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Mind and soul united : intellect morality in Jane Austen's life and novels

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**Mind and Soul United
Intellect and Morality
in Jane Austen's Life and Novels**

**A Thesis
Presented To
The Faculty of the Department of English Literature
San Jose State University**

**In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

**by
Maria Dolores Taylor
August 1999**

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ABSTRACT

Mind and Soul United Intellect and Morality in Jane Austen's Life and Novels

by Maria Taylor

This thesis addresses the importance of intellect and morality in Jane Austen's novels and characters, especially as reflected in her own life. It argues that Austen was a vibrant, intelligent and humorous young woman who wrote about the country life she knew best. She was extremely close to her family, who loved and supported her talents, allowing her writing to be nurtured and develop properly. Her characters possess a strength of spirit that was shared by their creator.

The thesis also discusses the fundamental differences between Jane Austen's morality and religious beliefs. Though she was a clergyman's daughter and had firm beliefs in Christianity herself, she, unlike the Evangelical movement occurring at the time, did not believe in forcing one's beliefs on others. Instead, she takes the subtle approach towards "moralizing" and teaches through example, through the mistakes and triumphs of her characters. This method of writing is often referred to as "moral education." Jane Austen believed that a person's mind and spirit must work together, rationally, in order to achieve a desirable balance.

**This thesis is dedicated to my parents
whose enormous love and unfailing support
have always empowered me
to realize my dreams.**

I love you both very much.

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Introduction

In the past couple of decades, much of the criticism that has surrounded the study of Jane Austen has been approached from a feminist point of view. Whether this feminism stems from an acknowledgement of Jane Austen as a successful female novelist or as a supposed vindicator of women's rights in the nineteenth century, the criticism has definitely been limiting. Her personal life is oftentimes viewed as ordinary and even dull. And aside from their feminist outlook, her novels are usually regarded as mere humorous works of art. This thesis intends to take an in depth look at the importance of Jane Austen as not just a female writer, but as a contributor to the intellectual well-being of her reading audience. Jane Austen is rarely acknowledged for her intellect; in fact, to some critics, she was nothing more than an old maid/ authoress. However, when studying her life, it becomes clear that education was an important part of her literary training. She did, after all, begin her education at the age of seven; a tender age for any late eighteenth-century child, especially a female. George Holbert Tucker, a critic of Jane Austen whose studies view her as an intelligent and vivacious woman, has some very useful insights into her accomplishments:

Not only was she well read, knowledgeable concerning the theater, music, politics, religion, and the fine arts, she was also keenly attuned to the exciting period in which she lived. These assertions can also be verified by a careful reading of her surviving letters, which also reveal that she was a flirtatious and occasionally sharp-tongued girl who matured into a compassionate but critically objective woman of

genius. (3)

Jane Austen was a superb specimen of womanhood, but she was also a wonderful novelist, one whose talents have surpassed some of the most prominent male authors. Jane Austen was a feminist in that she was intelligent, talented, and independent in a time when such characteristics were not the norm among women. These traits owe to a supportive and affectionate family, strong values, and an innate creative genius.

Jane Austen was conceived in a time fraught with turmoil. She was born at the start of the American Revolution against England. The war against France began three quarters of a century before her birth, and lasted well into her adulthood. Two of Jane Austen's brothers were officers in the navy, fighting gallantly against the French. With all of these circumstances that Austen had to face, it might be assumed that her style should reflect her times. Certain scholars have criticized Jane Austen's nearly total exclusion of the wars in her novels. Frederick Harrison takes great offense at Austen's supposed indifference by stating that she was "penning satirettes about her neighbours while the Dynasts were tearing the world to pieces, and consigning millions to their graves" (qtd. in Roberts 68). Another critic, C. Linklater Thomas, criticized Austen's letters:

If it had not been that two of her brothers were officers in the navy, there would have been hardly a reference to the war in her letters. There seems a want of public spirit in this attitude, and a failure of imagination. It is as if she could clearly apprehend only what was passing immediately before her, and as if she was deeply interested in those with whom she had come into personal contact. She could not visualize a larger scene or comprehend vital issues. (qtd. in Roberts 69)

The problem with this type of criticism is that it undervalues the subjects that Jane Austen *does* choose to deal with. Jane Austen felt that neither her education nor her life experience could qualify her for the task of writing about larger, worldly issues. In all logic, a simple country girl of the eighteenth century, no matter how intelligent, would be completely absorbed in her family; Jane Austen was no exception.

Jane Austen was born into a tight-knit family. They were a family who lived for one another and supported one another's aspirations wholeheartedly. The Reverend George Austen was an intelligent, kind and respectable man who was a devoted husband and father. George Austen saw to the education of all his children, even his daughters. In a time when women were primarily educated in the domestic arts, the Austen girls, Jane and Cassandra, attended school for two years away from home, and completed the remainder of their education with their father and brothers. The family was fond of writing verse, prose and theatricals. When Jane Austen began writing, her family was completely supportive of her endeavors, and would spend many evenings reading her finished manuscripts aloud to one another. The Austen girls were anything but secluded:

Clearly, the "girls" went out as often as they pleased. We sometimes tend to think of Austen as at her desk, writing, or in the parlour, sewing or reading or talking, but neither as child nor adult was she content to be desk-bound. Nor did Austen's upbringing restrict her knowledge and her activity to a "ladylike" sphere. She did not suffer the sort of physical and mental confinement imposed on Victorian girls . . .

Many readers have been struck by Austen's jokes about mistresses, illegitimate children, drunkenness and the like in her youthful

writing, jokes that her family clearly relished and encouraged.

(Fergus 29)

Jane Austen was fortunate enough to be part of an affectionate and supportive family. Without it, it is doubtful that she would have become the sort of novelist that she was. It is clear, with all of these circumstances in mind, why Jane Austen wrote about “simple” things like family, love and values. These entities are, after all, fundamental to life, whether they be “vital issues” or otherwise. The important thing to keep in mind is that to Jane Austen they were vital.

Jane Austen wrote about what she knew best, a serene country life. However, behind this mask of emotional stability, there lies a whirlwind of emotions and, underlying it all, a moral standard that is not didactic as much as a reminder of what advantages love and humility carry with them. Her characters are complex in their mannerisms, their values and, most interestingly, their minds. This complexity of intellect affects the actions of Jane Austen’s characters; more specifically, it affects the virtue that they either possess, or must learn to find.

Ch. 1

The Personal and Intellectual Jane Austen

Jane Austen's moral and intellectual stance, whether it be as an authoress or vibrant individual, arose from her background and her environment. She was raised in a religious home headed by her minister father, but it was by no means a restrictive one. She was taught to abide by God's teachings and moral expectations, but these values were not hindrances to Jane Austen's innate free spirit and independent nature. On the contrary, the Austen household was one of learning, laughter, and creativity. Jane Austen's family helped to mold her spirit that while inherently strong, was made even more so by the support given by those with whom she shared love and respect. This spirit, nurtured by her family, expresses itself in her novels, and is consequently a basis for all that is good and admirable in her characters. In a sense, it is possible to say that she lives vicariously through her characters, even those whose limitations make them seem so far removed from the author's own real experiences. Jane Austen's upbringing and environment, combined with several innate, passionate traits, are the basis for understanding the complex minds of her characters, and her novels' tendencies to conclude with an overwhelming sense of a general well being. Jane Austen's education is at the core of her world view. She was better able to illustrate the values of her characters by examining her society from an intellectual and moral perspective. Thus, in Jane Austen's life novels, education, whether it be of mind or spirit, is a primary concern.

Before delving into Jane Austen's own life, education, and moral standard, it is important to examine her background; that is, the lives of those

who surrounded her and influenced her daily. At the head of the Austen household stood the Reverend George Austen. George Austen was the minister of Steventon Rectory in Steventon, Hampshire. He was known throughout the village as a handsome, hard-working, honest, and spiritual man. He was also a highly educated man who graduated from St. John's College, Oxford. As a scholar, George Austen directed the education of his seven children. The rarity of the Austen household, and one of its principle advantages, lay in the fact that Mr. Austen chose to educate his daughters as well as his sons. He was radical for his time in believing that women had a right to educate their minds as well as simply to perform their traditional domestic roles. The significance of Jane and Cassandra Austen's education lay in that they were taught subjects that were traditionally reserved for the men, such as philosophy and Latin. This fact was the driving force behind Jane Austen's intellectual wit and personal vivacity. Though she was quite content in helping to run the household, she was a great lover of books, a trait due to her father's guidance and teaching. In later years, Jane Austen's older brother Henry had the following to say about his father's intellect and its influence on his sister:

Being not only a profound scholar, but possessing a most exquisite taste in every species of literature, it is not wonderful that his daughter Jane should at a very early age become sensible to the charms of style and enthusiastic in the cultivation of her own language. (Wilks 22)

Jane Austen's intellect is reflected in the characters that people her novels. Conversely, the morality of her characters--that is their ability to distinguish between right and wrong, pride and humility--is due in part to their ability to reason with their hearts as well as with their minds.

Jane Austen's mother, Cassandra Leigh, was also the daughter of a

parson--the Revd. Thomas Leigh. Revd. Leigh's rectory was in Harpsden, Oxfordshire. Mrs. Austen was always known as a witty and energetic woman who enjoyed writing doggerel verse as well as playing word games. Her jovial nature was not an empty-headed one; rather her wit gave support to her intelligence. Besides having an alluring personality and spirit, Ms. Leigh came from a very affluent and distinguished family. Among her ancestors was Sir Thomas Leigh, the Lord Mayor of London in the mid-16th century. The humility that was to be an Austen family trait was shown in Mrs. Austen's opinion of her own personal beauty. She by no means considered herself to be a beauty. She was, however, proud of her "aristocratic nose." Her delightful personality, coupled with good breeding and family connections, made Cassandra Leigh a most advantageous match for any man, and on April 26, 1764, at Walcot Church in Bath, she married the Revd. George Austen. Immediately after their wedding, the Austens moved into their new home at Deane Parsonage.

Soon after her daughter's marriage, Mrs. Jane Leigh, a widow, came to live with the Austens. Since the living received from his church duties was estimated at only £100 per annum, it was necessary for George Austen to take on other work in order to support his growing family. Besides being manager at the 200-acre Cheesedown farm on the north side of the parish, a gift bestowed on him by his cousin Mr. Knight, Mr. Austen decided to use his Oxford training and board pupils in his home. Thus, the first children that entered the Austen household were not their own, but rather the promising hopefuls of families who could afford such luxuries. Mrs. Jane Leigh brought Mr. Austen his first pupil, seven-year-old George Hastings. Mrs. Austen grew quite attached to the young Hastings, but unfortunately the child did not live

very long. In the autumn of 1764, the boy died of diphtheria. The Austen household soon became joyful again as the Austens' own children entered into the world. The Austens eventually gave birth to eight children, thus making the small rectory at Steventon a scene of busy domesticity.

