – a voice from within the book that invites the reader to enter into the world of the fiction. Similarly, in *Emma* we find Emma's comfortable social and material state of affairs as known to the general public of Highbury.

Jane Austen, therefore, can allow many of her characters to be seen through Anne's eyes, but she is content to do this consistently and adds her own coldly ironic gaze at frequent intervals. Compared with Austen's other novels, *Persuasion* is marked by a colder irony. Sir Walter Elliot is very different from pompously unimaginative Sir

Thomas Bertram in Mansfield Park. The authorial remarks at the beginning of the novel sum up his personality:

"Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage;.."[5]

In chapter 24, one may notice another ironical description of Sir Walter in the final summing up of the novel. Now, Sir Walter does not have any objection to Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth because he, with his fortune of twenty-five thousand pounds and high position in the navy, is no longer a nobody. Sir Walter is also impressed by Wentworth's good looks and condescends to enter their marriage in the Baronetage.

"He was now esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish spendthrift baronet, who had not had principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him, and who could give his daughter at present but a small part of the share of ten thousand pounds which must be hers hereafter."[6]

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5. Ibid; Ch-1; P-1211
6. Ibid; Ch-24; P-1362

Having seen more of Captain Wentworth and having seen him repeatedly by daylight and having seen him minutely,

"he was very much struck by his personal claims, and felt that his superiority of appearance might be not unfairly balanced against her (Anne's) superiority of rank."[7]

The absurdities, foibles and frailties of Sir Walter have been exposed through ironical statements in the course of the novel, and in such a manner that makes him look ridiculous.

Persuasion is the last of Austen's published novels and it seems to be more serious and reflective in tone compared with her other novels. The novel, in particular, could be classified as a novel of character, in which people are more important than the plot. The awareness of alternatives permeates its presentation of scene and character and the irony which is so closely associated with the authors technique of presentation becomes finely interwoven in the theme of the novel. Irony, as in other novels, pervades the whole story. In this

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7. Ibid; Ch-24; P-1362

connection, Mary Lascelles observes, "this irony is no mere symptom; it is the very tongue in which Persuasion is written."[8] It is needless to say that irony is her inspiration and her forte. Lord David Cecil remarks, "Her irony, her delicate ruthless irony, is of the very substance of her style. It never obtrudes itself, sometimes it only glints out in a turn of phrase. But is never absent for more than a paragraph."

A significant aspect of *Persuasion* is its presentation of the self projection of the author. The point is well underlined by Virginia Woolf and she believes that Jane Austen has translated her own experience into a fictional pattern in the course of the action :

"There is an expressed emotion in the scene at the concert and in the famous talk about woman's constancy which proves not merely the biographical fact that Jane Austen had loved, but the aesthetic fact that she was no longer afraid to say so."[9]

8. Mary Lascelles: *Jane Austen and Her Art*, 1968, Oxford Univ. Press; ed. Everyman's Library, Dutton: New York, 1972
9. *Quarterly Review, XXIV*, (January, 1921), Quoted in Casebook, *Northanger Abbey & Persuasion*, P-151-2

One may also find ironical implication in the portroyal of Elizabeth and much of the irony comes from the language employed by Jane Austen. She is also made to look ridiculous. At the age of twenty-nine, Elizabeth Elliot is unmarried and fears the approach of the years of danger of spinsterhood, and would have rejoiced to be asked in marriage by someone with a rank or title within the next twelve months or so. When married, she would be able to take her father's favourite book, 'The Baronetage' with great pleasure, but now she liked it not.

"Always to be presented with the date of her own birth, and see no marriage follow but that of a youngest sister, made the book an evil; and more than once, when her father had left it open on the table near her, she had closed it with averted eyes and pushed it away".[10]

We have irony in the way in which Jane Austen describes Elizabeth's proposal of economy. Elizabeth can think of only two forms of economy: to cut off some unnecessary charities, and to refrain from refurbishing the drawing room, and secondly, to stop the practice of taking a present for Anne on her return from her yearly pleasure

10. *Persuasion;* Ch-1; P-1213-14

trip to London. She has nothing to propose of deeper efficacy. On the contrary, she feels herself ill-used and unfortunate, and is not willing either to lose her dignity or to give up the comforts to which she is accustomed.

