Jane Austen and her Critics

The Interaction of Novel and Paratext

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Introduction

Jane Austen wrote in a time where the literary marketplace was rapidly expanding and changing. *Northanger Abbey* (published in 1818), with its study of the effects of novel reading on young people, is seen to engage directly with the fashionable novels of her time, and the reading public's concern with them. In all her other novels, Austen also shows a thorough understanding of the literature of her time and conflicting attitudes towards certain genres and conventions. As in her novels, Austen states numerous opinions and ideas about reading, writing, and publishing in her personal correspondence. Her letters not only display her knowledge and expertise as an author in the early nineteenth century, but also reveal Austen's drive and struggle towards becoming a successful published author.

This thesis aims to argue that Austen, although keeping strictly within the bounds of the literary standards that society upheld, determinedly adopted themes and a style of writing that set her apart from most authors at the time, and revealed a certain independence within the publishing sphere. However, viewing Austen as the independent author she herself claimed to be, means ignoring the interest and the concerns she expressed in her letters with regards to the reception of her work. Therefore, this thesis will propose a view that Austen simultaneously set out to achieve originality and independence as a writer, while being conscious of the standards set by the reading public and by the literary reviews.

This conflict in Austen's image between the modest author who, according to Henry Austen in his "Biographical Notice of the Author" had to be convinced to publish her work, "for she was equally rapid and correct, yet an invincible distrust of her own judgement induced her to withhold her works from the public" (6) and the independent author who stated in her letters: "I must keep to my own style & go in my own way" (*Letters*, 326) is mirrored in the recent research about Austen's position within the fiction market. On the one hand, there is a vast body of research uncovering and highlighting the unique features of Austen's books compared to the

other literature published at her time. On the other, there are critics who warn against considering Austen's fame and popularity in light of her posthumous popularity, emphasising instead context, sources of inspiration, literary influences, and her moderate success during her lifetime as a published author. Compared to other contemporary novelists such as Sir Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and Frances Burney, Austen's sales and profits were indeed considerably lower. Instead of focussing on either her distinctive qualities as a literary artist or the influences of other literary traditions on her work, this thesis will consider both Austen's innovative features and her concern with the reception of her work to study to what extent contemporary reviews had an influence on her work and how far she was the independent author who wrote according to her own tastes.

In spite of Austen's determination to maintain her own style and ways of writing, she was much interested in readers' feedback on her work. She inquired after the opinions of people in her surroundings and made overviews of their replies in the cases of *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815) (henceforth to be referred to as 'Opinions'). Published reviews were another source of feedback on Austen's novels. All novels Austen wrote and published within her lifetime, except for *Mansfield Park*, were reviewed at least once. In order to become a successful novelist, Austen had to adhere to the standards that the Romantic fiction market upheld. As Katie Halsey explains in her introduction to *Jane Austen and her Readers, 1786-1945*, "nobody reads in a cultural vacuum, and reading can never be innocent of the influences of social, political and economic structures, both those of the moment and of the past" (9). Therefore, Austen had to be aware of the public's expectations and meet them. And, although there are some reservations concerning the objectivity of the reviews and 'Opinions', they state most clearly these contemporary standards and expectations and measure Austen's work by them.

This thesis will analyse the complicated delineation of Austen's role within the fiction market of 'Romantic Britain' by studying the influence of reviews and collected opinions on Austen's novels. It will focus on the interaction between text and paratext and reveal the extent to which Austen was influenced by the contemporary reception of her novels throughout her writing career. In doing so, it will contribute to our understanding of Austen's expectations and goals of writing her novels and uncover the ways in which Austen was the innovative and independent author she is often considered to have been, and how, contrariwise, Austen stayed within the bounds of the accepted and conventional literature of her time. Understanding the extent to which Austen's novels were written with the publishing sphere and the hypothetical reader in mind, will deepen our response to the novels in general and potentially account for the clear differences between them and other novels of the period.

This thesis will include an analysis of Austen's work, focussing on three main points of reference as deduced from contemporary reviews: the style of writing; the content of the novels in relation to Austen's other novels; and the content of the novels in relation to the larger literary environment. There will be an in-depth analysis of all three of these points in relation to the three novels written at the height of Austen's career as a published author: *Mansfield Park*, *Emma,* and *Persuasion* (1818). Although the reviews from her other novels, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811*)*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, will be of relevance to this discussion, their early drafts could not have been influenced by the published reviews, and will therefore complicate the analysis of the relation between text and paratext. The paratext, for this argument, includes everything that gives the text meaning outside of the main body of the text itself. Most importantly here 'paratext' involves the novels' reviews. So, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word: "The textual and visual material that surrounds or supplements the main body of a published work, both as part of its physical format (the peritext, e.g. front cover, introduction, footnotes, etc.) and outside of this (the epitext, e.g. reviews, advertisements,

interviews, etc.); such material considered together as a frame which contextualizes a text and informs its interpretation." While the thesis focuses on the reviews of Austen's work, other relevant paratextual elements will also be taken into account.

This thesis is structured according to the chronological order of the publication of Austen's novels. Each chapter will analyse one novel in light of preceding reviews. The first chapter will focus on the way Austen interacts with the dominant literary conventions of her time, in *Mansfield Park* in particular, to show how Austen's own reading and the general ideas about contemporary literary conventions as displayed in reviews may have influenced her writing. The second chapter will focus on continuities and discontinuities in Austen's style of writing, focussing on *Emma*. The last chapter will discuss the development of content in Austen's novels, based on the opinions expressed in the documented reception of her novels, focussing on her last completed novel, *Persuasion*.

In order to study this consideration of Austen's authorial independence, this thesis will explore the development of Austen's novels in terms of themes and style, and relate these to the reception of her work as expressed in the published reviews and her own collection of 'Opinions'. It will consider Austen's publication history to determine which reviews she may have read and which reviews could, therefore, have had an influence on her work. The content of the 'notices' of her work will be related to the general literary conventions, to show Austen's position in relation to the publishing sphere and the reviews. This will reveal how Austen's novels both adhere to and distance themselves from the fashionable novels at the time and the standards society set, as indicated in the reviews. It will also help to explain how her language especially contributed to an understanding of Austen as maintaining, but also developing, her writing style within her struggle independently and successfully to navigate the fiction market.

While there is proof from Austen's letters that she read at least one of the reviews that were published about her work, and much has been written about the reception of Austen's novels,

little has been said about the possible influence the formal and informal reception had on Austen's writing directly. The juvenilia, which Austen started writing when she was only eleven years old, contain her earliest known attempts at writing fiction. Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice" may have been correct in stating that, at this point, publishing and professionalism were likely far from her objectives for writing. From 1796 onwards Austen started writing the drafts of her full-length novels. Jane Austen's sister, Cassandra documented the production timeline of these works. Kathryn Sutherland includes this overview in "Chronology of Composition and Publication". It is important to understand when Austen started and completed the novels, in order to ascertain which reviews may have been able to influence her writing.

Since the date of composition and the dates of publication were, in some cases, decades apart, it would be incorrect to look at solely the date of publication for this argument. According to Cassandra Austen, Jane Austen started writing *First Impressions* in October 1796, and completed the first draft in August 1797. This leaves a sixteen-year gap between date of composition and the date of publication. While the extent to which Austen revised her earlier written novels is certainly an interesting field of study, the focus of this essay will not be on the revisions Austen performed, since there is no conclusive evidence for most of her novels of how much she changed. Only the revised ending of *Persuasion* will be discussed in Chapter Three. From November 1797 onwards Austen worked on an early draft of *Sense and Sensibility*, although Cassandra recalls an earlier version titled *Elinor and Marianne*. *Sense and Sensibility* was published in November 1811. *Northanger Abbey* was written between 1798 and 1799 and, although it had been sold to a publishing company in 1803, it did not reach the public until after Austen's death in 1817.

Establishing the initial date of composition of *Mansfield Park* is slightly more complicated. According to Cassandra Austen, Jane Austen started writing the novel "somewhere about Feb^{y} 1811" (Sutherland, 16). However, in January 1813, Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra, concerning

Mansfield Park: “Now I will try to write of something else; — it shall be a complete change of subject — Ordination” (*Letters*, 210). Many critics suggest that the dates of composition and publication between 1811 and 1813 indicate that Austen, at this point, was working on *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* at the same time. Sutherland explains that “she was recasting *Pride and Prejudice*, drafting *Mansfield Park* and … correcting proofs of *Sense and Sensibility*” (18). The statement in Austen’s letters, however, suggests that she had completed editing and correcting *Pride and Prejudice* by this time and was only now starting the composition of *Mansfield Park*. Her mentioning of Mrs. Grant, a character from the novel, in a letter from about two weeks before suggests that she did already have an idea of the characters that would appear in the novel. Of course, the exact moment Austen began writing is difficult to establish, and the safest option is to assume Sutherland’s statement in her introduction to *Mansfield Park*, that “she was working on it in 1813” (vii) and presume that, by then, a general view of topic and characters had already been established. *Emma* was started in January 1814, finished in March 1815, and published by December 1815. *Persuasion* was started in August 1815 and completed in August 1816.

Considering the dates of publication of the various reviews, it becomes apparent which reviews may have had an influence on Austen’s writing. The two reviews of *Sense and Sensibility*, published in the *Critical Review* and the *British Critic* were published in February and May 1812. This means that they could have reached Austen before any considerable work had been done on *Mansfield Park*. The two reviews of *Pride and Prejudice*, published in the same periodicals, were published in February and March 1813, still long before the publishing date of *Mansfield Park*, but presumably already during the composition of the novel. It would therefore be plausible to assume that the reviews of *Sense and Sensibility* may have had a larger impact on the content of the story than those of *Pride and Prejudice*.

In order to consider how much influence the reviews may have had on Austen's writing, it is also important to discern how likely it was that she actually read them. B.C. Southam in *The Critical Heritage* seems to be very clear upon this matter: "there is no evidence that she was directly influenced by her readers, either reviewers or friends" (5). At the same time, multiple critics, including Southam himself, explain that we may be certain that Austen was aware of the readers' response: "She was keenly interested in the reception of her books. … The two collections of 'Opinions' and remarks in her letters testify to her concern to record how the novels were received" (Southam, 5). Katie Halsey agrees with this statement, alluding to Austen's letters in particular as showing a concern with receiving both positive and negative feedback and showing an interest in the financial aspect of publication (11-12).

Considering Austen's behaviour in the publishing sphere shows her thorough understanding of the workings of the fiction market and how it would affect her success. In "The Professional Woman Writer," Jan Fergus explains the publishing strategies Austen adopted in her years as a published author. *Sense and Sensibility* was published on commission by Thomas Egerton, which was risky for authors and a relatively safe option for publishers, since authors covered the costs for production and advertising (Fergus, 9). For *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen sold the copyright to Egerton, voicing her displeasure with hearing the price he offered, but also showing that she understood the risk the publisher was taking with this form of publishing (Fergus, 10). However, Austen could have profited more had *Pride and Prejudice* been published on commission, and her disappointment with the offer Egerton made for *Mansfield Park* caused her to publish her third novel and *Emma* on commission (Fergus, 11-12). Austen's aptness in navigating the financial part of publishing certainly shows that profit was part of her motivation for writing.