George and Cassandra Austen gave birth to their first child, a son, on February 13, 1765. On March 17, James Austen was christened by his godparents, Mrs. Jane Leigh, his maternal grandmother, and Mr. Francis Austen, his father's uncle. James' strength of intellect as well as a natural propensity for the church led him to enter his father's university, St. John's College, Oxford on July 3, 1779, and then follow in the paternal footsteps once more by becoming Rector of Steventon. On August 26, 1766, a second son, George, was born to the Austens. Sadly, very little is known or recorded about George Austen. What is known, is that by about 1770 it became clear that George had a mental illness. During this period of history, mentally handicapped children were boarded outside of the family home and thus unable to socialize with their close relations. In addition to his other ailments, George was also deaf and mute. According to her letters, Jane Austen is said to have had a knowledge of sign language, a skill that one would not have acquired in those years unless forced by necessity. The fact that Austen acquainted herself with a whole new language in order to be able to communicate with her brother provides another example of her strength of character and intellect. The third child to be born (a son yet again), named Edward, came into the world on October 7, 1767. He was named after his godfather, the Reverend Dr. Edward Cooper. Edward was to be the most prosperous of the Austen children, more prosperous, in fact, than his own parents. In 1783, he was adopted by his wealthy relative, Thomas Knight of

Godersham Park in Kent. The adoption occurred in order to ensure that Edward would become the legal heir of Mr. Knight's estate and thus have the ability to support his natural family in their times of need. He would, however, have to take on the family name of Knight. After three successive births, the Austen family enjoyed an intermission of about four years before giving birth to their fourth son, Henry-Thomas on June 8, 1771. Henry grew to become a handsome and amiable young man who was liked by his family and relations. According to his niece Anna (James's daughter):

“He was the handsomest of the family, and in the opinion of his father, the most talented. There were others who formed a different opinion, but for the most part, he was greatly admired. Brilliant in conversation he was, and, like his father, blessed with a hopefulness of temper which in adapting itself to all circumstances, served to create a perpetual sunshine.” (Wilks 23)

With Henry's amiable personality, it is no wonder he was Jane Austen's favorite older brother. His temperament was very much like her own peaceful disposition. He was, however, very uncertain about what he wanted to do with his life and changed his careers quite frequently. His first position was as a captain in the militia. He looked dapper in his crimson uniform and was consequently quite popular with admiring young ladies. After a time, Henry decided to resign from military life and become a London banker.

Unfortunately, the bank eventually crashed. Thankfully, he was offered the gift of a clerical living from his brother Edward, and in December of 1816 was ordained a clergyman near the Austen's Chawton home.

The next major event in the Austen household was not the birth of a child, but rather a change of address. Around July of 1768, the Austens moved

into their newly repaired and enlarged residence at Steventon Rectory. Mr. Austen oversaw the changes made to the rectory, as he wanted to make the accommodations suitable for his growing family. According to personal accounts as dictated by George Austen and later descendants of the Austen family, the rectory

stood in a shallow valley, surrounded by sloping meadows well sprinkled with elm trees . . . North of the house, the road from Deane to Polham Lane ran at a sufficient distance from the front to allow a carriage drive through turf and trees. The Parsonage consisted of three rooms in front of the ground floor--the best parlour, the common parlour and the kitchen, and the stairs; above were seven bedrooms, and the three attics. The rooms were low-pitched, but not otherwise bad, and compared with the usual style of such buildings, it might be considered a very good house. (W. and R. Austen-Leigh 17)

The Austens had now entered the home in which they would live for thirty-three years. There were very happy times filled with the laughter of their children. The fifth child to be born to the Austens was a girl, Cassandra-Elizabeth, born on January 9, 1773. With a new baby into the family, the Austens had to find additional means of supporting their brood. The parish at Dean fell vacant with the death of its owner, Mr. Hillman, and thus Mr. Austen was granted that rectory as well. However, the income from the Deane parish would only be a gradual one over the course of the year; thus, Mr. Austen decided to board pupils once again. In the summer of 1773, the Austens received their first boarder, the first of many such pupils that stayed at the Steventon rectory until 1796. The pupils provided more than just extra income for the Austen family; they were fine playfellows for the children of the

family as well as intellectual chums. All of the Austen children were taught at home with the boarders and thus benefited from their presence immensely. In later years, many of George Austen's pupils thanked the Austens for their household, which provided them not only an education but a strong moral foundation. On April 23, 1774, Mrs. Austen gave birth to her fifth son, Francis-William. The household was now livelier than ever.

On December 17, 1775, an event took place that would forever change the literary world: Jane Austen was born. The family was ecstatic about their second daughter. They were delighted that little Cassy was going to have a playmate at last. Mr. Austen wrote about the birth of his little Jane to his sister and said:

You have doubtless been for some time in expectation of hearing from Hamsphire, and perhaps wondered a little we were in our old age grown such bad reckoners but so it was, for Cassy certainly expected to be brought to bed a month ago: however last night the time came, and without a great deal of warning, everything was soon happily over. We have now another girl, a present plaything for her sister Cassy and a future companion. She is to be Jenny, and seems to me as if she would be as like Henry, as Cassy is to Neddy.

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 24)

Mr. Austen's predictions about the two sisters were absolutely correct. From her birth up until Jane Austen's untimely death, she and Cassandra were inseparable. They were more than sisters, they were the best of friends.

As for Jane's physical appearance, only an unfinished sketch of Jane Austen exists. Thus, her features are left to our imagination but with some assistance from her family members. After her death, Henry Austen wrote the

following epitaph:

“Her complexion was of the finest texture. It might with truth be said, that her eloquent blood spoke through her modest cheek. Her voice was extremely sweet. She delivered herself with fluency and precision. Indeed she was formed for elegant and rational society, excelling conversation as much as composition.” (Wilks 34)

These loving words from a devoted brother display the effect that Jane Austen had on her family and the world. Her niece Caroline Austen, adds the following details about her Aunt’s outer charm:

As to my Aunt’s personal appearance, her’s was the first face that I can remember thinking pretty, not that I used that word to myself, but I know I looked at her with admiration--Her face was rather round than long--she had a bright, but not pink colour--a clear brown complexion and very good hazel eyes . . . Her hair, a darkish brown, curled naturally--it was in short curls round her face (for *then* ringlets were *not* .) She always wore a cap--Such was the custom with ladies who were not quite young--at least of a morning but I never saw her without one, to the best of my remembrance, either morning or evening. (C. Austen 5)

These two portraits of Jane Austen illustrate her as someone whose inner beauty shone through. She was a pretty young woman, but her main appeal was found in her warm-hearted spirit. Then, on June 23, 1779, Mrs. Austen gave birth to her last child, Charles-John. At the age of forty, Mrs. Austen had completed her family.

The Austen household embodied the qualities which its owners brought to it. Mr. George Austen was a handsome man who was completely devoted to

his religion and family. He had a tranquil disposition and was well respected among his family and community. Mrs. Cassandra Austen, on the other hand, had an exuberant and determined personality. Mrs. Austen was best known for her sparkling sense of humor. This humor is perhaps most evident in her original verse. She enjoyed writing poetry, whether it was for charades, letters or personal amusement and satisfaction. The Austen household was definitely a literary one before Jane Austen even entered into it. Between Mr. Austen's love of reading and extensive library, and Mrs. Austen's poetic tendencies, the Austens were all lovers of the written word. The Austens loved, among other literary pursuits, participating in word games. One such game was drawn up by Mrs. Austen, Jane, Cassandra and Edward's wife, Elizabeth Austen (Knight). The object of the game was to rhyme verse with the word *rose*. The following excerpt from the poem composed by Mrs. Austen illustrates her extraordinary wit, as well as an insight into the jovial times that the Austens shared:

This morning I 'woke from a quiet repose,
I first rubb'd my eyes & I next blew my nose.
With my Stockings & Shoes I then cover'd my toes
And proceeded to put on the rest of my Cloathes.
This was finish'd in less than an hour I suppose;
I employ'd myself next in repairing my hose
'Twas a work of necessity, not what I chose;
Of my sock I'd much rather have knit twenty Rows. (Selwyn 21)

Amidst the pleasant times, the Austens never lost touch of their responsibilities to all their relations or to themselves. They were taught to have a personal strength that could not be easily swayed by undesirable

temptations. This strength served as an influence to all those fortunate people who mingled or worked with the Austens. One example of the influence that inspired personal reform can be seen in an instance when one of Mr. Austen's pupils, Gilbert East, was absent from Steventon for nine weeks, and consequently was missing his lessons. Gilbert was attending a plethora of balls, dancing his time away. Because she took an interest in everyone at Steventon, family or otherwise, and recognized that he was squandering his time, Mrs. Austen wrote Gilbert a doggerel verse in hopes of persuading him to return.

Epistle to G. East Esq'.

Your Steventon Friends
Are at their wits ends
To know what has become of Squire East;
They very much fear
He'll never come here
Having left them nine weeks at the least.

Two letters he sent
In hopes to prevent
Or lessen their wonder & trouble;
But as he still stays,
And creates fresh delays
Instead of being less, it is double.

Then pray thee, dear Sir,
No longer defer
Your return to the mansion of learning;
For we study all day,
(Except when we play)
And eke when the candles are burning. . . .

That "Cassandra" herself
May now lie on your shelf
No longer affording you pleasure;
While new tunes and new dances
And such pretty fancies
Employ all your thoughts & your leisure.

That such things as these
May delight, & may please
We do not pretend to deny;
But it's not quite so clever
To be dancing for ever
And let all your learning lie by

That you dance very well
All beholders can tell,
For lightly & nimbly you tread;
Bu[t] , pray, is it meet
To indulge thus your feet

And neglect all the while y' poor head?

So we send you this letter
In hopes you'll think better,
And reflect upon what we have said;
And to make us amends
Pray return to your Friends,

Fowle, Stewart, Deane, Henry, & Ned! (Selwyn 25-26)

Apparently, the note did indeed persuade Gilbert to return to his studies, for he entered Oxford in 1783. Upon his entrance into Oxford, Gilbert's father was so grateful to the Austens for their influence and assistance towards his son that he presented them with a picture of Gilbert.

This was the atmosphere in which Jane Austen was brought into the world. It was a happy one, to say the least, and one filled with constant mental stimulation and serenity. Jane Austen's character was a mixture of many elements, her family, her relations, her inherent personality traits and her close observation of the world around her. As a child, however, her first sources of inspiration lay in the loving arms of her parents. And, from an in-depth study of Jane Austen, it is evident how her parents' own traits were intermingled with her own.

If it is possible to divide qualities which often overlap, it may be thought that Jane Austen inherited from her father her serenity of mind, the refinement of her intellect, and her delicate appreciation of style, while her mother supplied the acute observation of character, and the wit and humour, for which she was equally distinguished.

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 19)

These qualities can also be found in her novels, in the complex lives of each of her characters. It is in this way that Jane Austen brought a fragment of her soul to each one of her characters, a fact which will be dealt with in more depth later on.