Elizabeth is made to look even more ridiculous in her relations with Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay. Her desire to get married to Mr. Elliot, the heir-presumptive, has once been frustrated but when he tries to make up with the Elliot family, Elizabeth's hopes are revived. As for Mrs. Clay, Elizabeth is not prepared to admit that this woman has any designs to marry Sir Walter. Elizabeth's confidence in Mrs. Clay becomes ironical in the light of Mrs. Clay's subsequent conduct, namely, her running away to London to live as Mr. Elliot's mistress.

According to Andrew H. Wright[11], Jane Austen's themes are ironic. Irony is here intended to mean the juxtaposition of two mutually incompatible views of life. In *Persuasion*, it is the conflict between love and prudence and Jane Austen defends both values warmly. She is deeply concerned with both aspects of the contradictions she

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11. *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure*: Andrew H. Wright (OUP, New York, 1954)

perceives in human experience. Another eminent critic, Professor Chevalier opines that 'the basic feature of every irony is a contrast between a reality and an appearance' and Professor Marvin Mudrick[12] calls irony a 'neutral discoverer and explorer of incongruities', Chaucer, Cervantes, Swift, Jane Austen all tried to search for the meaning of 'irony' but in vain and came to conclusion that it is useless to look for any definition or meaning of it. There is vigor, humility and sympathy in their searching and finally reached judgment but never serene certainty.

In the course of Austen's narration in the novel *Persuasion*, the readers find a number of ironical remarks about both Sir Walter and his eldest daughter Elizabeth. As for example, when Anne goes to Bath her father and sister are glad to see her –

"For the sake of showing her the house and furniture and met her with kindness." [13]

Sir Walter forgives the conduct of Mr. Elliot in marrying a woman of inferior birth because she was-

12. *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense & Discovery: Marvin Mudrick.* (University of California Press, 1968).
13. *Persuasion;* Ch-15; P-1291.

"a very fine woman with a large fortune', [14]

and because she was in love with Mr. Elliot . Sir Walter acknowledges these facts as a sufficient justification,"

"and though Elizabeth could not see the circumstance in quite so favourable a light, she allowed it to be a great extenuation."[15]

Both father and daughter feel very happy in the company of Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret and talk to everybody of –

"Our cousins in Laura-place, our cousins, lady Dalrymple, and Miss Carteret."[16]

They make amends to Lady Dalrymple for their past neglect of her, and having made up with her they feel much honoured. The author, in this context, observes ironically:

"The toils of the business were over, the sweets began."[17]

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14. Ibid; Ch-15; P-1293
15. Ibid; Ch-15; P-1293
16. Ibid; Ch-16; P-1299
17. Ibid; Ch-16; P-1299

Father and daughter also agree that the Crofts should not be presented to Lady Dalrymple and that they should be allowed to find their own level in Bath. The attitude of Sir Walter and Elizabeth towards Lady Russell is also ironically depicted. Elizabeth says that Lady Russell quite bores her with her talk about new books, and goes on to say:

"I thought her dress hideously the other night. I used to think she had some taste in dress, but I was ashamed of her at the concert. Something so formal and 'arrange' in her hair! and she sits so upright! My best of love, of course."[18]

In this small but amusing speech, we have Elizabeth's hypocrisy and her pretentiousness. Sir Walter makes a similar observation about Lady Russell. He says that he would call on her soon but he actually proposes only to leave his card at her house. He would not like to pay her a morning visit because morning visits are not fair to elderly women who do not use adequate make up. He would be happy if Lady Russell were to wear rouge to cover her ageing look.