Fergus identifies in this business-like behaviour also Austen's motivation for publishing certain novels at certain times in her career. *Northanger Abbey* had not been published, although

the copyrights had been sold to B. Crosby and Company, and Fergus sees Austen's letter to the company, signed Mrs. Ashton Dennis (MAD) as an argument for her determination to have her work published (8). Fergus also claims that *Northanger Abbey*'s and *First Impression*'s initial rejection was the reason for publishing *Sense and Sensibility* at that time: "The manuscript version of *Pride and Prejudice* contained an extremely unorthodox heroine, and Austen may have feared either similar vacillation from another publisher, if she succeeded in selling the copyright, or a more ambivalent reception from reviewers and the reading public than *Sense and Sensibility* was likely to obtain" (8). Austen's behaviour here proves her understanding of the interaction between the potential success of her novels on the fiction market. It shows a basic concern with how her novels were and would be perceived, arguing for the interest Austen took in collecting opinions of her work and possibly her interest in reading the published reviews.

The fact that Austen was a member of a book society and a circulating library would further suggest that Austen did read some, if not all, published reviews. In *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, William St. Clair explains that "advertising and review notices were aimed not only at potential readers but at the bookshops and circulating libraries" (189). He states that the circulating libraries would use reviews to support their desire to buy a book for the library, and that literary journals "were to be found all over the country, often standing on the same shelves as Blair, Buchan, and Burn, in towns where few other substantial books were to be seen" (284). In addition to this, he explains that reading societies would read and discuss literary reviews during their meetings (254). All of this meant that Jane Austen would have had enough opportunity to read literary reviews, including those of her own books.

Austen's connections to London and other authors may also have allowed her to have encountered her reviews. Austen's brother had owned a magazine, *The Loiterer*, when she was younger and she visited her brother Henry in London occasionally, also to discuss the

publication of her novels with the publisher. The reviews would have been known to her publishers and possibly shared with Austen, which was certainly the case with the review written by Sir Walter Scott in the *Quarterly Review* of October 1815. In a letter directed at her publisher John Murray, Jane Austen states: "I return you the Quarterly Review with many Thanks. The Authoress of Emma has no reason I think to complain of her treatment in it —— except in the total omission of Mansfield Park.—I cannot but be sorry that so clever a Man as the Reviewer of Emma, should consider it as unworthy of being noticed" (*Letters*, 327). This raises the question of whether Austen depended on her publishers for receiving feedback on her work, or whether she had personal access to the literary magazines. What this letter does show, is that Austen noticed that *Mansfield Park* was omitted from the review. She may have been made aware by her publishers that *Mansfield Park* received no other reviews, but there is no evidence for this in her correspondence.

St Clair points to some issues with the credibility of the reviews. He explains that: "most literary reviews seemed to have unashamedly puffed the books published by the publishing houses who owned them, even if they were out of line with their normal political stance" (187). Murray, the publisher of Austen's *Emma,* for example asked Sir Walter Scott to write the review in the *Quarterly Review*, a periodical owned by Murray himself. Although in this case, Scott was a genuine admirer of Austen's work and may not have undertaken the review merely to please Murray. The literary journals also brought their own social and political ideas into their reviews, which means that they would not always reflect the public's opinion. Especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with the French Revolution and the fear that a similar revolution would reach Britain, the political sphere was strictly divided between liberal and conservative. People were more likely to read the magazines and newspapers that matched their own political mindset. The majority of magazines and journals at the time were conservative, including the literary journals that reviewed most of Austen's work: that is, the

Quarterly Review, the *British Critic*, and the *Critical Review*. This is important to keep in mind while analysing the reviews, because political questions influenced what the reviews and readers of these periodicals valued, and these partial responses may not be reflective of society as a whole. Austen and her family are often considered to have been relatively conservative, though it has proved difficult definitively to place Austen's politics

Generally, St Clair says that "the influence of the reviews appears to have been greatly exaggerated both at the time and by subsequent writers" (189). Instead, St Clair says, reviews are "valuable sources for reconstructing the historical horizons of expectations against which newly printed texts were perceived" (285). It is in this sense that the reviews will be used for this argument. The reviews reflected the expectations readers had when they started reading Austen's novels, and may have shaped her perception of what Halsey calls the hypothetical reader, which writers kept in mind to predict the possible reaction of the public to what they wrote.

Chapter 1: *Mansfield Park* and the Reading Nation

"We have tried to get Self-controul, but in vain.—I should like to know what her Estimate is but am always half afraid of finding a clever novel too clever— & of finding my own story & my own people all forestalled." (*Letters,* 194).

In this letter, Jane Austen voices her concern about the originality of her novels and her curiosity about the sales of Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811). The Austen family read many works of literature from various genres and were critical of what they read. When Jane Austen finally read Brunton's novel, she expressed her dislike of the novel's unnaturalness and improbability and was not worried about the similarities between her novels and that of Brunton at all. The concern with the redundancy or lack of originality of her novels was not limited to this particular instance. Another letter portrays a similar attitude regarding *Pride and Prejudice*: "I would not let Martha read First Impressions again upon any account & am very glad that I did not leave it in your power.—She is very cunning, but I see through her design; —she means to publish it from Memory, & one more perusal must enable her to do it." (*Letters*, 46). Although there is a humorous undertone to this remark, Austen may have had reason to worry about the originality of her work. As Claire Harman explains in *Jane's Fame*, the original title for Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, *First Impressions*, was used by another female author in 1800 (37), forcing Austen to change the title when she eventually did publish the novel.

Austen's novels generally display her widespread knowledge about fiction and genres by using and adapting the genres she encountered in her own reading, The way Austen adopted literary conventions in her novels, and her reasons for doing so, will be the focus of this chapter. It will relate the content of the reviews to the larger literary environment of Austen's time, and delineate how Austen's views show her as moving beyond the limits of the standard literary conventions.

1.1. The Reviews and *Mansfield Park*

As mentioned earlier, the only reviews which could have reached Austen before the publication of *Mansfield Park* were those of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The first review, discussing *Sense and Sensibility*, from the *Critical Review* of February 1812, starts with a general remark on the publication of novels at that time. The reviewer laments the incredible similarities of the contemporary novels: "we are no enemies to novels or novel writers, but we regret that in the multiplicity of them, there are so few worthy of any particular commendation" (35). He, then, expresses his opinion that the novels that combine amusement and instruction are commendable and that *Sense and Sensibility* is "one amongst the few" that does this. A sneer at novel readers who are "insatiable after something new" is followed by the reviewer's opinion that this novel displays an "excellent lesson" and a "useful moral" (35). He continues to summarise the plot of the novel, highlighting the stark contrast between sense and dangerous sensibility and how the novel favourably uses this contrast to teach readers a lesson.

Here, it is important to keep in mind the political ideals that the reviewer may have been judging by, which were, as noted above, predominantly conservative. The distinction between 'sense' and 'sensibility' in the characters of Elinor and Marianne is more ambiguous than simply stating that the novel promotes sense over sensibility. As Ros Ballaster explains in her introduction to *Sense and Sensibility*: "Contrasts are established through similitude rather than absolute difference. Ultimately, 'sense' and 'sensibility' are etymological relatives rather than linguistic strangers" (xix). In terms of both language and plot, Austen appears to create an ambiguous study of how characters cope with excessive sense or sensibility. The reviewer did not directly pick up on these subtleties. This points to a possible ideological, and therefore unreliable, interpretation of the novel by the reviewer, or, contrariwise, a misjudgement of the novel by the modern academic critic, whereby we read more into the novel than was (deemed to be) there. As Claudia L. Johnson in "Austen Cults and Cultures" explains, "it is

conspicuously difficult to disentangle the 'real' Austen from the acknowledged or unacknowledged agendas of those discussing her" (233). In any case, this difference between our current ideas of Austen's art and those of the reviewer has to be considered when judging the relation between reviews and the novels.

The second review of *Sense and Sensibility*, dated May 1812, in the *British Critic*, similarly starts with a remark upon the large number of novels that enter the market at that time, and shows that the reviewer regrets the fact that this novel could not receive more attention than the short review it is given here. After a brief and very general summary, highlighting the wanting treatment of the Dashwood sisters by their older brother, the reviewer finishes the article by stating to the female readers that "they may peruse these volumes not only with satisfaction but with real benefits, for they may learn from them, if they please, many sober and salutary maxims for the conduct of life, exemplified in a very pleasing and entertaining narrative" (40). Again, the reviewer emphasises the moral lessons that can be learnt from the novel, and the combination of didacticism and entertainment.

Moving on to *Pride and Prejudice*, reviewed in the *British Critic* of February 1813, a noticeable difference can be perceived. The reviewer has a favourable opinion of the novel. However, the chief praise he gives to the novel is that it is entertaining: "we have perused these volumes with much satisfaction and amusement, and entertain very little doubt that their successful circulation will induce the author to similar exertions" (42). The reviewer does not mention any morality or lesson that can be deduced from the novel at all. The second review, in the *Critical Review* of March 1813, does mention lessons to be learnt, but these lessons are much more specific than how this didacticism is described in the reviews of *Sense and Sensibility*. The review states that Lydia's elopement "shows the folly of letting young girls have their own way," and that Austen draws a line between "the prudent and the mercenary in matrimonial concerns" (46). The reviewer concludes by applauding Austen's description of

domestic scenes. The focus of the latter reviews centres on amusement and the characters, while that of the earlier reviews are clearly concerned with the moral lessons the novel teaches.

This concern with morality and amusement mirrors the general concern regarding novel reading and writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Gary Kelly in *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* aptly summarises the conflicting views regarding modern novels. On the one hand, he says, reading of modern novels was condemned for raising false expectations of life, causing (predominantly) women to fall victim to this threat, and changing a person in a destructive way that could have harmful effects on society in general (7). On the other hand, there were the defenders of the novels, "celebrating the potential for domestic realism" in the modern novel and emphasising its purpose of studying the human mind and behaviour (7-8). However, Kelly explains, the defenders were a minority and it was generally believed that novel reading should contain a form of moral instruction.

This focus on morality is in line with the popularity of conduct literature which circulated at the time. The concern with the didactic function of literature was mostly aimed at women, who were generally believed to be the most avid readers of modern novels and therefore thought to be most easily influenced by what they read. St Clair ascribes the rising amount of conduct literature to the "anxieties among the governing elites at the assaults on the existing religious, political, and social order that occurred during the period" (277). In light of the French Revolution and Britain's counterrevolutionary response, people's behaviour had to be regulated as much as possible to keep similar revolutions from happening in Britain. This meant that the act of reading had to be regulated as well, especially for women. To Austen herself, other views of literature would have been available through her own reading, which could have had an influence on her writing. However, since this is the view that most reviewers express, this is the leading view to be considered in this discussion.

Conduct literature regarding the act of reading, mostly promoted by evangelical writers such as Hannah More and Hester Chapone, stated that reading for women had to be done under supervision, never in private (St Clair, 280). The amount of reading should be limited and the kind of reading had to be approved by authoritative figures. Literature was "too exciting, too distracting, and it inflamed the imagination" (St Clair, 281) with potentially destructive consequences to society. Reviewers, St Clair explains, saw themselves as the judges of what was suitable for the public to read in light of the existing literary standards at the time (285). This also becomes apparent in the reviews of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, where the reviewers assure young women, or their parents, that the books may be perused without any risk of posing a threat to the behaviour and imagination.

There were, of course, many novels that did get the reviewers' stamp of approval and were incredibly popular throughout Austen's life. St. Clair mentions Scott's Waverley novels as examples of this, and gives as a reason for their acceptability in society the "feedback loop" which continually reinforced the connection between author and readers, combined with their subject matter describing traditional societal structures and behavioural codes (288). Similarly, Halsey mentions Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, a novel often read by Austen, and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* as examples of novels which used the genre of the novel subtly to teach complex and valuable lessons (16). Austen, aware of the public's preconceptions, seemed to adhere to the standards the Romantic reading public upheld, obtaining the reviewers' approval despite her, sometimes overt, criticism of how they treated novelists.