In 1783 the Austens decided to educate their daughters formally. At this time, Cassandra was ten and Jane was only seven years of age. Jane was a bit too young to be going away to school, but she refused to be separated from her dear Cassandra. The girls were escorted by their twelve-year-old cousin, Jane Cooper. Their education would be in the hands of Dr. Cooper's sister, Mrs. Ann Cawley of Oxford. The fact that Jane Austen was educated at so young an age is imperative to understanding her as a great novelist. It is almost impossible for a person of little education to be able to delve into the psychology of a person's mind as well as Jane did with hers. It is equally imperative, at this juncture, to investigate the role that education played in the family structure of the eighteenth century. Prior to this time, the needs of children, and even more so, female children, were not foremost in the minds of their parents. In earlier times, sometimes the role of children was to grow up and support their parents, especially in poorer households. In actuality, the children often-times provided the financial support for their parents even when they were young. By the time Jane Austen was born, things were beginning to take a turn for the better. As David Grylls states:

Throughout the last four hundred years, but especially since the eighteenth century, the position of children in Western society has altered in two basic ways. Children have gradually been segregated from the community at large: and--partly as a cause of this, partly a consequence--their capacities and needs have been acknowledged as

different from those of adults. Instead of working with or for their elders, children have been sent to schools. But, oddly, this has not cut them off from their parents. Their integration with their families has not diminished but grown; and the nature of the bond, once mainly economic, is now mainly emotional. (qtd. in Dhatwalia 6)

There is definite evidence of this family bond between Mr. and Mrs. Austen and their children. Whether this was because of the change in times that Mr. Grylls speaks of will never really be certain. It is certain, however, that the Austens loved their children and that their concern for their education was a result of that love. The girls did not enjoy their time with Mrs. Cawley in Oxford for she had a very stern disposition, something that would be none too pleasing to two lively young girls. While in Oxford, their brother James took the girls on a sightseeing tour of St. John's College. However exciting he thought the tour to be, little Jane did not enjoy the "dismal chapels, dusty libraries and greasy halls." (W. and R. Austen-Leigh 44)

In 1783 Mrs. Cawley and the girls moved from Oxford to Southampton, and on the way, Jane and Cassandra came down with typhus, an illness that was widely spread by the encampment of troops in Southampton. Mrs. Austen and Mrs. Cooper left at once for Southampton to take their daughters back home. Jane nearly died but was finally able to recover. However, Mrs. Cooper, who also caught the fever, was not so fortunate and upon her return to her home in Bath, died on October 25, 1783. The loss of Mrs. Cooper was greatly felt in the Austen family. Theatricals that were performed regularly at the Steventon rectory ceased to be performed for the entire year--respecting the customary mourning period of the era. While the mourning period was in place, Jane and Cassandra were taught at home by their mother. Undoubtedly

however, they benefited from their father's pupils that boarded at their home.

In 1785, the Austens decided to send Cassandra and Jane to the Abbey School in Reading. Thus, at the tender age of seven, Jane followed her sister. When asked about the affection that Jane had for her sister, Mrs. Austen replied, "if Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate" (Fergus 35). The Austens were such warmhearted parents that they did not venture to separate the two, even under such unusual circumstances as this. The Abbey School was a reputable school for girls of aristocratic and working class families. The girls loved their time at the school, much more than their experiences at Oxford. The school was in beautiful surroundings, a factor which made it that much more appealing.

It took its name from the fact that part of its premises included the inner gateway of Reading Abbey, which was all that remained intact of the many buildings that had once made up the enormous 12th-century Cluniac monastery. The other part of the school occupied a large brick immediately adjoining the eastern side of the gateway; this house had a "beautiful old-fashioned garden, where the children played under tall trees in hot summer evenings," and an embankment at the bottom of the garden provided a viewpoint from which they could look down upon the romantic ruins of the rest of the Abbey.

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 47)

At the school, "the girls were taught writing, spelling, French, needlework, drawing, music and dancing" (Collins 133). Mrs. La Tournelle was the headmistress of the Abbey school, assisted by Miss Pitts. Mrs. Tournelle was not qualified to be headmistress; in fact, her duties and passions were more fit for the role of a housewife. Fortunately Mrs. Tournelle and Miss Pitts appointed

more qualified women to assist them, thus allowing the students to be taught more successfully.

The hours of study were not exacting, and provided the girls attended for morning prayers and at mealtimes, and said their appointed lessons, they were then free to spend the rest of the day chatting with their particular friends anywhere in the house or garden as they pleased.

The Austen girls were happy there. . . .

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 48)

Though the Austen girls turned out to be well educated ladies, they belonged to a rare few who had the privilege. The Austen family did not belong to the gentry; however, families of the clergy did have to appear prosperous, even if they weren't entirely so. Thus, the Austen children were educated properly, in accordance with their rank and the desires of their liberal-minded parents. As a whole, the educational system was less than desirable in the late eighteenth century. Public schools began as non-profit organizations open to all boys, primarily poor ones. The schools were designed to teach the boys Latin and Greek grammar (this is where we get our modern term "grammar schools").

When the institutions started admitting rich boys, the schools better resembled the private schools of today. Educational standards during Georgian England were mediocre. Boys were taught by tutors who sometimes had no desire for squandering their precious time. Great rifts between the classes made education something that only the rich could enjoy. Pampering often took the place of hard work.

There was no national school system at the beginning of the era, and no one cared. The poor were apprenticed at an early age or went to work in

the fields, and the rich had a governess for their daughter and a clergyman tutor for their son until he went away to Eton or Oxford. (Women, of course, generally did not learn Latin and Greek, “those provinces of masculine knowledge,” as Eliot calls them in *Middlemarch*, whose mastery, Dortha Brooke initially believes, would allow her a vantage point from “which all truth could be seen clearly.” In 1869, an etiquette manual observed that “gentleman should not make use of classical quotations in the presence of ladies, without apologizing for, or translating them.”) (Pool 103)

Young males from wealthy families were often-times ignorant and over-indulged, while the young ladies of the gentry were trained to be proper, pompous and oftentimes lazy housewives. The children from the lower classes were uneducated because they had no choice in the matter. Fortunately, reform came in the early part of the nineteenth century, when the Church of England

became appalled at the thought of lower-class children growing up in godlessness because they could not read the Bible. . . In 1811 those who were worried formed the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church throughout England and Wales to spread the Word of God by teaching people to read the Bible. (Pool 103)

Improvements were made after the death of Jane Austen. In 1817 these elementary schools, which began as Sunday schools, became rapid successes. By 1839, they even had the economic backing of Parliament, providing them with an annual grant of £30,000. At the same time that education was being offered to the general masses for the first time, steps were also taken to

improve the quality of scholarship.

As late as 1871 more than 19 per cent of the men and 26 per cent of the women getting married could only make an "X" next to their name in the parish register. By 1891 this had dropped to about 7 per cent each. (Pool 105)

Before reforms occurred in the mid-eighteenth century, those who learned the basics of reading and writing, were taught in a very systematic way.

Learning through recitation was essential to eighteenth-century pedagogy, particularly in teaching reading. Reading and writing were taught separately during the eighteenth century. Reading came first. Children were made to recognize and recite lists of two-letter combinations, such as ba, be, bi, and so forth, printed out in hornbooks, battledores or small books. They then proceeded to read aloud words of one syllable, then two syllables and up, combined in improving texts - for example: "Pa-rents, mas-ters, and mis-tres-ses" often reward the unworthy and slight the worthy, but they are punished when their favourites are ungrateful, showing "ir-re-gu-la-ri-ty" and "dis-o-be-di-ence", said to be a "just re-tri-bu-ti-on". (Fergus 37)

The above example of a reading exercise comes from one of many editions of Thomas Dyche's A Guide to the English Tongue. The guide first appeared in 1707, and included lines for the students to copy out. Copying in this manner was the way in which children of this period learned how to write. Though this method of teaching may seem a little tedious, and perhaps a bit limiting, repetition was and continues to be, a successful method of teaching. Though repetition of lines was successful to a point, more

sophisticated methods were in need. Jane Austen definitely had no trouble, even as a child, as her sophisticated script proves. As an adult, her handwriting was as beautiful as it was clear. Her meticulousness was also displayed in the care she took to compose a letter, the same care that is shown in her novels.

Her handwriting remains to bear testimony to its own excellence; and every note and letter of hers, was finished off handsomely--There was an art *then* in folding and sealing--no adhesive envelopes made all easy--some people's letters looked always loose and untidy--but *her* paper was sure to take the right folds, and *her* sealing wax to drop in the proper place (C. Austen 7)

The Austen girls returned from the Abbey School in 1786 because their parents found it impossible to afford their tuition any longer. They concluded their studies at home, and from that point on, Jane Austen never lived anywhere but with her immediate family. Though they were raised in a time which was educationally mediocre, the Austen girls had an advantage--their father. With their father's boarding school in their own home, his tutoring sessions with their brothers, and the extensive library that he owned, they were able to experience the scholastic advantages of a male. As shown by notes written by Jane Austen on the pages of several of her father's textbooks, the Austen girls sat in on a Latin or Mathematics lesson that was given to the boys, all the while absorbing what they were overhearing. In addition, Mr. Austen quite frequently read poetry and novels aloud to his family during their quiet evening gatherings. The following excerpt from a letter written by Jane to her sister on Dec. 18, 1798 records one such event: "My father reads Cowper to us in the evening, to which I listen when I can" (Le Faye 27). In her

novel Emma, Jane Austen makes an interesting reference to Cowper, referencing her childhood memories:

When he [Mr. Knightly] was again in their company, he could not help remembering what he had seen; not could he avoid observations which, unless it were like Cowper and his fire at twilight, "Myself creating what I saw," brought him yet stronger suspicion of there being a something of private liking, of private understanding even, between Frank Churchill and Jane. (745; ch 41)

The Austens loved reading novels, a practice still not very popular in the early nineteenth century. Novels of the time were primarily made up of Romantic/Gothic tales like Fanny Burney's Camilla, Evelina, and Cecilia; Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones; and Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa. Catherine Morland of Austen's Northanger Abbey indulges herself with Burney's works. These novels, though entertaining, were seen as frivolous tales of mystery, fantasy and romance. They were not didactic enough or "moral" enough for the general masses. The Austens, however, were not prudish enough to shun these works; they read them with enthusiasm, lightheartedness and laughter. In the same letter where Austen mentioned Mr. Austen's reading of Cowper, she made the following statement:

I have received a very civil note from M^{rs} Martin requesting my name as a Subscriber to her Library which opens the 14th of January, & my name, or rather Yours is accordingly given. My Mother finds the money. -- Mary subscribes too, which I am glad of but hardly expected. --As an inducement to subscribe M^{rs} Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c &c --She

might have spared this pretension to *our* family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so; --but it was necessary I suppose to the self-consequence of half her Subscribers. (Le Faye 26)

The Austens were definitely “great Novel-readers,” a trait not common among those of their time. This provided an excellent atmosphere for a budding novelist. By 1801, Mr. Austen’s personal home library consisted of over 500 volumes. At this time, Jane had acquired some books of her own, mostly children’s books like Goody Two Shoes. She would, however, read her father’s volumes, expanding her intellectual horizons. Soon, Jane Austen would be writing novels of her own.

No letters of Jane Austen’s prior to 1796 survive. However, the personality and wit displayed in her juvenilia portrays a vivacious and intelligent young woman. By 1783, James Austen had received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Oxford, but stayed on as a fellow for a few more years. On his visits to Steventon he continued to write verse as well as to organize the family’s amateur theatricals. He, like his father, became a minister, and was thus ordained deacon at Oxford on Dec. 10, 1787. The Austen’s second eldest son, Edward, was spending the majority of his time with his adoptive family, the Knights, and in accordance to the privileges that his class entitled him to, went on a grand tour in lieu of going to Oxford. Years later, Mrs. Austen wrote in a letter to Mrs. Leigh-Perrot:

[Edward] . . . has a most active mind, a clear head, & a sound Judgment, he is quite a man of Business. - That my dear James was not - Classical Knowledge, Literary Taste, and the power of Elegant Composition he possessed to the highest degree; to these [Edward] makes no pretensions. *Both* equally good amiable and sweet-temper’d.