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18. Ibid; Ch-22; P-1341

The most penetrating ideas of Austen have developed in *Persuasion* through the delineation of characters – but the exploration is conducted in such a way that it never becomes too intense. Hence, the underlying seriousness in not allowed to disturb the total comic effect. In Jane Austen's novels this effect is usually achieved through irony and a certain level of artistic distance is established at some certain points of the story. Anne Elliot who is one of Jane Austen's most sympathetic creations, does not totally escape the ironic focus that defines the approach of the whole.

Jane Austen's portrayl of Mary is steeped in irony. She has a great deal of the Elliot pride. She believes in the importance of social connections as much as her sister Elizabeth. She does not think Charles Hayter a fit match for Henrietta because he is nothing but a curate:

"You know," said she, "I cannot think him at all a fit match for Henrietta; and considering the alliances which the Musgroves have made, she has no right to throw herself away. I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family, and be giving bad connections to those who have not been used to them. And, pray, who is Charles

Hayter? Nothing by a country curate. A most improper match for Miss Musgrove of Uppercross."[19]

Mary's general dissatisfaction with life, her habit of grumbling and complaining, and her exaggeration of her ailments are all ironically conveyed to us. The least indisposition gives her a feeling that she is sinking. When she is alone, she imagines that she is being neglected and ill-used by everybody, especially by her husband's family. She complains that her children are unmanagable, and that her husband always ignores her. She feels hurt if her husband is away from her six hours at a stretch. Speaking of Captain Benwick, she says that he will sit poring over his book and not known when a person speaks to him, or when one drops one scissors, or anything that happens.

There is irony also in the way her attitude to her parents-in-law, Mr. And Mrs. Musgrove, is depicted. She criticizes her mother-in-law for humouring and indulging her (Mary's) children and for giving them so much trash and sweet things that they are sure to come back sick and irritable for the day. She says that Mrs. Musgrove's

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19. Ibid; Ch-9; P-1255

servants do not do any work but keep loafing about in the village. She tells Anne that the Musgroves should call on her before she goes to call on them. When Louisa meets an accident, she protests that she must stay to nurse her. She asserts that she must prove her usefulness to her sister-in-law and besides, how she can go home without her husband? The irony here is obvious: her anxiety to remain with her husband is greater than her wish to Louisa. Austen here ridicules Mary's selfishness when Mary leaves her sick child in the charge of Anne and herself goes with her husband to attend a party at the Great House.

One may find another ironical treatment of Austen when Mary writes a letter to Anne. In the letter Mary represents herself as an unlucky person who is always absent when anything desirable is going on. She complains that she is always the last of her family to be taken notice of. She speaks of her indispositions and says that she is sure to catch an infection in the throat, deploring the fact that her sore throats are always worse than other peoples. According to her (Mary), Captain Benwick is not a great match for Luisa, but a million times better than marrying among the Hayters. Mary, indeed has to be recognised as one of the principal comic characters created by

Jane Austen in *Persuasion*. She provides more humour even than her father.

We have also found some elations in the ironical gesticulations about Mrs. Musgrove. This appears particularly in Mrs. Musgrove's grief over her dead son Richard for whom she never cared when he was alive. Richard was a very troublesome, hopeless, stupid and unmanageable son. When the news of his death came to the family, nobody in the family had felt much grieved and Austen comments coldly:

"The real circumstances of this pathetic piece of family history were, that the Musgroves had had the ill fortune of a very troublesome, hopeless son and the good fortune to lose him before he reached his twentieth year; that he had been sent to sea because he was stupid and unmanageable on shore; that he had been very little cared for at any time by his family, though quite as much as he deserved; seldom heard of, and scarcely at all regretted, when the intelligence of his death abroad had worked its way to Uppercross, two years before.