Northanger Abbey is perhaps the clearest defence of novel reading by young women. The famous passage in which Austen criticises the people who openly condemn novels and promotes the genre in which "the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest

effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best possible language" (36-37) could not show Austen's defensive stance in the conflict of the modern novel more clearly.

Austen's defence of the novel, however, is nuanced, referring to a specific kind of novel, instead of the modern novel in general. Austen herself read conduct books and was aware of the general lessons they taught with regards to reading. Similarly, Austen was aware of the way contemporary writers such as Hannah More and Mary Brunton used these lessons in their works to promote morality. However, the extent to which Austen used or condemned the "Evangelical novel" is something that critics seem to have varying ideas about. Mary Waldron in *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time* clearly states Austen's dislike of evangelical fiction, for being too unnatural and impossible to apply to everyday life (85). This argument is mainly based on Austen's judgement of Mary Brunton's *Self-Control*, which she stated in her letters as having nothing "of Nature or Probability in it" (*Letters*, 244). Although Brunton's novel is an extreme example of this type of improbable moral writing, the naturalness or probability of novels was something that Austen was generally concerned with. As Waldron states, "'unnatural' conduct in a novel, especially if it was used to support the moral tendency of the work, she found deeply unsatisfying; she appears to have judged that writers of fiction had a duty to keep faith with readers - invention must tie in with what she thought they would recognise and to some extent share" (2). As the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* says when Catherine Morland realises that her faults lie with applying the Gothic fiction to her own life: "Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for" (188). This perhaps is characteristic of Austen's stance towards the novels at her time. They were all 'charming', but there were few which could teach lessons to the readers and present them in a way that made them applicable to real life.

Austen, then, was critical of the work of others, and this criticism mostly extended towards the overly didactic literature which promoted morality over reality. However, this did not mean that Austen condemned conduct literature in general. Halsey promotes a more balanced view of Austen's ideas about the fiction of her time. Her view, which is worth quoting in full, reflects Austen's engagement with the contemporary ideas about morality and fiction as a negotiation instead of a rejection:

> Austen responds with both amusement and sincerity to conduct literature, and the ideas it articulates, gleefully exposing affectation and absurdity, calmly appropriating tone and register, undercutting and subverting both diction and directives. However, she also engages seriously with the flaws in its ideological demands. Austen's novels belong in a tradition that believed in the importance of educating women to read more selectively, more carefully and, crucially, more intelligently. Notwithstanding her reservations about conduct literature itself, Austen trusted in the value of that tradition, and she develops a style of writing that both demands and teaches 'hard reading'. (35)

Although realising and satirising the limits of conduct literature, such as the improbability of settings and actions and the ensuing inapplicability of its lessons to the readers' own lives, Austen concurred with that literature's general plan of teaching readers to be more critical of what and how they read. This 'hard reading' required readers to engage actively with the novels, meaning that the readers could only fully understand the lessons the novels tried to convey if they actively tried. This statement, in combination with Waldron's perception of Austen's view that "fiction, though it does invent, must not lie" (110), portrays Austen as an author who offers studies instead of lessons, expected active engagement from readers with her literature, and promotes a novel that is neither overly didactic, nor solely entertaining. These qualities are what the early nineteenth-century reviewers discern and promote by highlighting the combination of morality, amusement, and reality in Austen's work.

1.2 *Mansfield Park* and the Issues with Reality

Although *Northanger Abbey* displays both Austen's views on novel reading, and the general concern with the genre presented in society, *Mansfield Park*, supposedly Austen's most moralistic work, is perhaps the most intriguing in terms of its defiance of the condemnation of novels and its seeming adherence to the accepted generic markers. It shows clearly how Austen's work was written in the form of a study, requiring active engagement, instead of presenting lessons to the reader directly. Because of its combining the moral with the amusing, Austen herself had already concluded that *Mansfield Park* would not be as entertaining as *Pride and Prejudice*.

Mansfield Park displays the issues with the influence of novel reading on young women's minds, while also showing the impossibility of young women living up to the standards of conduct literature. This behavioural struggle works on the character level. Fanny's behaviour is often presented as morally superior to that of her peers. She refuses to partake in acting, is constantly concerned with propriety and tends to contemplate much while saying very little. Her thoughts, however, do not always reflect her behaviour. When Sir Thomas announces his trip to Antigua, his daughters are left behind experiencing a sense of liberation and relief. Austen then reveals Fanny's thoughts to wander in a similar direction, in spite of Fanny's realisation that this is wrong: "Fanny's relief, and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to her cousins', but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved, because she could not grieve" (31). Fanny, in this instant, shows the clear struggle with *knowing* what is right, and *thinking* what is right. Similarly, when the scheme of playacting is devised, Fanny's thoughts are revealed to the reader: "for her own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted … but every thing of higher consequence was against it" (123). Her perusal of *Lovers' Vows* also reveals the conflicted state of Fanny's mind regarding the play: "she ran through it with an eagerness" but thought it "unfit to be expressed by any

woman of modesty" (128). Fanny, critical and judging by her ideas about morality and propriety, is able to deem *Lovers' Vows* unsuitable for performance. However, according to conduct literature, Fanny should not have read the play unsupervised, and her eagerness and curiosity only confirms their concern with the potential danger for young women to read such a play, as does her collection of literature for private perusal (141). Moreover, after being asked to participate in the play, Fanny "began to feel undecided as to what she ought to do" (141), revealing the struggle with doing what is generally considered right, and what is considered right in the eyes of her peers, who do not appear to see any problems with the play or acting in general.

There are two occasions on which Fanny is actually called out for being a hypocrite. The first one is when she cries about the news of Sir Thomas' departure (31) and the second is when she refuses Henry Crawford's marriage proposal in a way that echoes Elizabeth Bennet's refusal of Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. When Sir Thomas enquires about the marriage proposal, Fanny shows outward signs of shame, knowing that what she did was not what she ought to have done. Sir Thomas, upon learning that Fanny rejected Henry for lack of feelings on her side and lack of principle on his, says:

> I had thought you peculiarly free from the wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you – without even asking their advice. You have shown yourself very, very different from anything that I had imagined. (293-294)

Fanny is confronted with the struggle she has experienced throughout the larger part of the novel, which Waldron summarises as the division in Fanny's conscience between "what she

ought to do and what she wants to do" (91). Her position within the household, with little parental guidance and as set apart from her peers, forces Fanny to navigate her moral struggles by herself. Tony Tanner in *Jane Austen* explains, that *Mansfield Park* "is a book about the difficulty of preserving true moral consciousness amid the selfish manoeuvring and jostling of society" (171).

So, the morality of Fanny's character reveals signs of struggle instead of certainty. This is something Fanny herself is conscious of. On the narrator's level, a similar conflict emerges regarding the inclusion of playacting in the novel. Although drama in the form of theatre and the novel are two different literary modes, the way Austen employs two plays by Shakespeare and *Lovers' Vows*, is similar to how she used *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in *Northanger Abbey*. The heroine, whether it be Catherine Morland or Fanny Price, is personally aware of the problems her engagement with the work of literature brings, but the narrator shows the reader, through these characters, the larger issues with the fiction at hand.

This is something which Isobel Armstrong in *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park* beautifully delineates. In her analysis of how the plays, *As You Like It*, *Lovers' Vows*, and *Henry VIII* function in the novel, she explains, "the allusions to the play [*As You Like It*] are clearly signalled but they are possessions of the text and not the characters … Both men and women fall into stereotypes which actually prepare them for blindly adopting such roles later on inside and outside the play *Lovers' Vows*" (63-64). By assimilating *As You Like It*, famous for its "All the world's a stage" (2.7.139) speech, into the plot of *Mansfield Park*, Austen draws the readers' attention to the fact that all characters are, in a way, acting, but she also delineates the concern that critics had with the inability of readers to distinguish fiction from reality and with the novels, which supposedly raised false expectations. As Armstrong suggests, "the intertwining of the two texts [*Mansfield Park* and *Lovers' Vows*] is achieved with such virtuosity that they seem to be constantly challenging and modifying one another" (71) and, as she explains, this

interwovenness leads readers to question the relation between role and reality. With the amoral behaviour many characters show and Fanny's struggle with her inward feelings and outward behaviour, *Mansfield Park* becomes the novel that studies the notion of the influence of fiction on the mind even more thoroughly and realistically than *Northanger Abbey* does. It shows the struggle of young women living up to behavioural codes portrayed in conduct books and does so in a setting that was familiar to the readers. The narrative clearly highlights the dangers of becoming too involved in stories to separate the real from the fictional, but at the same time shows that the heavily moralistic opposite sets the reader up for difficulty with applying it to their own lives.

Fanny's outsider's position within the society of Mansfield Park exemplifies the critical observer that Austen had envisioned as her hypothetical reader. Austen aimed at making novels meant for 'hard reading', requiring active engagement with the matter instead of simply searching for amusement. She expected readers to be in charge of their own minds when it came to being able to separate fiction from reality. Fanny's natural behaviour shows the natural responses readers might have had to the text they were reading; a struggle between restraint and indulgence. Austen creates a narrative that invites readers to become involved, only to learn that becoming too involved might lead to regret, teaching a lesson through a study of the natural human mind, instead of presenting a study of the perfect human mind. As Tanner states, "Jane Austen knew that virtue was a hard affair and morality might involve renunciation, sacrifice, and solitary anguish" (171). Possibly even more realistic than *Northanger Abbey*, with nothing remarkable about the setting, no hidden rooms or conspicuous drawers, no ghosts of deceased relatives haunting the imagination, *Mansfield Park* creates an image that would allow contemporary readers to learn from Fanny's struggles and reflect on their own struggles.

How then do we relate *Mansfield Park* to Austen's previous publications and their reviews? Judging by the fact that the first time Austen mentions *Mansfield Park* in her letters in the

beginning of 1813, it may be safe to conclude that the reviews of *Pride and Prejudice* will not have had a big impact on the themes and the presentation of characters in the story, which had been devised earlier. The review in the *Critical Review* from February 1812 contains perhaps one of the greatest compliments Austen could have received about her work in relation to what has previously been said about her standpoint in the contemporary literary debate. Compliments such as "the incidents are probable" (35) and that the novel contains the combination of instruction and amusement fit the description of Austen's literary stance quite well. The morality of *Mansfield Park*, where instead of opposing a strong sense of duty and excessive sensibility, as in the characters of Elinor and Marianne, Fanny Price appears to combine the two character traits, makes Fanny's behaviour both a lesson and a defiance. As with Elinor's struggle with her duties and her feelings, Fanny is shown to be unlike the perfect heroines of more didactic fiction. At the same time, Fanny reforms in a similar way as Marianne does, leading to the happy conclusion of the novel.

So, when Isobel Armstrong asks how Austen could have created Fanny Price after "the wit and vivacity of her earlier heroines" (43), the content of the novel is important, because it points out that Fanny Price is not as "creepmouse" as Tom Bertram accuses her of being, but rather plays a pivotal part in the fate of the characters of *Mansfield Park*, and offers a criticism of the lack of probability in the didactic literature at the time. Moreover, the novel's paratext may give an idea as to why Austen made Fanny in this fashion. Armstrong gives the title as the most important clue, stating that "the title refers to a property and not to a person" (43), emphasising how characters gain meaning from how they present themselves at the estate instead of how they present themselves in relation to others. Fanny's quietude compared to Elizabeth Bennett's wit and energy takes the focus off the qualities that create complications for the heroine, such as pride and prejudice, and aims it at the question of how in the narrative of *Mansfield Park* each character plays its own part. This returns the argument to the notion that the estate of

Mansfield Park is a stage, and the characters' actions only achieve meaning within the minds of the audience. In this case, the actions become meaningful within the thoughts of Fanny Price. She appears to be the quiet observer who forms her own ideas based on her feelings and her ideas of propriety and presents these to the reader.