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 50-51)

Henry was the eldest son to remain at home, thus when Jane and Cassandra returned from school in 1786, they were companions to him, young Charles, and the few pupils of their father's who had not matriculated into the university as of yet. Since Jane was now at home, her education lay in the hands of her family, primarily those of the father. Her brother James also assisted in Jane's education.

Family tradition recalled that James had a very large share in directing Jane's reading and forming her taste. Henry remembered that "at a very early age she was enamored of Gilpin on the Picturesque . . . Her reading was very extensive in history and belles lettres; her memory extremely tenacious. Her favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose and Cowper in verse." (W. and R. Austen-Leigh 54)

Jane was also educated in different languages. At the Abbey School, she was taught French, and could read it quite well; she was, however, not very fluent in the speaking of it. In addition, Jane had the privilege of sitting in on her father's Latin lessons. The students were being taught from Pote's Eton Latin Grammar and Jane was able to learn from their recitations from it.

[when] the boys learned one of the first rules: "Propria, quae maribus tribuuntur, mascula dicas" (Proper names, which are assigned to the male kind, you may call masculines); she understood enough to be able to inscribe "Ex dono mei Patris" in the manuscript volume Mr. Austen gave her in 1790, that now known as *Volume the Second* .

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 55)

Due to her love for music and the music and singing lessons she received, Jane became acquainted with Italian. Among the music books that she used was

Veneroni's The Complete Italian Master. Though the Austens had to borrow a pianoforte for a time, Jane was given music lessons until about 1796.

Among her many other interests, Jane Austen was fascinated by history. Her father's school library had a copy of Goldsmith's four-volume, The History of England. From the Earliest Times to the Death of George II among its many other texts. Jane enjoyed reading these history books and making comments on the material in the margins of the texts. Young Jane even had very definite views on certain events in history, events which she would comment on in The History of England, a humorous parody of texts like Goldsmith's, which she composed herself in 1791. The opening page of her text reads:

The History of England

from the reign of

Henry the 4th

to the death of

Charles the 1st

By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian.

To Miss Austen eldest daughter of the Revd

George Austen, this work is inscribed with

all due respect by

The Author

N. B. There will be very few Dates in this history

This work was written by Jane Austen when she was only sixteen years of age.

From the title page on, it is quite evident that its author is a witty and

opinionated young woman. The work's sophistication, however, gives its readers the illusion that the author is a knowledgeable adult, and seeing as how Jane Austen never fit into the norm of adolescent silliness and self-doubt, this assertion is defensible. What makes the work even more interesting, is understanding her motives for writing it.

As befitted a descendent of the "Loyal Leighs", she was a vehement defender of the Stuarts, from Mary Queen of Scots onwards, and the pages of volumes three and four are peppered with her exclamations of praise for them and the condemnation of their enemies.

(W. and R. Austen-Leigh 55)

In addition to the instruction given by Jane's father and brother, she was also encouraged by individuals outside of the family circle to expand her curriculum. One such person was Madam Lefroy of Ashe. She was an intelligent and charming lady, sister to Sir Egerton Brydges, a young man who rented Deane parsonage with his sister Charlotte. Though a bit vain and obstinate, Sir Brydges adored his sisters. The following description of her intellect displays this sibling adoration. He also mentions his sister's affection for Jane Austen.

"She had an exquisite taste for poetry, and could almost repeat the chief English poets by heart, especially Milton, Pope, Collins, Gray, and the poetical passages of Shakespeare; and she composed easy verses herself with great facility The nearest neighbors to the Lefroys were the Austens of Steventon. I remember Jane Austen, the novelist, a little child; she was very intimate with Mrs. Lefroy and much encouraged by her." (W. and R. Austen-Leigh 56)

Through connections like these, Jane Austen was exposed to the classical poets

of her day, as well as the ones she read at home with her family.

It is interesting to take into account Jane Austen's own views on her education and intellectual capabilities. Even after she became an acclaimed novelist, with streams of positive reviews pouring through, her humility still stood paramount. In a letter written by James Stanier Clarke, assistant to the Prince Regent whom Jane Austen dedicated Emma to, he asks Jane

to delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman--who should pass his time between the metropolis & the Country . . . Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature--no man's Enemy but his own. Pray dear Madam think of these things. (Le Faye 296-97)

Jane Austen's reply was:

I am quite honoured by your thinking me capable of drawing such a Clergyman [pg. 2] as you gave the sketch of in your note of Nov: 16. But I assure you I am *not* . The comic part of the Character I might be equal to, but not the Good, the Enthusiastic, the Literary. Such a man's Conversation must at times be on subjects of Science and Philosophy of which I know nothing--or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which a Woman, who like me, knows only her Mother-tongue & has read very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving.--A Classical Education, or at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English Literature, Ancient & Modern, appears to me quite Indispensable for the person who w^d do any justice to your Clergyman--And I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress. (Le Faye 306)

To those of us who know about her background, Jane Austen's declarations about her educational inadequacies seem a bit exaggerated. It is true that she did not have the same type of intellectual training as someone like her brother James, but nevertheless she was able to observe this world of learning. When we take into consideration Jane Austen's character, however, this statement is not at all surprising. She was not the type of woman to put on airs, being humble in every respect. This is the essence of Jane Austen, both in her personal life and novels.

For Jane Austen, as well as the majority of women in the Georgian Period, much of the time that was not devoted to textbook study was spent sewing, managing the housework and playing music. In her later years, Jane was accomplished enough in sewing that she was able to create her own dresses and mend her bonnets. She was also an accomplished pianist, and sang quite sweetly. According to her niece, Caroline Austen,

Aunt Jane began her day with music--for which I conclude she had a natural taste; as she thus kept it up--tho' she had no one to teach; was never induced (as I have heard) to play in company; and none of her family cared much for it. I suppose, that she might not trouble them, she chose her practicing time before breakfast--when she could have the room to herself--She practiced regularly every morning--she played very pretty tunes, *I thought*--and I liked to stand by her and listen to them; but the music, (for I knew the books well in after years) would now be thought disgracefully easy--Much that she played from was manuscript, copied out by herself--and so neatly and correctly, that it was as easy to read as print. (C. Austen 6-7)

Though this type of "education" does not seem very stimulating to a woman in

the Twentieth Century, it was as much necessary as it was enjoyable. Domestic responsibilities were not overbearing for Jane, they were a pleasant and useful way to pass the time at home. Jane had her set of “chores” to accomplish, and did them without complaint.

At 9 o'clock she made breakfast--*that* was her part of the household work--The tea and sugar stores were under *her* charge--*and* the wine (C. Austen 7)

The difference was that Jane Austen was not confined merely to household duties, she expanded her mind and soul in the process.

In her adolescent years, Jane Austen began her writing career, though she probably didn't take it very seriously at the time. Before she was ever a novelist, she wrote humorous stories, fantasies, and even some verse, which she collected into what she called, Volume the First, Volume the Second, and Volume the Third. These writings began in 1787, when Jane Austen was only twelve years old. They served as a form of education by themselves. Her formal education had, for the most part, culminated by this point, but experience would be one of her greatest teachers.

Part of Jane Austen's upbringing and education lay in her travels around the English countryside, Bath, and London. Jane greatly admired the sea-ports of Lyme Regis and Devon, but greatly disliked the cities--except, perhaps, for the many balls she attended there. In May of 1801, upon the retirement of Mr. Austen, the Austens moved from Steventon to Bath and took up their residence first at the Paragon, and then at No. 4 Sydney Place. Before the trip actually took place, Jane relayed some of the family's plans for their residence in Bath. This passage is but one example of the wit that Jane Austen was to exhibit in her novels.

My Mother looks forward with as much certainty as you can do, to our keeping two Maids--my father is the only one not in the secret. -- We plan having a steady Cook, & a young giddy Housemaid, with a sedate, middle aged Man, who is to undertake the double office of Husband to the former & sweetheart to the latter. --No Children of course to be allowed on either side. (Le Faye 66)

Jane Austen's ability to laugh at the absurdities of polite society reveals an important aspect of her character that was both witty and humble. In a letter to her dear Cassandra upon first arriving in Bath, Jane writes,

The first view of Bath in fine weather does not answer my expectations; I think I see more distinctly thro' Rain. --The Sun was got behind everything, and the appearance of the place from the top of Kingsdown, was all vapour, shadow, smoke & confusion. (Le Faye 82)

The elegant buildings and multitudes of travelers whom Jane Austen observed in Bath have appeared in novels like Northanger Abbey and Persuasion. Upon the unfortunate death of Mr. Austen on January 21, 1805, the Austens left Bath, and eventually moved into Chawton in 1807. It was here in Chawton that Jane Austen wrote and revised her major novels: Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Emma, Persuasion, and Northanger Abbey. In 1815, Jane Austen visited London, and stayed with her brother Henry. It was here where she dedicated Emma to the Prince Regent, a great admirer of hers. Jane thought even less of London than she did of Bath. Evidence of her dislike of London can be found in a letter written in 1796, years before the visit to her brother's home:

My Dear Cassandra,

Here I am once more in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, and I

begin already to find my Morals corrupted. (Le Faye 5)

From a young age, the moral Jane Austen was clearly visible. She was not prudish or self-righteous, rather, she understood the rewards of a humble disposition.

Now that we have examined Jane Austen's educational upbringing, it is necessary to delve into her moral and religious background before continuing on. In this way, a clearer portrait is painted, one which brings to light important elements in her writing style. This thesis's main objective is to combine the two elements of education--specifically intellect and morality, and see how they work together in her novels.

Ch. 2

Religion and Morality: Independent Comrades

Jane Austen came from a family of devout clergymen. Her father, the Revd. George Austen, is of course, the primary example. Her two brothers, James and Henry, also became clergymen. The religious vocation was not limited to Jane Austen's immediate family, however. Relatives on her maternal side of the family were also clerics. Her mother's father, grandfather and several cousins were also devout ministers. Jane's sister Cassandra was engaged to a clergyman, and it is even rumored that, for a time, Jane herself was in love with one. The Austen family and their relations were a group of religious, intellectual, and moral people. What is also important to take into consideration is that a living in the clergy was a very common choice among young men in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "The eighteenth century church was a prime choice of career for a well-born younger son, since landed families had livings to bestow or could buy them" (Grey 203). This fact is not stated to diminish, in any way, the Austen family's devout nature; it is merely a useful piece of information that more clearly illustrates the kind of society in which Jane Austen was born. The Anglican Church, at large, was very different from her father's own type of preaching. George Austen was a reverent and spiritual man, and his parish was free of the corruption that was rampant elsewhere.

Many people became disillusioned with the complacent attitude displayed by the church and its apparent lack of concern for the social welfare of the poor. While many turned away from the church altogether, others followed the numerous break-away, non-conformist

movements that began to appear about this time, including the Methodists, Evangelists and Presbyterians. Church attendance fell off dramatically, particularly among the poor, who worked long hours in the factories and had little time off. (Guy 30)

Jane Austen's novels, but most distinctly, her letters paint a picture of her father as a devout pastor. She does not describe his religious services, though, nor his parishioners. This is not because the church was not an important aspect of Austen's life, but because, perhaps, she took it for granted as a routine part of her life--nothing exciting enough to dwell upon. Jane Austen's religiosity, as will be dealt with a little later on in this chapter, was a personal one. Austen believed in a moral standard, but the obtainment of it must be a personal journey. The journey may be guided by a priest, parent, or other mentor, but the ultimate person in charge is the individual himself--through the grace of God.