He had, in fact, though his sisters were now doing all they could for him, by calling him 'poor Richard', been nothing better than a thick headed, unfeeling,

unprofitable Dick Musgrove, who had never done anything to entitle himself to more than the abbreviation of his name, living or dead." [20]

The calm cruelty of this outburst seems to be the author's response to the hypocrisy of the wretched young man's surviving relatives in using his death as a means of claiming sympathy for themselves on various social occasions. It is characteristic of the 'no nonsense' air about the novel. Jane Austen has hardly time to laugh at Sir Walter Elliot. His vanity makes him so absurd as to be quite despicable. The irony in this case arises from a contrast between 'pretence' and 'reality'. Mrs. Musgrove's grief is more of a sentimental pose than a genuine experience. It is in this connection that Jane Austen makes one of her most humorous remarks in the novel:

"Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronise in vain – which taste cannot tolerate – which ridicule will seize." [21]

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20. Ibid; Ch-6; P-1240
21. Ibid; Ch-8; P-1250

Immediately after her fit of grief, Mrs. Musgrove gives a happy glance round the room, and says that –

"Nothing was so likely to do her good as a little quiet cheerfulness at home."[22]

Another ironical remark about Mrs. Musgrove occurs when the author tells us that, while giving to Mrs. Croft the history of her eldest daughter's engagement, she speaks –

"in that convenient tone of voice which was perfectly audible while it pretended to be a whisper"[23]

Anne felt that she did not belong to the conversation and yet, as Captain Harville seemed thoughtful and not disposed to talk about her daughter's engagement. Yet another ironical remarks about Mrs. Musgrove runs as follows:

"Mrs. Musgrove, who thought only of one sort of illness, having assured herself with some anxiety, that there had been no fall in the case; that Anne had not at any time lately slipped down, and got a blow on her head; that she was perfectly convinced

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22. Ibid; Ch-14; P-1290
23. Ibid; Ch-23; P-1350

of having had no fall; could part with her cheerfully, and depend on finding her better at night."[24]

Persuasion, in fact, consists of several separate stories interwoven and balanced in order to create a pattern. The central love affair of Anne and Wentworth is highlighted by the various sub-plots which involve the different groups of characters. The romantic entanglements of Louisa and Wentworth, Louisa and Benwick, Henrietta and Wentworth, Henrietta and Charles Hayter, Mr. Elliot and Elizabeth, Mr. Elliot and Anne, Mr. Elliot and Mrs., Clay and Mrs. Clay and Sir Walter compose a seemingly endless list of possible combinations. Together they give the novel its shape by providing a range of comparisons with the main relationship which helps to isolate its unique quality. In some ways Jane Austen is also giving us an ironic variant on the popular formats of romantic fiction of her day. It is, indeed, very apt to say that she (Austen) reverses the conventional plot mechanism focusing on youthful romance.

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24. Ibid; Ch-23; P-1356

The narrative style of *Persuasion* differs from those of the earlier novels of Jane Austen. In this novel the novelist herself tells the story on a larger scale than what we have noticed in her other novels. The conversation between characters and the use of pertinent monologues are not provided in abundance. Her adherence to such a style recalls that of the eighteenth century masters like Richardson and Fielding. These older novelists often treat the stupid and wayward characters very harshly in their writings. To Austen this sort of treatment appears to be unwanted. Her irony can become deadly enough. As to this characteristic of Jane Austen, Walter Allen has observed.

"... she may not harass her stupid characters with practical jokes, as the older novelists did, but her verbal play with them is at first no less shocking to those of us who were brought up on the pieties of humanitarianism."[25]

If we make a thorough survey of the novel, the grab of irony over the whole novel becomes explicit to us. She has gathered the pretence and the truth that provides the ironic vision. Simple irony is a statement that implies the opposite of what one says or implies more than it is saying. The technique of ironic statement frees Jane

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25. *The English Novel* (A Pelican Book): Walter Allen; P-109-10.