Another important idea to keep in mind when considering the possible reasons for why Austen chose to write this moralistic tale as opposed to something as amusing as *Pride and Prejudice*, is that *First Impression* had been rejected for publication earlier. When Austen started writing *Mansfield Park*, she would not yet know the eventual relative success of *Pride and Prejudice*. The success of *Sense and Sensibility*, on the other hand, provided a certainty that these themes worked with the public and may have motivated her to attempt writing a novel that resembled in some respects this first successfully published novel. Her announcement in a letter to her brother to present *Mansfield Park* to the publisher is mentioned after stating the success of *Sense and Sensibility*: "you will be glad to know that every Copy of S&S. is sold & that it has brought me £140, if that sh^{d} ever be of any value. –I have now therefore written myself into £250. –which only makes me long for more" (226). Austen's writing of *Mansfield Park* could possibly have been due to the certain success of *Sense and Sensibility*, while the success of *Pride and Prejudice* could not be ascertained yet when she started writing the story. The success of *Pride and Prejudice* would probably have had more influence on the writing and publication of *Emma*.

What can be concluded from the above discussion, is that Austen developed a thematic style that went beyond the ambitions of both the fashionable novels of her time and of the overly moralistic literature presented to the reader. Instead of denouncing either novel genre and creating something entirely new, she used elements from both genres, to create a tale that would fit the needs of the reader best. She was innovative in this sense, but in such a way that her novels still fit into the standards of the literary environment.

Chapter 2: Character and Style in *Emma*

Although the novels are very different in terms of plot and characters, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* engage with the same notions of propriety of content and language. From the discussion of *Mansfield Park*, it has become clear that in terms of content, Austen promoted a form of hard reading that invited readers intelligently to engage in the interpretation of her work, in order to fully understand the actions of the heroine and the structure of the plot and to find amusement in the novels. This becomes clear from the following statement: "There are a few Typical errors—& a 'said he' or a 'said she' would sometimes make the dialogue more immediately clear—but 'I do not write for such dull Elves'" (*Letters*, 210).

Most important was that characters behaved naturally, in concordance with the innate qualities of the characters that the novel revealed, and that the setting was familiar to the reader, something reviewers often found lacking in the other fiction at the time. Instead of creating easy literature that, like "mere Novels" or sensationalist fiction, was solely amusing or directly told the readers everything that could be learnt from the story, Austen created a form of fiction that was entertaining for those who read for amusement, but could also serve to teach useful lessons to readers who were willing to learn from their reading, as was promoted at the time.

Emma is perhaps the novel that most seriously engages with creating settings that are real and familiar to readers and presenting characters that behave naturally throughout. In terms of themes of misjudgement and secrecy, the novel most resembles *Northanger Abbey*, teaching a lesson in how to read and find meaning in reading. The difference between these two novels lies in the fact that *Northanger Abbey* teaches this lesson in reading actively and intelligently, by making it a prominent feature of the plot, while in *Emma*, it is the language and style of writing that serve this purpose.

According to James Edward Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, Austen did not expect people to like *Emma* or indeed its protagonist. Austen-

Leigh explains that when Austen started writing *Emma*, she stated: "'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like'" (119). This, in combination with the fact that Austen did not write for "dull elves" who could not work out the meaning for themselves, shows that *Emma* was perhaps one of Austen's most striking attempts at authorial independence. The reviews of *Emma,* both the official reviews and the collected 'Opinions', as well as the sales, reveal that *Emma* was not as popular as her other novels were. Interestingly, the novel most subtly teaches readers the lessons about misjudgement, secrecy, and reading, themes that were clearly present in Austen's previous novels. It also confronts readers directly with their own reading behaviour. To enjoy *Emma* is to study *Emma*, and to realise that the judgement of the narrator is not as reliable as the judgement of the readers themselves. Ironically, then, the novel that teaches lessons about reading and requires the kind of reading that was promoted by conduct literature and reviewers, is not recognised as doing this by the reviewers. They applaud *Emma* for being realistic and different from the romances, but do not appear to pick up on the fact that, essentially, *Emma* is a novel about reading and interpreting.

The chapter will show how the lack of action and changes of scene make *Emma* the least eventful but most linguistically complex novel. This complexity is possibly what made *Emma* less popular among the public at the time. It will show how Austen both used and went beyond the style of her predecessors, and used language and style to further explore the themes of her previous novels. It appears to directly subvert the acclaimed superiority of the reviewers regarding their own reading style, and their condescension towards novels in general.

2.1 Character and Narrative Technique

In many ways, Emma is the opposite of Fanny Price. Where Fanny judges quietly and correctly, Emma is very vocal about her ideas and is confronted with her misjudgements. And while Fanny is seemingly passive within the group at the Mansfield Park estate, Emma meddles

wherever she can. Opinions of Fanny in *Mansfield Park* varied. Mary Cooke "Admired Fanny in general; but thought she ought to have been more determined on overcoming her own feelings, when she saw Edmund's attachment to Miss Crawford" (Southam, 49). Even within the Austen family, opinions were divided: "Edward admired Fanny – George disliked her" (Southam, 48). And while Austen's mother called Fanny "insipid," Cassandra was "Fond of Fanny" (Southam, 49). The collected 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park* reveal that, although there were many people who criticised Fanny Price for various reasons, the majority of the people that were asked to provide feedback said that they liked the character.

The published reviews of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, which would have been available to Austen at the time she started the composition of *Emma* also reveal numerous remarks on how Austen handled the characters in her work. Generally, all reviews, except one by the *Critical Review* of *Pride and Prejudice*, commend Austen for the way she builds and sustains characters, as in the *Critical Review*'s review of *Sense and Sensibility*: "It is well-written; the characters are in genteel life, naturally drawn, and judiciously supported" (Southam, 35). It reveals a focus on the natural aspects of Austen's characters. On the whole, the characters in *Emma,* behave naturally and in a probable way. 'Natural' here implies that the characters are such as readers may encounter in everyday life, and their actions are in line with the way their inherent character traits are established. This was something which the reviewers and the readers of the preceding novels highly valued.

The 'natural' behaviour does not mean that the characters become predictable, or more predictable than people in real life. Austen's language and style prevent this from happening, because she reveals how characters ought to be perceived, without directly presenting an interpretation to the reader. In *The Language of Jane Austen*, Myra Stokes creates a concept of character that reveals the four categories of characterisation Austen often used to define her characters. Stokes explains that each character is generally described in terms of spirits,

manners, head, and heart (32). Under 'spirits', Stokes understands animation and cheerfulness as well as revulsion (46, 51), 'manners' refer to a person's address and behaviour and how this is likely to recommend them (81) and could also refer to their moral conduct. 'Head' refers to "abilities, powers, talents, and understanding" (121), 'Heart' refers to feeling. For example, Emma, when interrogating Jane Fairfax about Frank Churchill, asks about his looks, whether he is agreeable, and whether he is "a young man of information," to which Jane Fairfax replies by saying that "manners were all that could be safely judged of" (159). The short conversation addresses three out of these four categories of characterisation, although Jane Fairfax probably refrains from revealing more about Frank Churchill's character because of their hidden relationship.

Emma herself is described in terms of these four qualities. The first sentence of the novel delineates Emma's character as the following: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence" (7). Readers learn about her situation and her cleverness. However, about the word clever, Stokes has to say the following: "Clever, though not in itself derogatory, withholds the moral approval of sensible" (134). The use of the term 'clever', similarly, glancingly differs from the more positive word, 'intelligence'. The combination of cleverness, and sensibility or intelligence is proven to be lacking in Emma on numerous occasions. She has little regard for Harriet's feelings for Robert Martin when devising her plan to pair Harriet and Mr. Elton. The manner in which Emma rejects Mr. Elton also reveals her inability aptly to judge people's behaviour, and her treatment of Mrs. Bates is incredibly condescending. The description of Emma continues further down the page in terms of her ability to judge, revealing that she was "directed chiefly by her own [judgement and pride]" and possessed "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (7). Her spirits, similarly were aimed at admiring her own ideas (25). In spite of Highbury's admiration of Emma and Emma's admiration of herself, the narrator

reveals to readers a version of Emma that is in line with her actions throughout the rest of the novel.

Stokes also explains that this characterisation scheme allows us to study the naturalness of characters in terms of their behaviour, because it shows how Austen distinguished between the "intrinsic worth (head and heart) and social charm (address and spirits)" (34). Tanner offers, perhaps a less schematic, but equally convincing distinction between "manners as decoration and 'ceremony' and manners as expressive signs of morality and civility" (170). A distinction Emma also makes when referring to the people of Highbury: "elegance, which, whether of person or of mind, she saw so little in Highbury" (157). Although the term 'elegance' had many possible meanings and connotations at the time. Stokes defines it in *Emma* as the following: "an acquired, not an innate, virtue … and exposure to 'the best society', to civilised and refined company, is required to produce it" (88-89). She defines the antonym of 'elegant' to be the 'ordinary', making this remark by Emma a very snobbish one.

A favourable description of a character's manners and spirit could be undermined by a revelation of contradicting inherent qualities, such as feelings and mindset. This means that, superficially, characters such as Mr. Wickham, Mr. Willoughby, and Frank Churchill are thought to be charming. This is how the novels establish them in the minds of the heroines, who judge them by their outward appearance and address. Their actions, however, reveal their more inherent character traits, which are not as favourable and which surprise the heroines for being so different from what they expected. By making this distinction between the social and the intrinsic, the reliability of the narrative becomes questionable and the actual nature of a character's behaviour can only be determined and predicted by those who read critically or those who read the novel again. This is, of course, relevant to the discussion of how Austen elicited a form of intelligent reading, which was valued by reviewers and promoted by the conduct literature of her time to distinguish between the unfortunate "dull elves" and those who

actively engaged with what they read. The nuanced consideration of characters and the fact that important information is hidden in plain sight or omitted to create suspense, all make the reader aware of the unreliability of the narrative voice and forces them to think for themselves. It shows how Austen's use of language was one of the more innovative features of her novels.

Considering Frank Churchill's character in this regard, in comparison to Mr. Knightley, further proves this distinction between manners of decoration and manners of morality. Frank Churchill is described as "a very good looking young man; height, air, address, all were unexceptionable, and his countenance had a great deal of the spirit and liveliness of his father's; he looked quick and sensible" (179). Emma, here, is only able to judge by spirit and manners and draws the conclusion that she likes him. A few paragraphs down, however, readers already encounter suspicion regarding his sincerity of manners: "that he should never have been able to indulge so amiable a feeling before, passed suspiciously through Emma's brain" (180). Every premonition, however, regarding Frank Churchill is discarded because of his charming demeanour and behaviour. When Emma tries to determine his feelings, she thinks "he seemed to have all the life and spirit, cheerful feelings, and social inclinations of his father, and nothing of the pride or reserve of Enscombe. Of pride, indeed, there was perhaps scarcely enough; his indifference to a confusion of rank, bordered too much on inelegance of mind" (186).