One of the central religious movements in the eighteenth century was the rise of Evangelicalism. This religious sect, which still exists in a more radical form today (e.g. reborn Christians), is "a Christian belief that emphasizes personal salvation and reliance on the Bible" (Kenyon 133). The Evangelicals adopted a puritanical attitude towards life and salvation. In a sense, a person was either saved or damned, depending on whether or not the individual chose to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

This sort of teaching, of hellfire and brimstone, did not attract Jane Austen in the least. In fact, in a letter to Cassandra she stated, "I do not like the Evangelicals" (Le Faye 170). Jane Austen's cousin, Edward Cooper, was one such preacher whom Jane would, no doubt, call Evangelical. She greatly disliked his sermons and on September 9, 1816 she wrote to Cassandra,

We do not like M^r Cooper's new Sermons; they are fuller of
Regeneration & Conversion than ever--with the addition of his zeal in
the cause of the Bible Society. (Le Faye 322)

Edward Cooper preached about salvation, with the presumption that he knew the only method by which it could be achieved. He was pompous enough to think that he knew God's guidelines for Salvation, rather than relying on God's own grace and judgment. Jane Austen most likely felt that salvation was out of our hands and could only be granted through the grace of God. One of his sermons, one of which Jane Austen possessed such a great distaste for, commented on the Gospel of Matthew 7:13-14 which states,

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way,
that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto
life, and few there be that find it.

In reply to this passage, Edward Cooper asked,

Is the way in which I am walking the Way of the world, the Way of the
multitude? . . . Once I was walking as others walk in the broad way, have
I now entered in at the strait gate? . . . Remember the broad way is the
Way of destruction. Stay then no longer in it. Come out and be separate.
Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Strive, and you shall enter. The time
past may suffice to have walked in the way of sin and death. Henceforth
walk in the way of life, the way of pleasantness and peace. Do you hope
that you are already in this way? Pray to the Lord to keep you in it.
Strive earnestly to follow it. "He that endureth unto the end shall be
saved: but if any man draw back, my sons (saith the Lord) shall have no
pleasure in him." (Jarvis 21)

Jane Austen was annoyed with this type of preaching. She felt that no one's views should be forced upon others--especially by using threats. She did however, enjoy sermons that taught about living God's gospel rather than those that preached about a particular minister's path towards salvation . Revd. Thomas Sherlock was one such pastor whose sermons Jane Austen enjoyed immensely: "I am very fond of Sherlock's Sermons, prefer them to almost any" (Le Faye 278). The following sermon displays the type of serenity of spirit which Jane Austen admired most in preachers. The topic is salvation, as was the sermon of Austen's cousin, Edward Cooper, but its contents are noticeably different in tone and message.

"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that can be saved? And he said unto them. Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." You see by this account that our Saviour did not think fit to answer the curiosity of the inquirer, and since he declined the question, who alone was able to resolve it, it is absurd to ask the question of any body else; and it is a great presumption in anybody else to pretend to answer it. From natural religion we may learn much of the equity and justice of God, and of the terms of obedience on which we may hope to partake of his mercy, but how many or how few, will act by the laws of reason, and qualify themselves for the mercy of God, natural reason and religion can never show. Nor is there any reason to expect a resolution of this doubt in the books of Scripture; for had it been a piece of knowledge proper to be communicated to us, why was it not declared by our Lord, when the question was so fairly stated to him? or why does he give such an answer here, as is plainly calculated not to satisfy the curiosity of

mankind in this great point, but to restrain and rebuke it? The question is, "Are there few that be saved?" The answer is in affect, "What is that to you? Mind your own business, and strive to enter in at the strait gate." (Jarvis 20)

This appeal by Reverend Sherlock for reason above all else, and the humility to understand God's mysteries, definitely appealed to Jane Austen. She believed in reason above all else, especially the rational understanding that most of what God plans can not be fully grasped by human intellect; some things are a mystery. This belief in rational rather than purely emotional faith separated Austen from the Evangelical philosophies of her time.

This explicit distinction between an unchallengeable Theology and Rationalism is at the core of Jane Austen's morality. The word *morality* is appropriate, because it defines one's spiritual wellness. Jane Austen was a very religious young woman who prayed often and wrote a great number of prayers herself. She did believe that there was a distinct difference between what was acceptable and what was inappropriate, but it is obvious, especially as we see in her novels, that a person's moral standard is a personal journey.

As the daughter of a clergyman and as a devout Christian, it would perhaps be surprising if morality did not play a significant part in Austen's art, and each of her novels deals with specific moral questions that are intended to exercise our understanding, judgment, and discrimination. It is fairly clear that Austen's own values, as represented by the novels, are directly in line with the basic principles of Enlightenment rationalism and of the established church of her time. However, as it is often noted, her novels are actually remarkably free of explicit moralizing, and, when critics talk of her "moral interest," they

are referring not so much to the specific moral issues she raises (though these are obviously part of what they are talking about), as to her interest both in the *need* to make moral judgments as a matter of course and in the *processes* by which they are arrived at. (Poplawski 291)

The connection between Jane Austen's religious beliefs and her moral standard is that they share many of the same qualities and beliefs, but as we see in her novels, they are not necessarily dependent upon one another. Jane Austen would definitely say that the way to goodness is through God's Grace, but her non-dogmatic nature would not impose that view on anyone. Her method of influence is in example rather than threats. Through example, through the Golden Rule of "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you," Jane Austen becomes a more influential author and individual.

The following original prayer written by Jane Austen represents the moral example she was and brings to light her moral intent as an author:

Give us grace almighty father, so to pray, as to deserve to be heard, to address thee with our hearts, as with our lips. Thou art every where present, from thee no secret can be hid. May the knowledge of this, teach us to fix our thoughts on thee, with reverence and devotion that we pray not in vain.

Look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed and in mercy make us feel them deeply, that our repentance may be sincere, & our resolution steadfast of endeavoring against the commission of such in future. Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and

the danger of our own souls. May we now, and on each return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil. Have we thought irreverently of thee, have we disobeyed thy commandments, have we neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being? Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity.

Give us a thankful sense of the blessings in which we live, of the many comforts of our lot; that we may not deserve to lose them by discontent or indifference.

Be gracious to our necessities, and guard us, and all we love from evil this night. May the sick and afflicted, be now, and ever thy care; and heartily do we pray for the safety of all that travel by land or by sea, for the comfort & protection of the orphan and widow and that thy pity may be shewn upon all captives and prisoners.

Above all other blessings oh! God, for ourselves and our fellow-creatures, we implore thee to quicken our sense of thy mercy in the redemption of the world, of the value of that holy religion in which we have been brought up, that we may not, by our own neglect, throw away the salvation thou hast given us, nor be Christians only in name. Hear us almighty God, for his sake who has redeemed us, and taught us thus to pray. Our Father which art in heaven &c. (Jarvis 27-29)

By examining works like the above prayer, as well as Jane Austen's family life and background, it becomes evident that she was a very devout Christian. One question that has often puzzled critics, both past and present, is why

Jane Austen avoided the explicit discussion of religion in her novels. When we do come across pastors and church institutions, they are usually either pathetic examples of social breeding, corrupted individuals, buffoons, or if they are actually amiable, they do not speak much about the Church except to say that it is their vocation. Mr. Collins of Pride and Prejudice, for example, is a pastor who is both a ridiculous man and an individual who is more interested about his social position (especially with regards to his benefactor) than the concerns of his parish. Mr. Edward Ferrars of Sense and Sensibility desires a clerical position because it is a dignified and prosperous profession. Jane Austen may have done this as a means of making a political statement, and of exposing some of the religious hypocrisy rampant in the Georgian Period. She wanted to show that being good and true to oneself, to the world and, ultimately, to God, can only be accomplished through example. Austen knew that by forcing our opinions on others we can only arouse resentment. After Austen's death, a clergyman transcribed stories about Jane Austen from those told to him by Mrs. Barrett, a close acquaintance of Austen's. The passage below addresses the very essence of Jane Austen's religious beliefs, especially as represented in her novels:

the tribute of my old friend to the real and true spring of religion which was always present though never obtruded. Miss Austen, [Mrs. Barrett] used to say, had on all the subjects of enduring religious feeling the deepest and strongest convictions, but a contact with loud and noisy exponents of the then popular religious phase [Evangelism] made her reticent almost to a fault. She had to suffer something in the way of reproach from those who believed she might have used her genius to greater effect. But her old friend used to say, "I think I see her now

defending what she thought was the real province of delineator of life and manner and declaring her belief that example, and not 'direct preaching', was all that a novelist could afford properly to exhibit." (Fergus 36)

Jane Austen did place a significant value on religion, but did not want her work to project the trends that she despised most. If she was annoyed by preachers like her cousin Edward Cooper, how then would it be possible to assume the role of the Evangelical in her novels, or, most importantly, in her life? The type of religious influence that presides over Jane Austen's novels can be best defined by the term morality. When one thinks of something or someone that is morally admirable, images such as a good Samaritan or devoted family member may come to mind. Though it is true that institutional religion may be at the foundation of such responses, it is ultimately up to the individual's desire to bring about a common good, void of excessive vanity and pride, that allows the morality to have any shred of credence. Morality plays an essential role in Austen's novels; it is at the core of all of her characters actions, whether they be positive or negative. Besides her religious background, there are, perhaps other influences on Jane Austen's morality, such as philosophy. These influences would have appealed to Austen's regard for all things rational.

During the religious chaos that was occurring at the time, some people were trying to rise above the corruption around them. Some people turned to religion to solve their problems, while others turned to reason and philosophy. More often than not, the two worlds of science and faith would collide, while other times they would blend into a perfect union. Both groups tried desperately to answer some significantly fundamental moral

questions. These groups, often times referred to as moralists, had very decisive views about how individuals in accordance with, and separate from, their society should act in order to be truly moral.