Austen from the necessity of making involved commentaries on her characters. It is left to the reader to understand the full force of the irony and to make the criticism himself. A further technique of irony is to put a speech into a character's mouth which is not intended by the speaker as irony but becomes ironic in effect. In this case, the character is made to say more than he intends, though it is left to the reader to notice the implications. When Elizabeth says to Anne who has warned her that Mrs. Clay might have designs on Sir Walter –

"As I am rather better acquainted with her sentiments than you can be, I can assure you, that upon the subject of marriage they are particularly nice; and that she reprobates all inequality of condition and rank more strongly than most people."[26]

The reader who has seen Mrs. Clay acknowledges immediately that Mrs. Clay had so much success. The propaganda she has put out has been accepted by Elizabeth who is then lulled away from any suspicious of her friend. The speech becomes ironic at Elizabeth's expense revealing her as the dupe of Mrs. Clay whom she is defending.

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26. *Persuasion;* Ch-5; P-1230.

We have also found that many critics have commented their different views on the ironical design in the novel. Marvin Mudrick in his *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* locates the source of the irony in a contrast between the values the author intends to uphold and those prevailing in the actual world. Mudrick's theory of irony comes close to Douglas Bush's moralistic approach in so far as it focuses on the author's personal judgements. Another eminent critic, John Odmark analyses the structure of the novel and considers the ironic vision to be the principle which determines the structure of the novel.

"As a rule irony in Jane Austen's fiction has been defined primarily in terms of content. What I want to draw attention to is the fact that irony is above all a structuring principle that determines the shape of all the novels."[27]

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27. *An Understanding of Jane Austen Novels: Character, Value & Ironic Perspective*: John Odmark (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981); P-1

THE LAST WORDS

In the preceding chapters an attempt has been made to examine the nature of Austen's ironic vision and to show how irony has served as a driving force to the novelist giving her works an excellence, energy and vigour, hitherto unknown in British novel. The present chapter is partly devoted to a summing up and partly a re-assessment of Austen as a novelist with a difference in the light of the view-points which the critics advanced down the ages and which I had no occasion to consider earlier because of the limited sphere of my enquiry.

Between the surface of Jane Austen's novels and the surface of her life there is a remarkable parallel: both are without any striking eventfulness. Both novels and life give us primarily a view of middle-class people in the daily rounds of family life in provincial towns---a life in which there is good breeding, and wit, and sufficient hope of a reasonably satisfactory outcome of whatever difficulties may intrude. In the novels we come occasionally upon disappointments in love and the threat or actuality of seduction, but these seem less significant than the constant routine of family and neighbourhood conversations and entertainments. Yet this quiet mode of life does not mean that in

her characters Jane Austen does not explore human experience with all the thoroughness possible to the comic mode she has chosen. She does not require spectacular events to deal with important problems.

The evidence does not permit much speculation about intensities that may have lain beneath the placid exterior of her own life. The seventh of eight children, she spent her first 25 years in the village of Steventon, Hampshire, of which her father was rector. The family was congenial and gifted in self-entertainment – by games, charades, reading (particularly in 18th –century literature), and the practice of an ironic criticalness by which they punctured literary vogues. At one time or another Jane lived in several small towns, where her provincial life was quiet to the point of being static. She at no time participated in a literary society or had a literary correspondent.

Living in the high years of the major English Romantics, she in effect rejected the Romantic cult of personality, just as she was largely indifferent to Romantic literature. She derived from a neo-classical tradition of the comedy of manners; in harking back to an 18th- century tradition, she rejected those parts of it which anticipated Romanticism.

Her juvenilia, *Love and Friendship* and *Volume the First* (written in the early 1790's, but published respectively in 1922 and 1933), are for the most part clever parodies of the sentimental and romantic cliches of popular fiction. *Lady Susan*, a fragment perhaps written in the mid-1790's and published in 1871, is in the 18th – century letter form. The history of *Sense and Sensibility* is typical of Jane Austen's early literary disappointments. It was written before 1796, rewritten in 1797-98, rejected by a publisher, revised in 1809-10, and published in 1811. (All dates given below refer to publication.) As the title indicates, *Sense and Sensibility* juxtaposes an ideal which might have been set forth in the *Spectator* with the emotional self-indulgence of later 18th -century sentimentalism; yet here the author avoids the effect of allegory by making Elinor (Sense) neither priggish nor unemotional, and Marianne (Sensibility) essentially intelligent and generous. *Northanger Abbey* (1818) makes fun of a current literary fad by telling of the imaginary thrills and dangers experienced by Catherine Morland, an indiscriminate reader of Gothic novels. Of the novels written before the century's end, only *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) has no apparent basis in topical or literary satire but has an independent life at her mature level of work – an ironic, unillusioned,

and yet sympathetic view of human nature and its flair for comic incongruity.