Mr. Knightley, who is cheerful and sensible, is immediately introduced by not only outward manners, but also in terms of his sensibility (feeling). His demeanour is agreeable according to Stokes' theory, because it combines elegance, ease, openness, and simplicity (Stokes, 95). The narrator also emphasises his ability to judge people and situations with great understanding. He is "one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (12). This image is carried out throughout the rest of the novel. Frank Churchill, who is only introduced in terms of his amiability and the image Emma has of him, is not introduced as transparently as Mr. Knightley is. His actual character is later revealed to

the reader as being highly questionable, which is in line with the biased and incomplete introduction. This distinction is, of course, in line with the larger theme of the novel, regarding secrecy and misjudgement of characters and situations.

It is on these grounds that it becomes possible to understand the *British Critic*'s 'notice' of *Pride and Prejudice* which discusses the character of Mr. Darcy. The reviewer states that, although Elizabeth is excellently portrayed, "this is not precisely the case with Darcy her lover; his easy unconcern and fashionable indifference, somewhat abruptly changes to the ardent lover" (Southam, 41). As with Emma's perception of Frank Churchill, Elizabeth's perception of Mr. Darcy, reveals only a very displeasing address and a condescending manner. Nothing of what the reader has learnt so far about Mr. Darcy would explain the sudden shift in character and it can, therefore, not be natural in the eyes of the reviewer. There is a considerable discord between Mr. Darcy's social manners and spirit, and his mind and feelings.

The reason for this initial view of Mr. Darcy, which is not reflective of his behaviour and character in the end of the novel, is that the readers perceive Mr. Darcy through Elizabeth's judgements. This likewise happens when Emma meets Frank Churchill. In order to direct the reader towards a certain view of the characters, while also adopting a more revealing undertone as to their inherent qualities, Austen employs a narrative technique called free indirect discourse. It is a feature of Austen's style of writing that gave her novels the distinguishing quality of becoming more amusing and interesting once they were read again. The rereading of Austen's novels allows for a consideration of notable factors which readers would have dismissed upon first glance. This means that *Emma* also requires 'hard reading' to understand the more complicated tendencies of the novel. To not be equally misled by Emma's misjudgement as Emma herself, readers had to be able to separate the narrative voice from the character's.

Emma in particular is considered to be one of the most re-readable novels Austen wrote, simply because as Linda Bree in "Style, structure, language" states, "Austen set about the practical task of writing this novel where almost every sentence has different meanings in its present, in prospect and in retrospect" (94). One explanation for this is the constantly shifting focalisation of the narrative. The narrator appears to be omniscient, but usually only knows as much as the character that it focalises. As Marilyn Butler in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* explains, "most of the staple of the narrative purports to be Emma's thought process, or a summary of the action as it might be seen through Emma's eyes; though in either case, small objective touches … marks the reservation of the watchful author" (261). There are moments, such as the beginning, where the narrator could be considered omniscient. The narrator reveals that Emma "seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence" and "that the real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself … The danger, however, was at present so unperceived that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her" (7). The narrator here reveals information to the readers that Emma herself did not yet have, but allows us to look into Emma's mind to already perceive her ignorance of her own faults. The use of "seemed" in the first description of Emma Woodhouse is already alluding to a distinction between Emma's appearance and her 'real' character.

This distinction between narrator and character is then confused by a shift towards free indirect discourse. Joe Bray in *The Language of Jane Austen* defines the characteristics of this narrative technique as the following, "the combination of third-person pronouns and past tense with proximal deixis reflecting a character's subjectivity" (18). A shift from indirect discourse into free indirect discourse can be seen in the following passage:

> It was on the wedding-day of this beloved friend that Emma first sat in mournful thought of any continuance. The wedding over and the bride-people gone, her father and herself

> were left to dine together, with no prospect of a third to cheer along the evening. Her father composed herself to sleep after dinner, as usual, and she had then only to sit and think of what she had lost. (8)

This passage is followed by a lengthy report of Emma's feelings upon the event. Similarly, when the chapter progresses into a description of Highbury, the reader at first assumes that an omniscient narrator is speaking. A few passages later, however, the population of Highbury is described as a society that "afforded her [Emma] no equals," and Emma, who is recollecting Miss Taylor's departure of the day at that moment, "could not but sigh over it and wish for impossible things" (9). These examples confirm that the readers are still within Emma's thoughts and are reading this seemingly objective description obliquely through the eyes of the heroine. As Butler states, "only the alert reader notes the detail which simultaneously characterizes Emma's thoughts as censurable" (261).

It is, in fact, Mr. Knightley who readers should accept as the morally responsible character of the novel. Bray points out that Mr. Knightley is the quiet observer on most occasions (26). Similarly, he is the one who seems to find faults with Emma and seems to be able to judge characters and situations better. It is the use of free indirect discourse and the general focalisation through Emma that makes the reader question Mr. Knightley, or at least to not take him as seriously as they should. It is through Mr. Knightley that the reader is invited to study Emma's behaviour as distant from the general admiration bestowed upon her and as detached from Emma's own thoughts. In order to appreciate Emma, it appears, readers had to understand her character in a way that Mr. Knightley does and in a way that Jane Austen herself did. This means appreciating that she was often in the wrong and that her errors of judgement and her reform could teach valuable lesson to the reader.

The focalisation shifts occasionally. While the larger part of the story is told with access to only Emma's mind, there are instances where other people's thoughts are revealed. In Chapter

Two, readers learn of the history between Frank Churchill and his father through the eyes of Mrs. Weston. In that same passage, readers hear Mrs. Weston's account of Emma's character, which is "more equal to her situation than most girls would have been and had sense and energy and spirits that might be hoped would bear her well and happily through its little difficulties and privations" (19). And when, in Chapter Three, the narrator briefly enters the mind of Mr. Elton, his calling Emma "lovely" already shows a certain fondness of her person that would later be revealed in his proposal (21). The narrator, by focalising the character, allows readers to experience what that character is thinking and feeling, which provides readers with a more complete image of the situation. However, this is done in a way that does not immediately reveal everything about the true nature of the character and about how the plot will progress.

This tension between the narrative voice and the character it focalises is perhaps most clearly visible when Emma and Frank Churchill discuss Jane Fairfax. Frank Churchill is evasive and deceitful in answering Emma to such an extent that both Emma and Mrs. Weston notice: "you answer as discreetly as she could herself" (188). When Emma asks Frank about whether he knows what Jane Fairfax is destined to be, his answer is accompanied by the parenthetical "rather hesitantly" to describe his tone (188). And when he is about to reveal how intimately he knew Jane Fairfax in Weymouth, he stops talking halfway into the sentence and shifts the focus to Emma who he says would likely know more than him about Jane Fairfax (190). This passage gains a completely different meaning and becomes much more interesting once the novel is read again. While there are clear signs that we should distrust Frank Churchill, the reader is initially invited to interpret this conversation as establishing a closer connection between Emma and Frank Churchill, because it is how Emma interprets the situation. This manifests the connection between the narrative voice and the protagonist. Any suspicion that is raised upon Frank Churchill's evasive answers are discarded because Emma does not mention them again and simply admires her idea of Frank's character. The fact that Emma's judgement is clouded

by her curiosity about Jane Fairfax is only revealed to the reader if they actively search for it or upon reading the novel again.

The way Austen alternates between dialogue and free indirect discourse, and her "distinct attitude to the inward thought-process and to dialogue, and therefore to the proper relation between the two" is what makes her novels stand apart from other fiction published at the time (Butler, 264). It emphasises the discrepancies between a character's inherent qualities and outward behaviour, provides a much more realistic view of characters, and shows the reader the struggle of distinguishing between what is real and what is acted out.

2.2 Syntax and Style

While the narrative technique and description of characters hide relevant information from the reader, Austen's syntax and style are the most revelatory elements of her novels. In terms of syntax and Austen's use of letters, a more traditional style can be found in her work; a style heavily influenced by Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson. This use of language mirrors Austen's stance towards novels and novel reading. It shows how Austen used traditional techniques and adapted them to create a novel that was different from the common novels. This contributes to our understanding of *Emma* as an attempt at independence of style.

In *The Language of Jane Austen*, Norman Page identifies a development throughout Austen's writing in terms of its syntax. In Austen's juvenilia and early career, she used the "Johnsonian sentence" (92) which is known for its balanced structure. In her early career, Austen used this type of sentence for ironic and parodic purposes, because of the absurd disparity between form and content that was increasingly adopted into the fiction of her time (Page, 92). This does not mean that she did not use the sentence structure for more serious purposes such as characterisation (Page, 92). For example, *Sense and Sensibility* invites readers to compare and contrast the characters of Elinor and Marianne. As Page points out, Elinor's

manner of speech is stuck in the rigidity of the formal sentences, mirroring the supposed rigidity of her character (94). Contrastively, Marianne's sentences are often void of a clear structure and show resemblances to poetic speech patterns, matching the impulsive nature of the character (96). Although, as mentioned before, this distinction between sense and sensibility appears to be more ambiguous, the characters' reading practices and behaviour are matched and reflected in Austen's use of language with regards to the respective characters.

However, this formally structured language which abounded in her first written novels, decreases as her career progressed and made way for more dramatic language. Page argues that in the language of the later novels, especially *Persuasion*, "the architectural qualities of the written sentence have largely given way to speech-derived patterns" (101). Austen created these patterns by varying sentence lengths. For example, numerous shorter sentences serve to provide more immediacy of the action (Page, 106). Longer sentences can contrast longer and shorter clauses to create a more dramatic effect (Page, 108-109).

Bray uses a very long sentence from *Emma* in his example of how the use of free indirect denotes Emma's impatience with Harriett when she tells her about her meeting with Robert Martin. He perceives the use of third person perspective and the past tense in this dialogue as Emma filtering Harriet's words in anticipation of the actual news (39). This example: "'She had set out from Mrs. Goddard's half an hour ago – she had been afraid it would rain – she had been afraid it would pour down every moment—but she thought she might get to Hartfield first – she had hurried on as fast as possible'" (167), shows how Austen uses varying lengths of clauses within a long, but still readable sentence, to hurry the narrative along and to force the reader to experience this hurry as well. It also shows how Austen employed syntax to narrate the experience of her character and convey this experience to the reader, again establishing this connection between the narrative voice and the perception of the character. In the shift from more structured syntax to a style that bears closer resemblance to spoken language, Page claims

that Austen's earlier novels still betray more of the eighteenth-century style of writing, while the later novels with their more dramatic use of language are more adventurous and innovative.

A stylistic feature that seemed to become less influential as Austen's career progressed, was the epistolary form. Page attributes to the style of epistolary fiction "melodramatic and sentimental excess" and "vivid immediacy and minute analysis of states of mind" (168, 172). But the epistolary genre was decreasing in popularity. This was presumably one of the reasons for Austen to refrain from using the form in later drafts and novels. Page does, however, identify traces of the epistolary form in, for example, *Sense and Sensibility*, where "Marianne is placed firmly in the eighteenth-century tradition of heroines whose lachrymose emotions find a partial outlet in letter-writing" (175). Similarly, letters and letter writing play an important role within the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*.

There is a shift, however, when considering the novels with later dates of composition within the epistolary tradition. As Page argues, Fanny Price resorts to letter writing because of her isolation within the household, and in *Emma*, the seclusion of Highbury requires this type of correspondence to keep up with the rest of the world, but the novels do not depend upon it as much as the earlier written novels do (180-182). However, Page also identifies the function of letters that goes beyond their derivation of eighteenth-century tradition: "it can advance the plot by reporting action or disclosing information; and it can, no less surely, reveal character" (182). This is why, as Page argues, Austen often, but not always, limits herself to quoting letters written by the morally questionable characters of the novels. They reveal characteristics of those characters that would not have been noticed otherwise (183). This is where Stokes' theory and Page's ideas work in tandem to aid the main argument of this chapter that Austen employed various styles and techniques to create a narrative that revealed little upon first glance, but gained meaning upon rereading. This was a style that elicited hard reading to truly understand

the purpose of the plot and character as dealing with the unreliability of narration and the importance of actively reflecting upon and studying the work at hand.