In the eighteenth century, and in other centuries too, moralists tended to belong to one of two camps. There was what I shall call, with conscious crudity, the Calvinist camp, and there was what I shall call the Aristotelian camp. A moralist of the Calvinist type thinks, like a criminal lawyer, of human beings as either Saved or Damned, either Elect or Reject, either children of Virtue or children of Vice, either heading for Heaven or heading for Hell, either White or Black, either innocent or guilty, either Saints or Sinners. The Calvinists' moral psychology is correspondingly bi-polar. People are dragged upwards by Soul or Spirit or Conscience; but they are dragged down by Body or Flesh or Passion or Pleasure or Desire or Inclination. A man is an unhappy combination of a white angelic part and a black satanic part. At the best, the angelic part has the satanic part cowed and starved and subjugated now, and can hope to be released altogether from it in the future. Man's life here is either a life of Sin or else it is a life of self-extrication from Sin. (Southam 114)

It is evident from her novels, letters and the majority of studies done on her life, that Jane Austen does not belong to the Calvinist camp of morality. Now let us examine the second group:

In contrast with this, the Aristotelian pattern of ethical ideas represents people as differing from one another in degree and not in kind, and differing from one another in respect not just of a single generic Sunday attribute, Goodness, say, or else Wickedness, but in respect of a

whole spectrum of specific week-day attributes. *A* is a bit more irritable and ambitious than *B*, but less indolent and less sentimental. *C* is meaner and quicker-witted than *D*, and *D* is greedier and more athletic than *C*. And so on. A person is not black or white, but iridescent with all the colours of the rainbow; and he is not a flat plane, but a highly irregular solid. He is not blankly Good or Bad, blankly angelic or fiendish; he is better than most in one respect, about level with the average in another respect, and a bit, perhaps a big bit, deficient in a third respect. In fact he is like the people we already know, in a way in which we do not know and could not know any people who are just Bad or else just Good. (Southam 115)

According to the definition of the Aristotelian Moralist, Jane Austen fits neatly into all of its classifications. Though she was educated in the classics, it is doubtful that Jane Austen was thoroughly acquainted with Aristotle's ethical prototypes, but her characters--combined with the way in which she lived her own life--exemplify his fundamental views. According to Aristotle's Ethics, there is not a universal good because the word *good* by itself, has so many applications:

things are called good in as many senses as they are said to exist; for they are so called in the category of Substance (e.g. God and mind) and in Quality (the virtues) and in Quantity (what is moderate) and in Relation (what is useful) and in Time (opportunity) and in Place (habitat) and so on. Clearly, then, there cannot be a single universal common to all cases, because it would be predicated not in all the categories, but in one only. (Aristotle 70)

Jane Austen was not thoroughly trained in the classics, as we observed

previously, but her views about goodness and morality were ingrained in her from her family, her religion, her environment, and, most importantly, from her own common sense. She was a rational being, even more so in her forty-one short years than many ever manage to be. Jane Austen realized that people had many facets to them. Each individual is an intricate being with a mixture of many different personality traits: in short, even saints have their bad days.

Jane Austen's moral ideas are, with certain exceptions, ideas of the Aristotelian and not the Calvinist pattern. Much thought she had learned from Johnson, this she had not learned from him. When Johnson is being ethically solemn, he draws people in black and white. So they never come to life, any more than the North Pole and the South Pole display any scenic features. Jane Austen's people are, nearly always, alive all over, all through and all around, displaying admirably or amusingly or deplorably proportioned mixtures of all the colours that there are, save pure White and pure Black. (Southam 115)

Jane Austen's characters are diverse. She could depict life with the utmost simplicity, yet allow her readers, whether simple or not, to identify at with them. Her characters, like herself, are a combination of innocence and wickedness. Even characters like Mr. Elton from Emma, who is the epitome of idiocy and vanity, or Elizabeth Bennet from Pride and Prejudice, who is the embodiment of innocent fervor, or even George Wickam from Pride and Prejudice, who seems completely intolerable in our eyes, can not be covered by a simple white or black veil. They are as multi-faceted as all human beings, and in their intricacies, provide the needed pieces for the puzzle that make up Jane Austen's world.

One of Jane Austen's most celebrated characters, a young lady who is seen to embody all that is good and dynamic in Jane Austen's novels, is Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth Bennet is the principal heroine in Pride and Prejudice. She is, perhaps, the strongest of Jane Austen's characters. In fact, it is often speculated that Elizabeth is as close to a representation of Jane Austen's own character as we could hope to find. In Elizabeth Bennet, we see a great deal of Jane Austen's personal vivacity as well as the moral values that Austen cherished. Jane Austen truly loved her prized creation, and in a letter to her sister Cassandra wrote:

I must confess that *I* think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, & how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I do not know. (Le Faye 201)

Whether or not Elizabeth Bennet is a fictional Jane Austen or not, she is a beloved character and has been seen as a model for women for centuries. Like Jane Austen, Elizabeth is not easily swayed by public opinion. That is not to say that she does not conduct herself in a proper and respectable manner; on the contrary, she is the epitome of gentility; however, she does not allow the opinions of others to dictate her life. Jennifer Ehle, the British Actress who played the role of Elizabeth Bennet in the acclaimed 1997 BBC production of Pride and Prejudice, was a great admirer of Elizabeth from the very first time she read the novel at the age of twelve:

She's a wonderful role model. She's independent. She manages to be a free spirit in a society that doesn't encourage free-spiritedness, which is something that I think appeals to young women today because they can sympathize with her. So she's quite easy to identify with. I love her wit and her intelligence. There aren't that many female role models

in literature or film who are as bright as she is. She is certainly no victim.

It's so lovely to read a book by a woman that one is able to understand at the age of 12 and to know that it was written in 1813. You realize that you're not the first person to feel all those things. And it's wonderful to go through the fantasy of falling in love--it's so flirtatious and yet so safe; nothing really sexually threatening happens in it. It's a lovely fantasy to have. (Birtwistle and Conklin 21)

Elizabeth's timeless strength of character is a testament to the kind of virtue and spirit which attracts us all, whether it be now or a hundred years from now.

Another of Elizabeth's character traits is that, like Jane Austen, she will not marry for wealth--only for love. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, marriage, for women, was usually only a property settlement. If at all possible, a lady married a gentleman who could either sustain or improve her social standing. Jane Austen realized that marriage without mutual affection and love was useless and personally destructive. In a letter to her niece Fanny, Jane Austen addresses the issue of marriage without love. Fanny was about to be engaged to a man whom she thought well of but did not have deep affection for. Being a loving and concerned aunt, Jane Austen wrote:

You will think me perverse perhaps; in my last letter I was urging everything in his favour, & now I am inclining the other way; but I cannot help it; I am at present more impressed with the possible Evil that may arise to You from engaging yourself to him--in word or mind--than with anything else. --When I consider how few young Men you have yet seen much of--how capable you are (yes, I do still

think you very capable) of being really in love--and how full of temptation the next 6 or 7 years of your Life will probably be--it is the very period of Life for the *strongest* attachments to be formed)--I cannot wish you with your present very cool feelings to devote yourself in honour to him. It is very true that you may never attach another Man, his equal altogether, but if that other Man has the power of attaching you *more* , he will be in your eyes the most perfect. . . and nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound *without* Love, bound to one, & preferring another. *That* is a Punishment which you do *not* deserve. (Le Faye 286)

Jane Austen never got married herself, but probably did fall in love at some time in her life. There is one speculated incident that occurred during one of the Austen's vacations in Lyme Regis. There it is said the Austen met and became quite fond of a young naval officer. They spent a good deal of time together, and to her sister Cassandra it seemed that they were forming a serious attachment. Unfortunately, the young man died at sea, so her one romantic experience never came to fruition. This is said to be the only great love of Jane Austen's life; however, we can only rely on the word of future generations of the Austens, since Cassandra burnt a great portion of her sister's letters most likely in order to destroy the more personal material that was contained in them. There was another instance where Jane Austen was proposed to by a very amiable and wealthy man, and thinking that she liked him enough she accepted him. The morning after her acceptance, though, Austen realized that she could not marry the young man because she did not truly love him. She refused to settle for anything but the best for herself, even though it was not commonplace for women of her era to place

themselves and their sense of self-worth in higher regard than any convention.

Marriage is a central theme in the majority of Jane Austen's novels, and her views on the subject are clearly, though unconventionally, displayed. Marriage is a moral issue to Jane Austen because it deals with the human heart. It is immoral to be unfaithful to yourself just as much as it is to be so to anyone else. By no means did Jane Austen consider herself and her feelings superior to anyone else's, but she did realize the value of dignity. She realized that without it, no meaningful attachment, romantic or otherwise, can possibly be formed. In the opening passage of Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen mocks the insignificant value that was often placed upon marriage at that time:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters. (179; ch. 1)

This passage illustrates that in regards to matters of marriage, personal dignity was often times over-shadowed by greed.

In Jane Austen's witty novel Emma, Emma Woodhouse makes it her preoccupation to take on the role of matchmaker. She tries to place her friends in advantageous matches, even if they aren't completely suitable. Not long after the start of the novel, Emma takes it upon herself to match her friend, Harriet Smith, with an eligible and prosperous bachelor. Harriet already shows signs of being interested in Robert Martin, a respectable farmer, but (of

this union) Emma feels to be beneath Harriet's dignity;

The acquaintances she had already formed were unworthy of her. The friends from whom she had just parted, though very good sort of people, must be doing her harm. They were a family of the name of Martin, whom Emma knew well by character, as renting a large farm of Mr. Knightley, and residing in the parish of Donwell--very creditably, she believed; she knew Mr. Knightly thought highly of them; but they must be coarse and unpolished, and very unfit to be the intimates of a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect. *She* would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintances, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (596; ch. 3)

Jane Austen's Emma, is the absolute opposite of Elizabeth Bennet. In the character of Emma, Jane Austen paints a portrait to support the popular opinion of marriage and the gentry at the time. Emma is absorbed in her social status and feels it is her duty to direct the love lives of her acquaintances. Emma, though somewhat unwittingly, embodies aristocratic conceit. Thankfully, and in the tradition of Jane Austen's moral endings, Emma realizes the error of her ways and ceases her matchmaking. The one completely Austenesque quality that Emma possesses throughout the novel is her secure sense of self-worth. Though she tries to pair those around her with "proper" matches, she does not allow the same to be done with her. When the insipid and vain Mr. Elton makes advances, she utterly rejects him. For her self, Emma is at first interested in the handsome and wealthy Frank Churchill,

thinking that he is a gentleman, but upon learning about his secret engagement to another, and his less than worthy character, she realizes she never truly loved him after all. She is eventually paired with her brother-in-law Mr. Knightley, a kind, affluent, and modest gentleman, and thus makes a prosperous and harmonious match for herself.

In novels like Emma, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park, Jane Austen employs her religious characters in ways that may seem unorthodox for a parson's daughter. Characters like Mr. Elton and Mr. Collins are insipid fools. Mr. Elton is an arrogant snob, while Mr. Collins is an annoying dolt. In the case of these two gentlemen, Jane Austen makes two important points. First of all, through their unholy actions, totally unbefitting their profession, Jane Austen reveals their humanity. In these characters, she displays her Aristotelian morality by proving that no human is either totally virtuous nor totally wicked. In the case of Mr. Collins, Gilbert Ryle says:

If a Calvinist critic were to ask us whether Mr. Collins was Hell-bound or Hell-bent, we could not answer. The question does not apply. Mr. Collins belongs to neither pole; he belongs to a very particular parish in the English Midlands. He is a stupid, complacent and inflated ass, but a Sinner? No. A Saint? No. He is just a ridiculous figure, that is, a figure for which the Calvinist ethical psychology does not cater.

(Southam 115)

Mr. Elton is, perhaps, a bit more difficult to classify. From the moment we are first introduced to him in the novel, Mr. Elton is undesirable. He is only interested in Emma because of her social position and behaves extremely ill towards Harriet Smith upon learning that Emma had no interest in him apart from her desire to match him with Harriet. In response to Emma's rejection of

his affections, Mr. Elton delivers a reply which deems him thoroughly reprehensible:

I think seriously of Miss Smith! Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl; and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. I wish her extremely well; and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to--Everybody has their level; but as for myself I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith! No madam, my visits to Hartfield have been for yourself only. . . (647-8; ch. 15)

Mr. Elton may seem to fall under the Calvinist philosophy of the black seed, but there are certain aspects of his situation which make him a little more grey than black. When Mr. Elton eventually marries, his wife is such an imbecile, even more so than he, that his situation appears more pitiable than reprehensible. It is true that Mr. Elton gets what he deserves, but no man quite deserves his fate. In this instance, piteousness serves as a minor atonement for past wrongs, and knowledge that he is to be miserable for the remainder of his existence makes him ever the more foolish, but forgivable.