Although Austen was endowed with all the attributes of a true ironist— such as keen sense of the ludicrous, witty observation of human inconsistencies and absurdities, genial temperament, capacity to make fun of the frailties and foibles of all specimens of humanity – she is a novelist who revels in satire with equal gusto and verve. Satire is an element in which she lives, but there is no trace of the savage indignation of Swift in her writing. Her attitude as a satirist is best expressed in the words of Elizabeth when she says: "I hope, I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and non-sense, whims and in consistencies, do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can". Each novel of Jane Austen has a motive covert as well as overt. *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* satirize that romantic philosophy which was sweeping the world in the early nineteenth century and which relied on the instinctive movements of heart and imagination. In these novels satire is all-pervading. It mainly takes the form of mimicry of the sentimental novelist's peculiar phraseology. *Sense and Sensibility* is satirical in tone. With subdued irony Jane Austen ridicules sentimentalists. The satire is mostly

directed against sensibility and sentimentality depicted in the characters of the Dashwood sisters. Jane Austen also ridicules the selfishness and worldly wisdom of Mrs. Dashwood and her henpecked husband, John. *Pride and Prejudice* exhibits the folly of relying on first impressions which eventually turn out false. *Emma* satirises the self-deception of vanity. Emma is a clever woman whose confidence in her own cleverness blinds her to reality. She spends her life in trying to rearrange the lives of others, but her plans when put into practice only reveal her failure to understand either the dispositions of people she is dealing with or the true nature of her own feelings and motives. *Persuasion* is full of satire on snobbery, vanity, affectations and pretences. The satire on Sir Walter's pursuit of his social superiors, 'Our cousins, the Dalrymples', is magnificent. Sir Walter is a snob. He prides himself on his good breeding, high standing and wide popularity. The moment Sir Walter and Elizabeth hear of the arrival of their rich relatives, Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, they are all in flutter. Anne sees how they are all out to lionize their rich and noble relatives.

Jane Austen directs her satire particularly against women and their peculiar foibles. She does not spare people like Mary Musgrove

or Lady Bertram with their affectations. She condemns outright any taint of pampered sensibility. She always exposes insincerities. In her novels Jane Austen exposes folly, self-deception, irresponsibility, silliness and the individual's lack of knowledge of himself. Though she laughs at their foibles and fantasies, egotism and inconsistencies, she treats them kindly and sympathetically. Mr. Collins, basically a satirical character, is not exactly a mean, contemptuous toady. His creator draws him with a certain amount of sympathy.

Whatever influences initiated Jane Austen's second period of writing, successful publication was unquestionably an important stimulus to continuing creative work. Novels begun after 1810 include *Emma* (1815), *Persuasion* (1818), and *Mansfield Park* (1819). Some fragmentary work was not published until the present century.

Emma represents a culmination of the manner which Jane was developing in her early novels; it is the ultimate achievement of the artist viewing her heroine with detachment. Jane's detachment takes the special form of an awareness of the heroine's capacity for self-deception. Emma Woodhouse is the very embodiment of self-deception: she misreads evidence, misleads others, and discovers

her own inner feelings only by accident. In Fanny Price of *Mansfield park* and Anne Elliot of *Persuasion,* Miss Austen paints more gentle and self-effacing heroines in the tradition of Jane Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice;* there is a little more awareness of theme and a little less comic gaiety. But there is still all the wide social perspective, the sense of frailty, and the awareness of complication of motive by which Jane Austen, who had had scarcely a tenth of the worldly experience of her model Fanny Burney, far surpassed her model and set a permanent standard for comedy of manners.

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