Frank's letter in Chapter Fifty-One is quoted in full and reveals his character to a much greater extent than Emma's biased character description did, which omitted any proof of his inherent qualities. His language in the letter betrays the irrationality of his thoughts, while he also adopts a stylised approach when writing the letter. There are passages where he seems to be writing from an overflow of sensibility, which he checks by going for a walk (411). But there are also moments where his style is very well thought through. For instance, when he says, "It is very difficult for the prosperous to be humble" (408) or "in short, my dear madam, it was a quarrel blameless on her side, abominable on mine" (412). The first sentence is a general statement containing antithesis, the latter a balanced sentence in terms of both syntax and its use of antithesis. The way the letter is written mirrors how Frank, in his interaction with Emma and the society of Highbury, hides the irrationality of his character and actions behind a stylised presentation of himself.

It is, however, in the discussion of this letter between Emma and Mr. Knightley, that the reader is confronted with a choice of whom to trust for the interpretation of Frank's words. The narrative voice here, reveals more explicitly than before, the bias Emma has towards Frank and how it affects her reading of this letter: "though it was impossible not to feel that he had been wrong, yet he had been less wrong than she had supposed – and he had suffered, and was very sorry – and he was so grateful to Mrs. Weston, and so much in love with miss Fairfax, and she was so happy herself, that there was no being severe; and could he have entered the room, she must have shaken hands with him as heartily as ever" (415). Emma is blinded by all the compliments he pays her and Mrs. Weston in the letter and by his seeming regret concerning the situation. The judgement of his character still reflects the opinion of him that she had when she first met him and discards his questionable traits.

Here, the reader is increasingly invited to accept Mr. Knightley's opinion of Frank Churchill. His impartiality in the matter is disputed by himself (416), but at the same time he asks Emma to refrain from expressing her own opinions until he has read the letter completely. This is followed by his thoughts about the letter, presented in a string of short sentences, which as discussed before convey immediacy and possibly Emma's impatience. This impatience is emphasised when Emma follows his account by saying "you had better go on" (417). Mr. Knightley's thoughts present the reader and Emma with an image of Frank Churchill that appears to be more in line with his general behaviour. Mr. Knightley is able to see through the pomp of Frank's language to a far greater extent. The remarks such as "too much indebted to the event for his acquittal" and "Always deceived in fact by his own wishes, and regardless of little besides his own convenience" (416) are conclusions which he draws from Frank's account of his relationship with Jane Fairfax. This letter and the ensuing discussion confirm to readers the biased nature of Emma's character and invites them to consider Mr. Knightley's perspective as equal or even superior to Emma's. It confronts readers with the clouded judgement that has been presented to them by Emma throughout the novel.

By leaving the discussion of the letter unresolved, neither character completely agrees with the views of the other, the reader is forced to consider their own standpoint. Rereading the novel reveals that the narrator does provide hints regarding Frank Churchill's character, as discussed before, but that the narrative voice and the character's ideas become too closely connected throughout the novel, to really consider the implications of those hints. Instead, the readers are influenced by Emma's ideas and opinions. The initial characterisation by a detached or reasonably objective narrative voice is sustained, confirming the natural behaviour of the characters.

The combination of free indirect discourse, the particular method of characterisation, and the occasional use of letters, which are characteristic of all of Austen's novels and skilfully

combined in *Emma*, make *Emma* a novel that allows readers to question the character's judgement and their own, and make this a novel that, upon first glance, appears quite uneventful, but upon reading it again becomes ever more entertaining and useful. This is highlighted in, for example the 'Opinions' of *Emma*, when Miss Bigg, states that she "on reading it a second time, like [*sic*] Miss Bates much better than at first" (Southam, 56). The unreliable narrator reveals enough to the reader to make the characters appear natural, but hides so much from the readers that the stories do not become immediately predictable. Although the plot of this novel is less overtly concerned with novel reading or fiction in general, the style denotes a concern with the distinction between superficial reading and hard reading and between fiction and reality.

Chapter 3: *Persuasion* and the Influence of Reviews

The previous chapters have focussed on the general concerns that reviewers expressed when criticising Austen's novels and how Austen adhered to the expectations of the early-nineteenth century public, but also on how she deviated from other novels of her time to create a new kind of novel that did not just offer amusement or morality, but rather explored a combination of these two features. The naturalness of character, morality, and the portrayal of everyday life, which allowed readers to learn from her literature instead of just being entertained, was what critics valued most in her work.

This chapter will focus on some of the more specific remarks within the reviews and the collected 'Opinions' that Austen recorded to see whether they directly influenced her writing. The first section will analyse the reception history of her novels by looking at thematic connections, sales of her work, and her own ideas expressed in her letters. The last section will look at how one of Austen's last written works, *Persuasion*, responds to the reception of her work as a whole.

3.1 The Development of Austen's Writing and the Reviews

In terms of general themes, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* are very much concerned with the morality of their heroines. Although there are some clear differences between the dialectical treatment of Elinor and Marianne, and the character of Fanny Price, both novels contain a study of character instead of a presentation of the 'perfect' heroine. They both use this study to form a more realistic image of young ladies struggling with the conflict between what they ought to do and what they want to do. However, in terms of general themes, the novels are relatively conventional within the publishing sphere at the time.

Considering the sales of her earlier novels and society's general concern with regulating conduct and reading, it would have been a sensible decision for Austen to write another novel

that deals with themes of morality after *Sense and Sensibility*. When Austen started developing the story of *Mansfield Park*, according to Cassandra Austen around February 1811, *Sense and Sensibility* had already been accepted for printing. Which, compared to the fate of *Susan* (*Northanger Abbey*) and *First Impressions* (*Pride and Prejudice*) was, of course, proof of success. By the time *Pride and Prejudice* had proven to be very popular, *Mansfield Park* was almost completed. Austen herself realised that *Mansfield Park* in itself would perhaps not become her biggest success and would depend upon the popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* in order to sell. She wrote in one of her letters from July 1813, "I have something in hand – which I hope on the credit of P.&P. will sell well, tho' not half so entertaining" (*Letters*, 226). The context of publication might account for some similarities between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, outside of Austen's personal motivations for writing the novel.

The influence of the review of *Sense and Sensibility* on either *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mansfield Park* is probably limited. It is important to point out that there is quite convincing evidence from Austen's own letters that she had not read anything about the reception of *Sense and Sensibility:* "Your tidings of S&S. give me pleasure. I have never seen it advertised" (*Letters*, 259). This letter was written in November 1813, the same month that *Mansfield Park* was published. Any similarities between the novels are, therefore, probably either coincidental or based on opinions expressed to her by family, friends, and the publisher.

However, if the reviews, as discussed in chapter one, reflect the reading public's opinion of her work, especially in terms of favourite characters and general themes, then they may still be of use to account for any similarities between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. Both the reviews of *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, highlight Mr. John Dashwood's character as showing good intentions, but also as being easily persuaded by his wife to refrain from acting upon those intentions. According to *Critical Review,* it teaches a lesson of "how dangerous is the procrastination of liberality" (Southam, 39). In *Mansfield Park*, Mrs. Norris

similarly appears to have good intentions by proposing the idea of inviting Fanny Price to the estate. However, when the matter of Fanny's residence is discussed, "Mrs. Norris was sorry to say, that the little girl's staying with them, at least as things then were, was quite out of the question" (10), blaming this on her husband's health. Mr. Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, is like Mrs. Norris convinced of his own benevolence, and resolves upon giving much less than he initially intended to give to his family (11). For both the reviews of *Sense and Sensibility* to dedicate a large part of their review to Mr. John Dashwood and his benevolence, means that it is likely to have been a feature of the novel that was picked up by others. This idea is supported by the fact that many of the documented 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park*, state that the readers liked how Austen portrayed the character of Mrs. Norris.

Similarly, the criticism in the 'notice' by the *British Critic* from May 1812 is aimed at the extensive overview of genealogy of the Dashwood family. This may have been expressed to Austen, since the introduction of characters in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* is less summative and more narrative. It is, however, impossible to say with certainty whether this relation is coincidental, a result of Austen's own ideas about her work, or based on opinions expressed by others.

The relation between the reviews of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* is also difficult to establish, since there is, again, no proof in her letters that Austen had read the published opinion of *Pride and Prejudice.* However, there is slightly more evidence that Austen had a better idea of the opinions of *Pride and Prejudice* than of her earlier novel. She was in London between the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*'s first edition, and its second, looking for portraits that would remind her of its characters (*Letters*, 220). She must have realised how popular her latest work was, and it could have been possible that reviews were presented to her by her publisher, Thomas Egerton. Her letter from the sixth of July 1813 to Frances Austen, describing the

success of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, shows that around this time, she was certainly aware of the relative success of her work.

While there are many differences between *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, there are some specific differences that could point to Austen having read the criticism of *Pride and Prejudice.* This mainly lies within the discussion of the characters of Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth Bennett, according to the *Critical Review*, is superior to the "common heroines of novels, and goes on to say that "from her independence, which is kept within the proper line of decorum, and her well-timed sprightliness, she teaches a man of Family-Pride to know himself (Southam, 46). Elizabeth's independence is applauded because it remains within the bounds of propriety and eventually aids the unification of herself and Mr. Darcy. All reviews of *Pride and Prejudice* seem to be equally positive about Elizabeth's character.

In the same review in the *Critical Review*, Elizabeth is repeatedly compared to Beatrice from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, because she "falls in love on much the same principles of contrariety" (Southam, 44). It is true that Elizabeth Bennett and Beatrice are equally witty in their remarks and in their determined prejudices. Although Elizabeth Bennett and Beatrice show similar tendencies and character traits, and elements of *Pride and Prejudice* can certainly be traced back to Shakespeare's play, the connection to *Much Ado About Nothing* appears to be a much stronger presence in *Emma*. First of all, the title of Shakespeare's comedy reveals that all complications of the plot originate in the fact that there is nothing of interest happening. Boredom is the main motivation for the matchmaking plot, as becomes clear from Don Pedro's plan: "the time shall not go dully by us. I will in the interim undertake one of Hercules' labours, which is to bring Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection th'one with th'other" (2.1.359-363). The theme of matchmaking is much more apparent in *Emma* than it is in *Pride and Prejudice*. And, as Sheldon P. Zitner in the introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing* explains, compared to Shakespeare's other plays, this work is

decidedly fixed in terms of its setting (17). Similarly, in *Emma*, nearly the entire plot takes place in Highbury, with one trip to Box Hill as the exception. According to Linda Bree in "*Emma*: Word Games and Secret Histories," "the most exciting events are a couple of timid schoolgirls being frightened by gypsies, and the theft – by report – of Mrs Weston's turkeys" (135). In these environments where nothing of real interest happens, just as in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "people make their entertainment in unsophisticated ways" (Bree, 135).