Apart from showing the humanity of foolish pastors, Jane Austen might be trying to keep institutional religion out of the moral fabric of her novels by showing their indifference to the religious needs of their parish. Marilyn Butler comments on Austen's religiously devoid parsons:

Austen represents clergymen in almost wholly matter-of-fact career terms. The decision of Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* to enter the church is made against his family's wishes, and perhaps the reader infers that Edward feels a strong sense of religious vocation, but this is not said. When Colonel Brandon presents him with a living,

he reacts not by visiting his new parishioners but by worrying because he can now afford to get married, which unhappily means marrying Lucy Steele. Even after his marriage to Elinor, it is not his clerical duties that we hear about but the couple's home building as they choose their wallpaper and plant the shrubbery. Henry Tilney of *Northanger Abbey* is introduced in even more secular guise, as a fashionable man-about-Bath and nonresident in the parish his father has given him. Catherine's father, the Reverend Richard Morland, possesses two good livings. Nonresidency and pluralism came under sustained attack as clerical abuses about the turn of the century, but in the 1790s Austen cannot have perceived them as delicate issues. (qtd. Grey 203)

Jane Austen may have been commenting on the political issues of her day, especially with regard to her dislike of the Evangelicals, but it is her moral posture, her desire for the individual to be in charge of his own moral destiny, that seems to dictate her authorial decisions. Of Austen's heroines (though the same is applied to her heroes), Gilbert Ryle observes,

I am sure that she was personally not merely the the dutiful daughter of a clergyman, but was genuinely pious. Yet hardly a whisper of piety enters into even the most serious and most anguished meditations of her heroines. . . . I am not suggesting that Jane Austen's girls are atheists, agnostics or Deists. I am only saying that when Jane Austen writes about them, she draws the curtain between her Sunday thoughts, whatever they were, and her creative imagination. Her heroines face their moral difficulties and solve their moral problems without recourse to religious faith or theological doctrines. Nor does it ever occur to them to seek the counsels of a clergyman. (qtd. in Southam 117)

To Jane Austen, one's religious preoccupations were most likely best expressed in a private manner. Something so personal as one's faith and love for God is, ultimately, a private affair. Although going to church and consulting a clergyman may prove useful to the security of one's faith, it is ultimately up to the individual to control his or her own moral destiny. Jane Austen used her characters as exemplars of morality. Her characters all experience moral lessons, either self-realized or guided by the wisdom of others. With the decline in faith in the Church during the Georgian Period, Jane Austen knew that the best way to carry her point, especially a moral one, was to teach by example. The trials and rewards that Austen's characters experience act as subtle reminders of a more civilized and benevolent world. Perhaps this was a method that Jane Austen used to teach her views on morality, views that may have served useful to her turbulent times. As we have mentioned previously, Jane Austen believed "that example, rather than direct teaching, was all that a novelist could afford properly to exhibit." She knew that novelists could not afford to be preachers because they would lose their audience. Jane Austen was displeased with the Evangelical school of forced preaching; thus, it would be hypocritical both to others and herself to write in the manner she despised. Her subtle reminders of the way life should be led are definitely part of her charm. Her characters encounter obstacles in their love lives and family endeavors that are just as relevant in today's society; times change, our fundamental human emotions do not.

Ch. 3

Moral Education in Jane Austen's Novels

Jane Austen's mind and soul combine in her characters to create a type of novel that had never been experienced before, novels unlike what exists even today. Her characters are tempests of emotions. They experience every sort of sensation: joy, rage, passion, hope, hopelessness, and so on. They, like all humans, are not monochromatic, but shaded with various emotional hues. Throughout the novels, Austen's characters deal with situations that prove either profitable or unbearable. These events are often evidences of lessons either learned or in need of further cultivation. These lessons are not taught by any instructor, or arrived at through the guidance of a pastor; they are self-taught and must be obtained through the emotional stability of each individual character. Their environment may affect their decisions, as may those they care for, but the ultimate transformation is up to them. Jane Austen's formal education and religious background serve as a drawing-board for developing the minds and personalities of her characters--the devices which they will need in order to mend their own injustices and seize their own triumphs. In a way, Jane Austen serves as the omniscient force, forever present in the lives of her characters.

This method of "filtering" a character's consciousness through the "central authorial intelligence," in a sort of "submerged speech" or semidramatic thought summary... enabled Austen to show and implicitly analyze the moment-by-moment thought processes of her heroines as they grapple with the problems that confront them. (Poplawski 292)

At the core of her novels' significance lies the moral education of Jane

Austen's characters.

The education that is, without a doubt, most important for the happiness of Jane Austen's characters, is that which affects their individuality.

For Jane Austen education involves much more than the mere gathering of information. Like John Locke, she considered that a system of education should address the whole person and be a moral as well as an intellectual training. Moral education, in fact, becomes a major issue in many of her novels. (Grey 141)

F.R. Leavis commented on Jane Austen's authorial greatness in his 1948 publication, The Great Tradition:

The principle of organization, and the principle of development, in her work is an intense moral interest of her own in life that is in the first place a preoccupation with certain problems that life compels on her as personal ones. She is intelligent and serious enough to be able to impersonalize her moral tensions as she strives, in her art, to become more fully conscious of them, and to learn what, in the interests of life, she ought to do with them. Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a great novelist.

This account of her would . . . [be] my case for calling Jane Austen, and not anyone later, "the first modern novelist." . . . Jane Austen, in fact, is the inaugurator of the great tradition of the English novel. (qtd. in Poplawski 291)

The intelligence of Austen's character is significant only if reason is at the core of that knowledge. Jane Austen's ability to mingle intelligence with moral principles has justified much of the praise directed towards her superiority of authorship.

That the individual *is* confronted constantly with moral problems in the modern world and *needs* to resolve them intelligently is part of her point and part of what makes her “the first modern novelist.”
(Poplawski 292)

All of the novels deal with the issue of moral refinement and prosperity, but the most popular treatment is definitely Pride and Prejudice. The novel was a personal favorite of Austen’s and she looked upon it, as she did all her novels, as a mother would a beloved child. In a letter to Cassandra, relaying the news about the publication of Pride and Prejudice, she wrote: “I want to tell you that I have got my own darling Child from London” (Le Faye 201). It is no wonder, therefore, that Jane Austen would instill in her characters the very same virtues that she would teach her children, had she produced any.

In Pride and Prejudice, we see the moral equation addressed in the title itself. Pride and prejudice are two vices that serve as obstacles to a fulfilling life. Most importantly, they are impediments that are removed first through guidance, and finally through self-awareness. At the start of the novel we are introduced to the “pride” portion of the story, in the form of Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Mr. Darcy is a handsome, wealthy and seemingly disagreeable man. We are first introduced to Darcy at the Meryton Assembly. Darcy rejects every offer to dance with any other women but those of his own party. Darcy’s best friend, Mr. Bingley, tries to encourage his friend to join the festivities and dance, recommending that he engage Miss Elizabeth Bennet for a dance. Darcy’s reply is an arrogant one, demonstrating his initial proud character:

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me* ; I am in no humour to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other

men. You had better return yourself to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me.” (183; ch. 2)

Elizabeth does not allow Darcy’s insults to affect her opinion of him and, at first, she is prejudiced against him and his apparent pride. This prejudice is erased when she learns the truth. Despite this initial flaw, Elizabeth is a sweet-tempered girl with a sturdy disposition. Her personal dignity prevents the slights of others from distressing her, though they do influence her opinion of them. It is imperative to understand that Elizabeth’s confidence is not a result of pride, as with Darcy; she does, however, know the value of her humanity and does not allow others to disrupt her spirit. Mr. Darcy is greatly affected by Elizabeth’s indifference towards his rejections of her, and even more so when she rejects his dance proposal days later at the Lucas’. Darcy now begins to become greatly intrigued by Elizabeth and his gazes prompt the immediate attention of Miss Bingley, who vainly desires to be matched with Darcy.

“I can guess the subject of your reverie.”

“I should imagine not.”

“You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner--in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity, and yet the noise--the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of all those people! What would I give to hear your strictures on them!”

“Your conjecture is totally wrong. I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.” (190; ch.6)

The “fine eyes” that Darcy is admiring are, of course, Miss Elizabeth Bennet’s. The pompous attitude that Miss Bingley exhibits is one example of the world of vanity which surrounds Darcy. Though his interest in Elizabeth is one sign of what his personality is capable of, he is far from reformed. Often-times, observations made by actors who have to bring a character to life are important sources of insight into a character who is confined to the printed page and the reader’s imagination. Colin Firth played Darcy in BBC’s recent production of Pride and Prejudice and had the following to say about Darcy’s attraction to Elizabeth:

Up to this point, I don’t think Darcy has ever really looked at a woman --I mean looked with real eyes, with real interest--though he’s admired women in a casual way. The truth is that he’s very bored. He’s one of the richest men in England, and until now that’s always been enough to make him attractive to women. I remember reading a very helpful saying; “A man who is eligible needs to entertain no one.” For me, that was a great key to understanding Darcy--I thought that if he were charming as well, life could be intolerable for him. So, out of both shyness and a lack of necessity he remains aloof. Then Elizabeth comes along and actually gives him a chance to respond, and it’s probably the first opportunity he’s ever had in his life to be the pursuer rather than than the pursued: it’s irresistible. That’s when he first notices her eyes. What starts off as intriguing becomes profoundly erotic for him.

(Birtwistle and Conklin 102)

Mr. Darcy is intrigued by Elizabeth, both for her charming indifference towards him, and also for her intellect. One evening at Netherfield as Elizabeth sits reading, the subject of a woman’s education is raised. Mr. Bingley speaks of

his admiration for women's accomplishments. Darcy interjects by commenting that there are not more than "half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are truly accomplished" (196; ch. 8). Mrs. Bingley agrees, adding physical graces that she deems necessary, graces that she obviously feels Elizabeth does not possess. The interaction between Darcy and Elizabeth hereafter, offers us an insight into Darcy's interest in Elizabeth's mind.

"All this she must possess," added Darcy, "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."

"I am no longer surprised at you knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any* ." (196; ch.8)

This reproach by Elizabeth is no doubt directed at Mrs. Bingley's haughtiness and is a not-so-subtle reminder to all of her present company that she is indifferent to their mockery; she will not be easily intimidated. Elizabeth's mind, is therefore, one of her most attractive qualities. Mr. Darcy confirms this at the time of their eventual engagement. After telling Elizabeth about the qualities which attracted him to her, he comments on how enchanting her mind is:

"Now, be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"

"For the liveliness of your mind, I did." (356, ch. 60)

At first, Darcy is intrigued by the challenge that pursuing Elizabeth presents, but it is only upon her rejection of his proposal of marriage, that he is truly affected by her. Darcy clearly displays his pride and arrogance of rank, in the manner in which he proposes to Elizabeth.