The characters of Beatrice and Emma are more similar than Beatrice and Elizabeth Bennett in some respects. Beatrice, like Emma, is proud and "self-endeared" (3.1.56). And while Elizabeth is independent and refuses both Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy, she does not principally oppose marriage in the way Emma and Beatrice do. When Leonato says that he hopes to see his daughter married someday, Beatrice replies, "would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust, to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?" (2.1.59-60). Emma, who says that she had never been in love, adds in response to Harriet's concern about Emma' unwillingness to marry:

> I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think it ever shall. And without love, I am sure I should change such a situation as mine…I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house … and never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes. (82)

Both Beatrice and Emma, in their argument against marriage, name the loss of independence as one of the main reasons. At the same time, Zitner explains, "if Beatrice fears marriage; she is also fearful and chagrined at being single" (31). This could, arguably, also be the case for Emma. Zitner discusses the early signs of Beatrice's interest in Benedick's well-being already showing in the beginning of the play: "her devotion to the single life is queried before it is expressed" (29), which in line with what has been discussed in the previous chapter about how

the readers may be aware of the characters' feelings, before the characters themselves are. Similarly, Emma's determined and repeated denial of a connection between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax could already reveal to the readers Emma's interest in Mr. Knightley's love life (210), and therefore can be seen as undermining her initial attitude towards love and marriage. While it is difficult to establish whether Austen was inspired by the review of *Pride and Prejudice* and its comparison of Elizabeth to Beatrice to address similar themes in *Emma*, there are some clear similarities between the three stories and heroines that would suggest that this was not mere coincidence. Other critics have also connected *Emma* to other plays by Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in particular.

Jane Austen herself described Emma as a heroine whom nobody but herself would like (Austen-Leigh, 119). This suggests that Austen understood what people generally, or specifically, did or did not like. Emma is certainly different from the heroines of her other novels. The main difference between Emma and the other heroines is her pride and selfishness. Walter Scott, in the *Quarterly Review*, calls her the "princess paramount" who "either anticipating the taste of a later period of life, or, like a good sovereign, preferring the weal of her subjects of Highbury to her own private interest, sets generously about making matches for her friends without thinking of matrimony on her own account" (Southam, 66). Compared to Elizabeth, who has an "independence of character, which is kept within the proper line of decorum" (Southam, 46), Emma seems to have an independence of character that sometimes exceeds these boundaries. She gossips, behaves condescendingly towards others, and is generally proud, which the novel itself calls "the real evils … of Emma's situation" (7).
This becomes apparent from her treatment of Miss Bates on their trip to Box Hill, or the manner in which she refuses Mr. Elton, and might suggest that Austen, when writing *Emma* at least, was led by the independent desire *not* to give people what they wanted.

It is perhaps, because of these qualities, pride and condescending communication, that Austen expected her to be disliked. These are exactly the qualities which are initially attributed to Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* by Elizabeth Bennett and the people around her. Mr. Darcy is accused of being proud, accused of behaving terribly towards Mr. Wickham, who is of a lower social class, and who decides to meddle in the relationship of Jane and Bingley in a way that closely resembles the way Emma poses a threat to the relationship between Harriet Smith and Robert Martin. However, while Mr. Darcy proves to have noble qualities when the prejudices fade away and mends the relationship between Jane and Mr. Bingley himself, Emma does not show similar tendencies. When Mr. Knightley expresses his feelings towards Emma, and she recalls Harriet's feelings for him, the narrative voice states: "for as to any of that heroism of sentiment which might have prompted her to entreat him to transfer his affection form herself to Harriet, as infinitely the most worthy of the two … Emma had it not" (403). In the continuing chapters, Emma decides to evade confrontation with Harriet, devises the plan to send Harriet to London, and hears from Mr. Knightley, not from Harriet herself, that Harriet and Robert Martin are engaged. Emma plays no part in their reunion. Emma becomes a version of Mr. Darcy that had little to none of his redeeming qualities. But, while Mr. Darcy was criticised for showing unnatural behaviour, Emma's character is developed according to the image that Austen initially created of her.

There is additional evidence that could suggest Austen had read the reviews of *Pride and Prejudice*. *The British Critic* in February 1813, so before Austen had finished writing *Mansfield Park,* states that although Elizabeth is a very consistent character with "no defect in her portrait…this is not precisely the case with Darcy her lover; his easy unconcern and fashionable indifference, somewhat abruptly changes into ardent lover" (Southam, 41). Again, there is no documentary evidence that Austen read the reviews of *Pride and Prejudice*, but comparing this

account of Mr. Darcy's character to how Austen sets up the engagement between Edmund and Fanny in *Mansfield Park* seems to almost be a direct response to this point of criticism:

> I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that everyone may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary as to time in different people.—I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (436)

3.2. *Persuasion*

The first thing to notice about the criticism that preceded *Persuasion*, is that, unlike Austen's other novels, *Mansfield Park* received no official reviews. This may have been due to the fact that there were many other novels coming out in that year, including Walter Scott's first Waverley novel; Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*, and Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage*. As the reviewers of *Sense and Sensibility* had already noted, there were so many new novels, that they could not always dedicate an extensive amount of space to Austen's work. This could also mean that people did not recognise the unique features of her work or that there was no large-scale interest to follow the progress of her writing. Austen did note that the reviewer of the *Quarterly Review* omitted *Mansfield Park* from his review of Emma, while he included a note on all her other works. This meant that, when she started writing *Emma*, she possibly had access to the reviews of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, and that she definitely had access to the 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. During a later stage of composition, Sir Walter Scott's review in the *Quarterly Review* would have been available to her as well.

The lack of public reception did not signify that *Mansfield Park* was not popular. *Mansfield Park* sold out faster than *Pride and Prejudice*, in spite of its larger print run (Fergus, 12). The

less successful second edition came out when Austen was already writing *Persuasion*, so this would not have had a big influence on her initial ideas for the novel, which may very well have been influenced by the initial success of her more moral novel. But, as Fergus points out, her letter to James Stanier Clarke, which stated "though I may never succeed again" (*Letters*, 326) "may hint at a fear that this novel might fail to earn money, as her second edition of *Mansfield Park* was failing" (Fergus, 15).

The sales of *Emma* were not as high as those of her other novels. This may be due to various factors. According to Mr. Fowle in the 'Opinions', the public did not deem the novel interesting (Southam, 57). It is also possible that people had lost interest in Austen after reading the more earnest *Mansfield Park.* There was no second edition of *Emma* in Austen's lifetime. Austen started writing *Persuasion* in August 1815, but *Emma* would not be published until December of that same year. Austen expressed concern about the reception of *Emma,* when she said in her letter to the Countess of Morley: "in my present state of doubt as to her reception in the World, it is particularly gratifying to receive so early an assurance of your Ladyship's approbation" (*Letters*, 323), or when she writes to Clarke, that she is afraid that it will not be as witty as *Pride and Prejudice* or as sensible as *Mansfield Park* (*Letters*, 319). Austen herself liked *Emma*, but was aware that others might not.

With P*ersuasion*, the opposite seems to be the case. In her letter to Fanny Knight, Austen talks about perfect heroines, saying that "pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked" (*Letters,* 350). In relation to *Persuasion*, she says the following, "You may perhaps like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me" (*Letters*, 350). Austen's next publication was a choice between *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. For *Northanger Abbey*, the decision to refrain from publishing the novel was a deliberate choice. Austen was concerned that *Northanger Abbey* may have become outdated, since the date of composition was almost twenty years earlier. *Persuasion* was the safer and more refined option in terms of theme and language,

and a product of her later career. The decision to publish *Persuasion* could also have been made with the financial situation of the Austen family in mind. As Fergus explains, "her family had suffered financial reverses. Her brother Henry's bank had failed on March 1816…Austen herself had lost 13.7.0 of profit on *Mansfield Park* that had remained in her account with Henry" (15). However, the financial setback and disappointing profits for *Emma,* and her illness, eventually kept Austen from being able to publish *Persuasion* herself (Fergus, 15).

Considering *Persuasion* in light of the collected 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* reveals some interesting changes and similarities. One aspect that many people in Austen's 'Opinions' admired, was the scene where Fanny Price returns to her family in Portsmouth. One person even compared the Price family in Portsmouth to the Bennetts from *Pride and Prejudice*, which may explain its popularity. Another was surprised that Austen could have described the scene so well, including the many references to the navy. *Persuasion* more directly engages with Naval characters and is often considered to be one of Austen's most overtly political novels. This may relate to the paratextual elements from *Emma*. *Emma* was dedicated to the Prince Regent, upon the request of James Stanier Clarke, the Regent's chaplain and librarian.

During the time that Austen's novels were published, England was at war with France, and was led by a regent who was known for his luxurious lifestyle and spending a lot of money on trivial things. *Persuasion* is the only novel where readers are given a specific timeframe of its setting. It starts "the summer of 1814" (*Persuasion,* 10) and ends in March 1815, when Napoleon had escaped from Elba. This is a time of temporary peace from the war. As Jonathan Sachs in "The Historical Context" states, "Napoleon abdicated unconditionally in April 1814 and the first Treaty of Paris ended the Wars of the Sixth Coalition on 30 May 1814 … Peace was officially restored – until the Hundred Days of Napoleon's return culminated in Napoleon's attack on Waterloo on 18 June 1815 (42). While the ending, with Anne becoming a captain's wife, has many social implications, it is also highly political, which may be due to the fact that

Austen was aware that the Prince Regent would read her work as he had done with her other work.

Compared to the other novels, *Persuasion* is different both in tone and content. There are some big differences between Anne Elliot and the other heroines. The most prominent difference is her age. Emma and Anne are at different stages in their lives, which has implications for their views of friendship and relationships. As Penny Gay in "Emma and Persuasion" says, "love yet to be discovered, contrasted with love lost and hoping against hope to be recovered, makes *Emma* a romantic comedy and *Persuasion* something that critics have called elegiac" (69). At the same time, Gay argues, there is a more important distinction to be made between the conservative, fixed, but unruly Emma, and the progressive, mobile, but virtuous Anne (70). Anne first moves to Uppercross, where one household is in a state of improvement, and the other is led by an absent father and Mary Musgrove, Anne's sister, whose inactive role within the household is similar to that of Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*. Anne visits Bath and Lyme, seaside towns that look forward to Austen's *Sanditon*, and the accident at Lyme is perhaps one of the most shocking events to happen in Austen's novels. Compared to Emma, Anne Elliot is constantly moving and the novel has more incident as a result of it. Incident, according to the 'Opinions', had been lacking in her previous two novels.

Persuasion differs from *Emma* in another important respect. The theme of match-making is still present, as it is in all of Austen's novels, but it rather reverses what happens in *Emma*. In *Emma*, the heroine is the one who persuades Harriet to decline Robert Martin's proposal, matching her to the more socially advantageous Mr. Elton. *In Persuasion*, it is the heroine who is persuaded to break up the relationship. Lady Russell, who favours a match to Anne's cousin, Mr. Elliot, had convinced Anne to break up with Captain Wentworth eight years before the novel is set. Anne becomes the opposite of Emma Woodhouse. Instead of the main character misjudging and causing complications for others, Austen created a heroine who is persuaded

by Lady Russell's misjudgement and undergoes the complications this created. This makes readers more sympathetic to Anne's character as opposed to Emma's character, which many of Austen's acquaintances in the 'Opinions' criticised.

The criticism of Fanny Price's character in the 'Opinions' seems also to have been taken into account when Austen wrote the character of Anne Elliot. Both heroines are displaced at the beginning of the novel. Both are presented as characters that represent qualities superior to the people around them. Anne, however, does not have the same timidity that Fanny Price possesses, or at least, she learns to overcome it. Penny Gay, in "Emma and Persuasion" states, "She [Anne] increasingly takes part in conversations, even at times leading them, particularly in dialogues with her new friends in the Navy community" (65). Especially the way Anne handles the accident in Lyme reflects this development of Anne's character. This is something that does not happen to Fanny.