He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more than eloquent on the subject of

tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority--of its being a degradation--of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounded, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. (266, ch. 34)

Elizabeth is infuriated by this distasteful method of recommending himself to her. Consequently, and without a moment's hesitation, she rejects his proposal and informs him of the reasons why. Being a vain man who thinks it unbelievable that he would be rejected, Darcy accuses Elizabeth of acting in a flippant manner because of the lack of flattery in his proposal speech. Her response to Darcy serves as the primary catalyst for his transformation.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner."

She saw him start at this, but he said nothing, and she continued:

"You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it."

Again his astonishment was obvious; and he looked at her with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. She went on:

"From the very beginning--from the first moment, I may almost say--of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt

that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry." (268; ch. 34)

This fervent speech by Elizabeth Bennet illustrates the strength of character that Jane Austen admired and nurtured. Elizabeth has an unwavering sense of virtue. She does not allow anyone with undesirable intentions to sway her decisions.

By the end of the novel, two people have understood, and corrected, the error of their ways. Darcy is not the only character that learns a life-altering lesson. Elizabeth, too, learns that she has been prejudiced against Darcy. She had been under the impression that Darcy has been unjust to Mr. Wickam - - the son of his father's servant--by not granting him a living in the church. Elizabeth was persuaded by Wickam's charms, serving as a mask to hide his roguish character. Upon learning the truth about Wickam from Mr. Darcy himself, Elizabeth realizes that she has been greatly deceived and unjust to Darcy.

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickam could she think without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried; "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted

prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself.”

(275-276, ch. 36)

Jane Austen approach towards Elizabeth’s conversion is a masterful technique for relaying her views on the complexity of each type of individual. This is yet another example of the Aristotelian Jane Austen that we spoke of earlier.

Elizabeth has learned from Darcy in spite of his apparent initial flaws.

Darcy’s transformation is much more dramatic and pivotal to the novel. Elizabeth has served as Darcy’s teacher. Through her rejection of him, he has discovered his hidden self. He has become an amiable gentleman who accepts those whom he used to feel were beneath his dignity:

I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was *right* ; but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately, as only son (for many years I was only *child*), I was spoiled by my parents, who, though good themselves (my father particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed , encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing--to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight-and-twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you? You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You

showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. (350; ch. 58)

Mr. Darcy has discovered several virtues in his journey towards truth. He found love, humility, and most importantly, he found himself. He realized, through Elizabeth's good example, the meaning of true happiness. The important thing is that Darcy was willing to change without that, no coercion of Elizabeth's would have sufficed to create satisfactory results.

According to Jane Austen, an important factor in a person's moral character is mental refinement; specifically, the ability to come to reasonably intelligent conclusions. It is a fact that Jane Austen was formally educated, though only for a short while, and was well read. The men in her novels are well educated, and the women are well read, though often home-schooled. The development of their minds are useful in that it allows for them to become more rational beings. In her sympathetic characters, reason and intellect work simultaneously to redeem any moral defect the individual may possess. In Pride and Prejudice, for example, Elizabeth's reason and virtuous strength serve as Darcy's moral education--he learns from her rationality and consequently becomes humble.

In Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen's heroines, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood (two sisters who adore one another), represent both sides of the morality spectrum. Elinor is the rational one and Marianne is the free spirit. Like Pride and Prejudice, the title of the novel reveals a great deal about its tone, and the characters who provide its color.

Admittedly the title and the use of the two sisters does seem to indicate a fairly primitive schematization, but the stuff of a novel may well belie the apparent simplicity of its structuring. The fact that Marianne

has plenty of sense and Elinor is by no means devoid of sensibility should alone convince us that Jane Austen was already enough of a novelist to know that nothing comes unmixed, that qualities which may exist in pure isolation as abstractions only occur in pure isolation as abstractions only occur in people in combination, perhaps in confusion, with other qualities, in configurations which can be highly problematical. (Poplawski 269)

Sense and Sensibility is a noteworthy example of Jane Austen's Aristotelian tendencies; the intermingling of virtues that prove her character's multifaceted personalities.

The difference between Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice is that the characters eventually take on one another's virtues. Marianne, whose heart leads her mind, eventually learns the advantages of being more like her sister Elinor, whose mind controls her emotions. Elinor, on the other hand, realizes that her life and heart are too restricted, and learns the value of true passion from her sister Marianne, though she never quite exhibits it with the intensity that only her sister can possess. The novel shows the value not only of learning from a good example, but also of understanding how to be an example yourself. Elinor and Marianne realize their self-worth, like Elizabeth Bennet, but unlike Elizabeth's unwavering strength of character, theirs needs a stronger foundation before they can stand on their own. The Dashwood sisters are prejudiced towards one another and do not comprehend why one another's stance seems so steadfast, perhaps even insipid. Just as Elizabeth mistakes some of Darcy's shyness for pride, so do the Dashwood sisters misinterpret one another's motives. Jane Austen describes the two sisters, the sensibility of Marianne, and the sense of Elinor:

Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counselor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that the eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge that her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever, but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great. (5; ch. 1)

From the start of the novel, Jane Austen is clear about the moral education that will occur in the novel. The Dashwood sisters must learn from one another, perhaps Marianne more so than her sister, but they eventually understand the importance of their individual temperaments, and adopt what they need to in order to reform themselves.

This novel, unlike many of Austen's more humorous works, deals strongly with erotic passion, and the way in which the characters respond to that passion, is what often causes a great deal of personal suffering. Marianne falls desperately in love with John Willoughby, and does not heed her sister's warnings about becoming too involved in the relationship without first being well acquainted with his true character. After Willoughby's first lengthy encounter with Marianne dispenses, Elinor reproaches her sister for

being too open about her interest in him before learning more of his character and intentions. Marianne, greatly annoyed by this reproach, reacts with as much reserve as she is being scolded for possessing.

“Elinor,” cried Marianne, “is this fair? is this just? are my ideas so scanty? But I see what you mean. I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank. I have erred against every commonplace notion of decorum! I have been open and sincere when I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful. Had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes this reproach would have been spared.” (24; ch. 10)

Colonel Brandon, a man of thirty-five who is seemingly devoid of passion, has interest in the frolicsome Marianne. Her exuberance and frankness, appeal to him; they are a refreshing change from the confined society to which he has been accustomed. She also serves as a reminder of Brandon’s past love, who in her youth was much like Marianne, but whom he was sadly forbidden to marry because of her poor connections and situation in life. Marianne now serves as a joyful light amidst his somber past. To Marianne, however, Colonel Brandon is the epitome of drudgery. To her, he is standing with one foot in the grave and without a single hope of resurrection. Willoughby shares in Marianne’s annoyance with Brandon’s sullen disposition and remarks,

“Brandon is just the kind of man . . . whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to.” (25; ch. 10)

Marianne naturally agrees with Willoughby’s assessment of the Colonel, as she does with most of his declarations, however misguided.

Marianne learns of Willoughby’s deceit and her out-cry of emotions

make her seriously ill. She survives and sees that the devotion of Colonel Brandon is a much more fitting match than she had previously thought possible. She has adopted the temperance of her older sister.

Elinor, one can argue, is the most fortunate and happy of the two sisters by the end of the novel. She is reunited with Edward Ferrars, the man whom she loved, but because of a prior and unwilling engagement, was unable to attach herself to. In chapter 49, Elinor finally displays the depth of her “sensitivity”:

But Elinor, how are *her* feelings to be described? From the moment of learning that Lucy was married to another, that Edward was free, to the moment of his justifying the hopes which had so instantly followed, she was everything by turns but tranquil. But when the second moment had passed--when she found every doubt, every solicitude removed--compared her situation with what so lately it had been--saw him honourably released from his former engagement--saw him instantly profiting by the release, to address herself and declare an affection as tender, as constant as she had ever supposed it to be--she was oppressed she was overcome by her own felicity; and happily disposed as is the human mind to be easily familiarized with any change for the better, it required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquility to her heart. (167; ch. 49)

Elinor now possesses the passion that once filled Marianne's heart. She has not become her sister, as Marianne is not a new version of Elinor; rather, they have found the best parts of themselves--parts that had been in hiding.

In Jane Austen's Emma, the title character is the one who learns. She must learn to correct the errors of her ways. She has a preoccupation with

playing matchmaker and meddling in the affairs of others, though done in complete innocence. Mr. Knightly (appropriately named) serves as Emma's mentor. When she insults a silly, but destitute and loyal acquaintance Knightly reproaches her poor behavior:

She is poor; she sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old age must probably sink more. Her situation should secure her compassion. It was badly done, indeed! You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour--to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her--and before her niece too--and before others, many of whom (certainly *some*) would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her. This is not pleasant to you, Emma--and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will --I will tell you truths while I can; satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now. (760 - 1; ch. 43)

Knightley is indeed Emma's "faithful counsel." Her regard for his esteem towards her prompts her to see the error of her ways and quickly mend them. Her natural spirited disposition, much like Elizabeth Bennet's though much more mischievous, allows her to reform quite easily and without any real modification of disposition.

Jane Austen's characters have a general strength of spirit that allows them to recognize their lapses of judgment and adjust. They are guided by the moral education provided by loved ones, their situation in life, but most importantly by the substance of the character. Jane Austen often joked about her own shortcomings, but never dwelled upon them, even in the most

grievous of times. "Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can" (popular quote).

Conclusion

Jane Austen fell severely ill towards the close of 1816, and died on Friday, July 18, 1817. Years after her death, physicians deduced that the cause of her death was Addison's disease, a degenerative ailment affecting the spine, muscles, and skin pigmentation. She had been a most beloved daughter, sister, aunt and friend. Her death was greatly mourned by the many who loved her novels and literature lost one its brightest stars at the young age of forty-one. Her tombstone in Winchester Cathedral describes the woman and the loved one that was Jane Austen:

In memory of Jane Austen, youngest daughter of the late
Revd. George Austen formerly Rector of Steventon . . .

She departed this Life on the 18th of July 1817, aged 41, after a long
illness supported with the patience and the hopes of a Christian.

The Benevolence of her heart, the sweetness of her temper, and the
extraordinary endowments of her mind obtained the regard of all who
knew her and the warmest love of her intimate connections.

Their grief is in proportion to their affection they know their loss to be
irreparable, but in their deepest affliction they consoled by a firm
though humble hope that her charity, devotion, faith and purity have
rendered her soul acceptable in the sight of her *Redeemer*. (Wilks 141)

This tribute by her brother Henry noticeably makes no mention of Jane

Austen's authorship. In Austen's case, the tribute is fitting. She had a passion for writing, that is certain, but her humble nature would have been embarrassed by such notoriety. Her mother and sister added another plaque to Jane's memorial in Winchester Cathedral celebrating her talents; thus, she will not pass unacclaimed, as if that would ever be possible, plaque or not.

Through her novels and the lively dispositions of her heroes and heroines, Jane Austen's beliefs in moral goodness, a bright intellect, unwavering convictions, a tender regard for loved ones, and a humbled pride, are relayed in everything she has said, written, or done. She was not a saint, by far, but rather an ordinary young woman with an extraordinary mind and heart. Through her example we understand her purpose for writing, and through her characters, we catch a glimpse into the possibilities of our own humanity.

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