3.3. The Ending of *Persuasion*

The correspondence between Austen and Clarke reveals a telling attempt by Clarke to convince Austen to change her genre, and Austen respectfully declining this, stating that she will continue writing about domestic scenes. He asked her multiple times to create an image of a clergyman that went to sea (there had been much critique of her depiction of the clergy in Mr. Elton and Edmund), and would have liked to read a historical romance written by her. Interestingly, there are no clergymen in *Persuasion*; not in the comic sense Austen stated as one of her talents, or in the more serious sense as Clarke would have liked to see. As to his suggestion to write a historical romance, Austen's reply is, "I could not sit seriously down to write a serious Romance under any other motive than to save my Life, & if it were indispensable for me to keep it up & never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first Chapter" (*Letters,* 326). What is interesting is Austen's

almost condescending tone towards such romances. The double use of 'serious' suggests that, to her, romances were silly and did not accommodate her style of writing.

In the *Quarterly Review* Walter Scott seems to have noticed the same inclination to refrain from writing in the style of the romance. Scott, in his defence of why Austen's novel is worth commenting upon, as opposed to the "ephemeral productions which supply the regular demand of watering-places and circulating libraries" (Southam, 59) discusses the themes of the romances that flourished in those years. Authors wrote about "adventures of a nature more interesting and extraordinary than those which occur in his own life, or that of his next-door neighbour" and the heroes were presented "but in the most sentimental mood, and with minds purified by a sensibility which often verged on extravagance" while the heroine was "still more immaculate" (Southam, 60, 62). When this type of literature was exhausted by authors, he explains, a more realistic form of writing re-emerged which was set in everyday life. Austen falls into this category, where the realistic delineation of her characters is amusing, and the morality of the novel "applies equally to the paths of common life" (Southam, 63-64).

Interestingly, in spite of Austen's reluctance to write a romance, *Persuasion* is often termed Austen's most 'romantic' novel. Not in terms of wild adventures and impeccable heroines (although, as we have seen, Anne is almost too perfect for Austen's own taste), but because of its relation with nature and poetry. Gay identifies these instances where Austen becomes more poetic and Romantic in her style. She gives as an example, the discussion of poetry between Anne and Captain Benwick whom Gay describes "as one who had loved and lost, and is thus inclined to indulge in maudlin reflections aided by the current fashions of poetry" (65). Although Anne doubts the restorative effects of poetry and recommends the Captain to read more prose, her own behaviour, which is also marked by love lost, would not corroborate her suggestion (Gay, 66). Austen, like she did with many other literary traditions, uses romantic poetry for ironic and reflective purposes.

Another way in which Romantic elements come back in *Persuasion* is in its use of nature as a regenerative force. Anne's time at Lyme revives her spirits, allowing Anne, who had been quiet and reserved before, to become more confident and prominent within the group. As Gay points out, the seasons seem to move along with Anne's character development: Anne's father and sister in Bath are often described as cold, while the Musgroves and the naval characters are associated with warmth (Gay, 67). In this, Gay identifies an antithesis that could have political inclinations. It provides "an image of changing social leadership: a profession that actively serves and protects the nation rather than letting the national estate run into debt" (67). Knowing that the Prince Regent read her work, the significance of the contrast between Sir Walter and Elizabeth on the one side, and the Musgroves and the Naval characters on the other, may have served as a subtle criticism of the state of the nation at the time.

Persuasion is the only novel by Austen for which we have some insight into her editing process. Austen changed the original ending quite drastically into the ending that was eventually published. These endings bring together all views of Austen that have been discussed in this and the pervious chapters. As stated earlier, Austen's writing elicited a form of hard reading that revealed enough of the characters to judge their naturalness, but not enough to make them predictable. The subtle shifts in narrative technique force the reader unconsciously to read most of the story from Anne's perspective. Through her eyes, readers perceive the character and actions of Captain Wentworth, and Anne's uncertainty about his feelings for her. There are hints throughout the novel, such as when Anne has helped Louisa after her fall and Captain Wentworth asks Anne to stay behind to take care of Louisa. He is seen as "turning to her [Anne] and speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past" (106). This hint can only be noticed by a very attentive reader or upon rereading. Captain Wentworth's true feelings, alluded to throughout the novel, but unperceived by Anne, are revealed in the letter he gives to Anne. As was the case with Frank Churchill's letter in *Emma*,

this letter reveals the Captain Wentworth's feelings and thoughts, allowing the reader and Anne to judge him, for the first time, by his inherent qualities instead of his outward behaviour.

Even more overtly than *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion* presents a study of character. Where Fanny Price is able to resists all forms of persuasion, such as participating in the play or climbing over the fence in the Sotherton scene, Anne Elliot is persuaded by Lady Russel. This novel presents a study of her character on its way to restoring itself. Anne Elliot, therefore, does not have the "insipidity" of Fanny Price and, in the end, during her conversation with Captain Harville, is shown to speak up for her own beliefs, eliciting strong emotions in Captain Wentworth.

The original ending contains no such display of independence of Anne's character. Anne overhears a short conversation between Captain Harville and Captain Wentworth, and there is a clarification of there being no attachment between Anne and Mr. Elliot, after which Captain Wentworth proposes to her. In "The Two Chapters of Persuasion", Southam identifies in this original reunion an "exposure rather than a revelation of feeling, a process of discovery which may be true to life but not to the life of *Persuasion* whose probability is violated in this chapter" (89). This ending would diminish the message this novel is trying to convey, Southam argues, because it undermines "Anne's fitness to judge and over-ride Lady Russel's objections to her marriage, the 'persuasion' which formerly kept her from Wentworth" (89).

The plot undermines Lady Russel's judgement earlier by showing Mr. Elliot's true nature. The original ending, however, included Anne's gloating upon her correctness in judgement. This is very much out of character for Anne, who is seen to be bound by duty to others, including Lady Russell. The original ending shows a self-righteous tendency of Anne towards becoming a version of Emma. And although the novel is about judgement and being persuaded, it is not about the heroine's struggle with being right, but rather with the heroine's struggle between duty and happiness. In the end, the novel seems to convey that there can be a

combination of the two, when Anne tells Wentworth, “I was right in to submitting to her [Lady Russel], and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement, than I did in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience” (231). This understanding of the past is not present in the original ending and would therefore not have resolved the moral issues of duty and friendship that lie at the basis of this novel (Southam, 94).

This novel, like Austen’s other novels, becomes a study of character that requires hard reading to understand and appreciate. Instead of showing a heroine who struggles, but finds happiness in spite of her strong sense of duty, like Fanny Price does, the novel can be seen as presenting a heroine who struggles and finds her happiness *because of* her sense of duty. This perhaps, makes Anne Elliot Austen’s most morally superior heroine, “almost too perfect” for Austen’s own taste.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored Austen's position within the publishing sphere of the Romantic Period by tracing the possible influences of the reviews and other paratextual elements back to her work. The historical context of her literature, influenced by the British response to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, created a publishing environment that was strictly regulated. It upheld a standard of fiction that particularly valued the didactic function of literature and strictly opposed the sensationalist fiction that had the potential of leading readers, young women in particular, away from their duties, by inciting their imagination to raise false expectations and creating confusion between fiction and reality.

Austen challenges the condemnation of the common novel by combining the features from that genre with the standards that society upheld for fiction at that time. In this sense, she did not defend all novels, nor did she attack the reading standards that were set by the publishing environment. She created a kind of novel that attempted to entwine the entertaining qualities of the common fiction at the time with the didactic qualities of the conduct literature that became increasingly influential throughout her life. This led to a type of fiction that did not contain improbable settings and situations, that did not draw upon the rules of romance described by Scott, but was known for its probability instead. In order for young women to apply the literature they read to their lives, the setting had to resemble their own living environment and the characters had to resemble people they could encounter in real life. The conduct literature and the moralistic novels often presented readers with a perfect heroine who could serve as an example. This in combination with the improbable setting and actions, was an impossible standard for young women to live up to. Instead, Austen presents readers with an imperfect heroine who encounters issues that readers may recognise, and shows them the struggles of this heroine as she navigates these challenges. It was a type of literature that required active reading and rereading to appreciate and learn from the novels, which would not allow readers to

confuse the boundaries between fiction and reality and raise false expectations of life. All this might suggest Austen's independence of mind and her pursuit of a singular vision that would distinguish her from other contemporary authors.

In particular, Austen's language served as a tool to elicit active reading as opposed to easy reading and confronted readers with their own impressionability. Austen's specific use of narrative techniques, such as free indirect discourse, creates the illusion that readers are judging actions through the eyes of an omniscient narrator, if it is not directly made clear who the narrator focalises. Within these seemingly objective descriptions, the novelist reveals information to the reader that is relevant to how the plot unfolds. These hints, however, are often clouded by the protagonist's judgement. The reader assumes the reliability of the narrator throughout the story, and is confronted in the end with the biased views they assumed as a result of the focalisation of the main character. This serves to make the readers understand and identify with the troubles the heroines face, but at the same time confronts them with their inability to separate the biased from the objective or the fictitious from the real. This confrontation prevents readers from becoming too immersed in the world of the novel, or, as Scott says, allowed the reader to "return from his promenade to the ordinary business of life, without any change of having his head turned by the recollection of the scene through which he has been wondering" (Southam, 68). *Emma*, who takes the reader from confidently misjudging and a selfish independence to accepting her own limitations and forming an attachment, is perhaps the best example of how content and language work together.

The expectations that society held at the time, are most vividly portrayed in the literary reviews. In Austen's case, the literary reviews commend the naturalness of characters; how they behave compared to how they are introduced in the beginning by the narrator. They applaud the combination of amusement and morality in her work and emphasise the lessons the novels

teach. In the eyes of the reviews, Austen's literature, although consisting of novels, could be safely recommended.

To say for certain whether Austen was directly influenced by the reviews is impossible, since there is no letter that refers to the reviews directly, except for that single reference to the *Quarterly Review.* However, there are indications that Austen was aware of what worked in a particular novel and what needed improvement. The clear differences between her novels suggest that she adhered to these guidelines in order to become a successful published author. Austen's schematic overview of her readers' opinions proves that she wanted to understand the market she was navigating. The combination of sales, the 'Opinions', and the reviews, will likely have had an impact on the content of her novels or on her expectations of how her novel would be received by the public. Compared to Elizabeth Bennett, Emma is much more flawed in character, which would make her generally disliked, as Austen expected, inviting readers and critics to consider *Emma* as Austen's clearest attempt at writing according to her own tastes. However, compared to Fanny Price, Anne Elliot is more assertive. Compared to *Mansfield Park,* the resolution of the love stories is much more emotional, and compared to *Emma*, *Persuasion* is packed with action. And after the worries about Emma's reception, *Persuasion* appears to be much more in line with what the general audience would prefer. This suggests that Austen was interested in and influenced by the reception of her work. The revised ending of *Persuasion* also shows Austen's understanding of the importance of creating a story that, although it may be less comic than her usual style of writing, is coherent from beginning to end, and where characters are carried out naturally while maintaining an element of surprise.

In Austen's behaviour within the fiction market of the Romantic Period, she might be seen as displaying Fanny Price's struggle between what she wanted to do and what she ought to do. Her letters present her willingness to keep to her own style and her own way, but her collection of 'Opinions' and her preoccupation with the financial aspects of her publications betray a

reservation to this proclaimed independence. The ‘Opinions’ of the readers from her own environment and possibly that of the larger public were important sources of understanding the novels’ distinctive qualities within the boundaries set by the contemporary critics and the larger literary environment. Her engagement with the reception of her work and the larger publishing sphere of the early nineteenth century, show Austen to possess an “independence of character, which is kept within the proper line of decorum.”

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